Officials, groups rebuilding areas

Rob Cullivan/Catholic Courier

ROCHESTER — Interfaith Action, a federation of churches and business alliances, is collaborating with the City of Rochester and several other groups on major efforts to improve the city's west side.

The initiatives — announced during a Feb. 20 press conference at St. Augustine Church on Chili Avenue — are designed to revitalize the Chili Avenue commercial district; redevelop the Jones Park neighborhood around St. Anthony of Padua Church off Lyell Avenue; and refurbish Sebastian Park, which was named for Father Sebastian Contegiacomo, a former pastor at nearby Most Precious Blood Parish on Stenson Street. The park is located near Most Precious Blood Church.

Interfaith Action and city officials have slated meetings during the coming weeks at various locations where plans will be developed and subsequently presented for each area.

The collaborative efforts bring together the work of IA; Mayor Bill Johnson's 2010 Rochester Renaissance community development initiative; and the Neighbors Building Neighborhoods' planning process, which is sponsored by the city.

Plans include a new community parking facility at the northeast corner of Chili Avenue and Salina Street, and the improvement of business facades on Chili Avenue, according to information sheets distributed during the press conference. The city, state and federal governments have already committed $7.5 million to rebuild Chili Avenue, and residents have worked with city officials to create a streetscape design plan. Improvements are expected to be complete by the winter of 2004-05, according to IA.

Bonnie Cutaia, who attends St. Helen's Church in Gates, owns a meat market on Chili Avenue with her husband and son. She said she and other merchants and their neighbors envision Chili Avenue becoming a New Orleans-style street, with refurbished store facades and plentiful lighting.

"We have a lot of historical buildings on this street, and we could do a lot with them," she said. She added that her family has operated its market in the area for three decades, and has watched Chili Avenue decline and start to come back.

"Most of my customers are people that live in this community ... and they want Chili Avenue to be something to be proud of," she said.

Mayor Johnson noted that IA and the city initially had a somewhat contentious relationship when they began meeting a few years ago, but have grown to become partners. He said he welcomes the organization's input because its members have helped improve the city's plans for redeveloping the west side, as well as find financial support.

"We can see that we don't have all of the brilliance and all of the smarts in city hall," the mayor said with a smile, adding that IA represents residents who refuse to despair of living in the city, no matter what challenges they face.

"Why wouldn't somebody want to work with them to keep them here as engaged residents?" he asked rhetorically.

Aimee Frederes, a St. Augustine's parishioner and IA board president, said the collaboration between her organization, the city and other groups has made her neighbors excited about living on the west side.

"It really invigorates people," she said. "It's like a breath of life into our community."

IA also outlined several moves already made to improve the west side. For example, Chili Avenue businesses have invested $200,000 to improve their properties; the city demolished several derelict properties in the Jones Park neighborhood; Jones Park area landlords formed an association; west-side residents successfully fought to prevent the opening of three nightclubs with live entertainment; and the city's forestry bureau teamed up with neighborhood residents around Sebastian Park to refurbish a "forever wild" section.

Despite numerous challenges, Mayor Johnson said collaborative efforts to improve the west side represent hope for its future.

"We are going to lift blinders from people's eyes, and people are going to see the rewards of being faithful," he said.

Interfaith Action represents about 10,000 families and 60 businesses, and counts among its members the Roman Catholic Community of the 19th Ward (St. Augustine, St. Monica and Our Lady of Good Counsel churches), St. Anthony of Padua, St. John the Evangelist (Humboldt Street), Holy Apostles, Holy Family, Holy Rosary and St. John the Evangelist in Spencerport. The community redevelopment effort is being supported by a host of different organizations and groups, including Neighbors Building Neighborhoods, Action for a Better Community Inc. and the Catholic Campaign for Human Development, the U.S. bishop's anti-poverty program.

Reuters/CNS

Bus attack kills eight

Israeli rescue workers remove a body from a Jerusalem bus that was destroyed in a suicide bomb attack Feb. 22. Eight passengers died and more than 60 were wounded. Pope John Paul II condemned the attack and called for a rejection of the "absurd dynamic" of terrorist violence.

Sr. M. Marcian Rotonno, SSND, 103

Obituary

Sister M. Marcian Rotonno of the School Sisters of Notre Dame died Feb. 14, 2004, at the Lourdes Health Center in Wilton, Conn. She was 103.

Born in St. Patrick Parish, Rochester, she entered the congregation in 1921, professing her final vows in 1931. She earned her bachelor's degree in chemistry and biology at the College of Notre Dame of Maryland. In the Rochester Diocese, she served at Bishop Kearney High School in Rochester as a teacher (1962-89) and administrative assistant (1989-92), prior to her retirement in 1992.

She is survived by her nephew, Dr. Raymond (Berthe) Santirocco of Rochester; grandnieces Laura Santirocco (Lawrence Davidson) of Farmington; Carla (Toby) Clark of Perinton; Paula Santirocco (William Goddard) of Ohio; and special friends, Mr. and Mrs. Patrick Fox of Rochester and Mr. and Mrs. Richard Caliendo of New Jersey.

Sister Rotonno's funeral liturgy was celebrated on Feb. 18, 2004, in the Provincial Motherhouse Chapel in Wilton with burial in St. Mary's Cemetery, Bethel, Conn.

Memorials may be sent to SSND Development Fund, Wilton, CT 06897.