

The Elmwood

Gazette

April 2009

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It's Been a Long Time - Soapbox Time

I haven't sent out the Elmwood Gazette since the beginning of the year. At that moment, we weren't sure whether it was 1929 or 1931. I'll call it 1934 right now. The economy is shaky, but beginning to find strength. Retailers, for the most part have stayed open. New projects have not been scrapped. Layoffs are part of the scene, but not the whole scene. Of course, if you are laid off, then it's a different story.

For the last 20 years, the Connecticut economy has been sustained by Fairfield County. Hartford County's financial and economic strength has been deteriorating since the late 1960's as the population moved out of the central city. Then, we hit our big recession in 1990 (Thanks to the defense cutback and Colonial realty) and have never fully recovered. So we didn't have quite as far to fall as the rest of the country.

In Elmwood, Wiremold had a round of layoffs and is planning more in September. Restaurants in our area are doing ok, but could always do better. Furniture and home improvement stores are hanging on for dear life. Auto repair is staying afloat, but new auto sales are non-existent. National chains are starting to wither on the vine. Folks in the salon business tell me they are seeing more grey roots as their clients stretch out their coloring visits. There is a glimmer of hope as many young couples are beginning to take advantage of low interest rates and lower home prices.

The dental biz is a surprising barometer of the local economy. You see a cross section of the population; it's skewed towards those who can afford healthcare, but it gives a good indication as to how the average working Joe or Jane is faring. October, November and December were dismal months in our office. No new patients; patients telling me that they had been laid off or were about to lose their jobs and no elective treatment. I am happy to say that has changed since the beginning of the year. Many of my new patients have moved into the area from other areas of the country and many are coming into Elmwood in order to avoid the congestion of the Center. Folks are opting for elective treatments again. It seems that many of us were able to cut back on the extras and hang in there.

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Elmwood remains affordable and accessible. We have free parking and a commercial vacancy rate that is almost zero. We have a built-in customer base adjacent to a walkable center. Our housing stock is varied and very much in line with what aging boomers will be looking for over the next thirty to forty years. In choosing to build a new store on Newington Road, Stop and Shop's marketing/development department also sees the trend and wants to be in on it.

One of our BIGGEST upcoming financial problems has to do with the State's projected shortfall of 4 billion dollars. Our representatives are talking about this RIGHT NOW and I would urge you to call them and discuss it. In my opinion, just as we have dialed back our expenses, the State needs to do the same. I cringe when I hear discussions of increased taxes and fees. We can't afford it. And even in a crisis like this, have you heard/seen the massive number of radio and print ads for the UCONN Health Center? It's time for the Governor and the Legislature to get together and cut. Every agency needs to be able to justify its existence and the question on every person's lips needs to be, "If this agency/commissioner/job did not exist, what impact would it have?"

There is a silver lining -- recessions spur ingenuity. It's very easy to get warm and comfortable working for a large company that offers pensions, healthcare and paid time off. When you lose that luxury, a portion of workers start businesses and some become successful. It's a time when small properties will be bought for a song in the hopes of reselling them later at high prices. It's a time to purchase stocks in the expectation that they will skyrocket later.

So to paraphrase Monty Python, "We're not dead yet!" Now, enough of economics. What is happening in Elmwood?

Almost Free Elms!

Adam Bender is working on his Eagle project which happens to be - planting elm trees. He ordered a lot of them. Twenty of them will be planted around town at our schools and that leaves twenty more to find homes for. These trees are one inch caliber, 6-8 ft in height, disease resistant Liberty elms from the Elm Tree Institute of Keene, NH (www.landscapeelms.com). The final size of the tree will be 60-80 feet with a 40 foot canopy. We are requesting a \$50 donation for these elms and you will have to pick up the tree. Contact me at srick@snet.net and I will get you in touch.

Clean up Day - April 25th

And in concert with President Obama's call for volunteerism and Earth/Arbor Day, there will be a community clean-up day on Saturday April 25th 8:00am. We will meet at the Faxon Branch Library, grab some gloves, garbage bags, orange vests and coffee. As usual, we'll clean New Britain Avenue from the railroad bridge up to Mayflower Street. It's a great way to spend two hours and the street looks great after it is done.

And when you're done helping to clean up the Ave, join the Elmwood Community Center's tag sale from 9-2. This is the 30th Anniversary of the Community Center's existence. Robin Collins and Gina Marino have spent countless hours building the programs and integrating the facility into the community,

A 28 Year Gestation

In 1981, a walking trail along the Trout Brook was proposed to the Town Council. You may remember, interest rates were at 22%, and the economy of the country was in shambles (history repeats, eh?). The Town Council rejected the project and that pretty much was it for investment in Elmwood for the next twenty years (there was the New Britain Avenue task force, but the hurdles they faced were too great). So after 28 years, the path has finally been built and I'm looking forward to walking it.

Library's Coffee talk

Marcia Lewis, librarian at the Faxon Library, has sponsored many coffee talks over the years. In the absence of a community group, these meetings have served as an occasional interface between residents and elected officials. She hit the jackpot this year - roughly 150 Elmwood residents met with Town and State officials and voiced their opinion. Wow! Marcia is hoping that this will be the first step in establishing a community group to replace West Hartford Vision. Everyone at the meeting was not only impressed by the size of the turnout, but the diversity of the crowd. Once again, our library serves as the first government contact for many new residents and immigrants.

Demolition Begins

Demolition and remediation of the Industrial Safety Supply property has begun. It's