



# Developing Communities

A NEWSLETTER OF THE NORTHSIDE COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT FUND

## Local and National Recognition for J. Francis Company

Four years ago, when John McCloskey, owner of J. Francis Company, was looking to relocate he told the realtor to show him properties "anywhere but the Northside!" In 1988 while studying at the Heinz School at Carnegie Mellon University, McCloskey founded J. Francis Company, a professional full service General Contractor doing commercial, residential and institutional renovations and remodeling.



(L to R) Dave Myers, Vice President; Jean M. Krak, Business Development Manager; Toni Shar, Office Manager; and John McCloskey, President.

He had been renting on the South Side for thirteen years, but was looking to purchase

and renovate an old building that was not only closer to the major arteries in Pittsburgh, but also had the space for his equipment and crew. The search eventually brought him to the Old Honest Soap Factory, a one-hundred-year-old, 22,000 square foot building located on High Street in Spring Garden. A \$50,000 loan from the Northside Fund allowed J. Francis to purchase and renovate their new headquarters.

Today that \$50,000 loan has become \$2 million dollars in revenues, and they are happy that they gave the Northside a chance. "There is openness on the Northside," says Jean M. Krak, Business Development Manager. "People are so helpful."

If so, then the people of J. Francis Company have truly become Northsiders by making a real difference in their community. When they first moved onto High Street they were surrounded by drug houses and dilapidated buildings.

"We had a lot of clients coming and going and that chased away some of the unwanted elements of the neighborhood," says Krak. "But we wanted to do even more."

To encourage the turnaround J. Francis began to buy the sur-

rounding abandoned buildings and restore them. Now they are being used as housing by some employees, and several were torn down that could not be restored. Their investment has actually improved the environment in the neighborhood.

Over the years, J. Francis has done work for Duquesne University, Carnegie Mellon University, Washington & Jefferson College, Soffer Organization, Graham Realty, and Dargate Auction Galleries, LLC among others. In the past year, however, J. Francis has finally gotten the recognition it deserves.

The company has been the recipient of some very prestigious national awards, including the National Association of Remodeling Industry (NARI) 2005 Contractor of the Year, winner of "Residential Interiors over \$100,000," for a Gateway Towers apartment, and the "Big 50" 2005 Contractor of the Year by Remodeling Magazine. Locally, J. Francis received the "2005 Cool Space Locator Award." The Cool Space Awards "celebrate and highlight the cool spaces in our midst to create excitement about cool spaces that will encourage adaptive reuse of urban locations." J. Francis is certainly a model, not just for innovative urban design, but also for businesses becoming advocates for their neighborhoods.

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## CLIENT PROFILE

# New Loft Space in East Allegheny

Art, architecture, and the history of Allegheny City all come together in a new project on Suismon and Middle Streets in the Northside's East Allegheny neighborhood.

Architect Bob Baumbach and his wife Jen Saffron were looking for an open space with an interesting history and the potential for some creative and historic renovations. In December 2002, they found what they were searching for in the old one-story building built in 1866 that originally housed John Schmittdiel Horse Shoer. "The former blacksmith shop is the only survivor in this one block radius of businesses that were essential to a time when the transportation industry was driven by horses and horse shoes," says Baumbach.

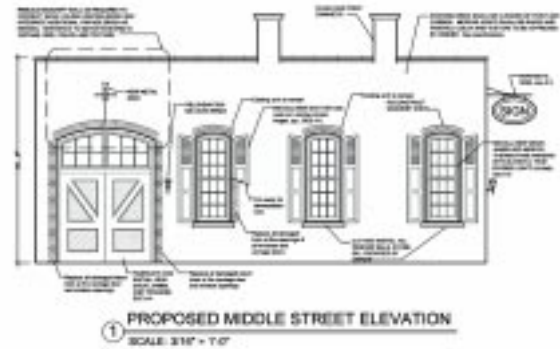
The enthusiasm is obvious when Baumbach explains the plans for 900 Middle Street. The historic façade will be renovated, the bricks cleaned and repaired, and the 9 over 9 sash windows with shutters and carriage doors installed once again. Inside the plans are even more ambitious: one great loft space with 13-16 foot ceilings, lots of natural light, and brick walls; what Baumbach calls "an ideal space for thinking and working."

Along with a loan from the Northside Fund, Baumbach is utilizing the Historic Preservation Tax Credit to fund the project. Under this program, if a building that is located in a National

Historic district and determined to be a "contributing" building it may qualify for up to a 20% tax credit. "This means 20% of our investment in renovations will come back in the form of a tax credit," enthuses Baumbach, "This is good for people who would like to invest in the Northside; and it could make or break a deal for someone who is on the fence."



Contractor Tom Romito of Primo Construction plans to begin the project this summer, and although Saffron and Baumbach may not put out an official call for tenants until the renovations are well under way, they are open to the idea



## Northside Fund Creates Development Committee

The Northside Fund Development Committee met for the first time in April. The new Committee consists of some very dynamic members including: Pittsburgh Mayor Tom Murphy; Shelly Sponholz, Senior Vice President of Real Estate Development and Assets Management for Giant Eagle, Inc; Mike Coleman, President of Allegheny R & D; Rhonda Brandon, Executive Director Manchester Citizens Corporation; Steve Shivak, Vice-President of Opera-

tions at the Pittsburgh Technology Council; and Debbie McClain, Executive Director Northside Leadership Conference.

The Northside Fund Development Committee has established two key objectives for 2005-2006: 1) identify key development opportunities in the gateways/portals to the Northside; and, 2) establish underwriting criteria for real estate projects.

of modifying the renovations to fit the needs of a tenant. Because of the open studio atmosphere, the high ceilings and natural light, they are interested in using the space for creative professionals that would thrive in the loft-live environs and contribute to the growing creative capital of the neighborhood. "We would prefer a tenant who would allow it to function for the greater community good," Baumbach says.

## Shelly Sponholz: Joins Best 50 Businesswomen

Board member and Treasurer of the Northside Fund, Shelly Sponholz was selected as one of the 50 Best Businesswoman in Pennsylvania for 2005. Shelly serves as the Senior Vice President of Real Estate Development and Assets Management for Giant Eagle, Inc. The Northside Fund congratulates Shelly on her success!

## MEET THE BOARD

# Ray Meyer

Ray Meyer has lived on the Northside his entire life. His lifelong passion for community involvement began when he



was fifteen years old and living on Troy Hill. His parents had always been active members of the community, especially at the Troy Hill VFW and the Grace Lutheran Church. It was at the church where Meyer decided to lead the initiative to dig up the basement to help put in a youth center. This contribution gave him his first ex-

perience in affecting change in his neighborhood.

In 1989, following the mayoral race, another big turning point arrived. Meyer took the advice of long time friend Tom Murphy who told him, "Get involved!" he joined both the Brighton Heights Citizens Foundation and the Northside Leadership Conference. Since then he has been President of the Northside Leadership Conference, and is currently a Board Member of both the Northside Leadership Conference and the Northside Community Development Fund, as well as Vice-President of the Brighton Heights Citizens Foundation.

Meyer's love for the Northside is obvious to anyone who talks with him. He speaks with pride

about the diversity of the Northside, and how important it is to him to maintain that diversity in the midst of new development. Meyer hopes to see a mix of affordable housing, retail, and light industry back on the Northside because it would benefit all of the residents, "so we don't push out the hard working class people who built this great neighborhood," he says.

Meyer enjoys his work with the Northside Community Development Fund, and counts as some of his major accomplishments "bringing Linda back to the Northside to run the Fund," and "being part of the ongoing transformation taking place on the Northside." He hopes in the future the Fund will be soliciting businesses from all of over Pennsylvania, and even out of state, to relocate to the Northside.

## Northside Supplier Network

The business to business webpage connecting Northside companies has been undergoing major renovations. The Northside Fund and the Northside Chamber of Commerce are working together to create a more efficient and effective webpage. Some changes include: business email and website links, company bios, a workforce development guide, a calendar listing local events, and member-to-member discounts.

"We live a rapidly changing world where technology is the key to growth, says Linda LeFever, Executive Director of the Northside Fund. "The Northside Supplier Network allows local businesses to become more competitive in their marketing efforts."

In the next few months the webpage plans to include a Northside tourism directory, weekly specials for members, and a commercial real estate

guide. If your business would like to become a member, or you have suggestions to improve the Northside Supplier Network please contact Shannon Murphy at 412-322-0290 or [murphy@nscdfund.org](mailto:murphy@nscdfund.org).

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*The Northside Community Development Fund is supported by:*

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Pennsylvania Community  
Development Bank

Department of Health  
and Human Services

Department of the Treasury,  
Community Development Financial  
Institution Fund

Urban Redevelopment  
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Small Business Administration

## New Addition at the Northside Fund

Special Projects Manager Shannon Murphy gave birth to Wyatt McMahon Murphy on March 23rd (his actual due date!). He and Shannon returned to work on April 29th and are happy to be back in the office.

## Celebration in the Park

This year's Celebration in the Park, organized by the Northside Chamber of Commerce, will be held Saturday July 23rd. The parade begins at 10 a.m. and the festival runs until 8 p.m.

## New Loans

The Northside Fund approved a loan for Team Construction. The \$100,000 loan is part of \$260,000 in project costs to renovate 1529-1531 Federal Street. The Northside Fund approved a loan of \$124,000 to finance Bookminders, Inc. as the company offers franchises throughout the country. Bookminders is the anchor tenant in the Northern Light Tower.



922 Middle Street • Pittsburgh, PA 15212

## Looking for New Office Space?

The Northern Light Tower, located at the corner of Allegheny and Western Avenue is looking for tenants. Small to medium sized firms requiring 2,500 to 10,000 sq. ft. of space should contact Jim Genstein of NS Property at 412-279-7965 ext. 1.

## Correction

Our March newsletter incorrectly listed Rob Strovers' Artistic Pursuits webpage address. The correct address is: [www.artisticpursuits.net](http://www.artisticpursuits.net). We apologize for the error.

## Northside Fund Community Outreach

Loan Officer Sarah Mansmann is currently attending local community meetings to familiarize residents with all of the services the Northside Fund offers. If your community group would like a presentation at your next meeting please contact Sarah Mansmann at 412-322-0290 or [mansmann@nscdfund.org](mailto:mansmann@nscdfund.org).

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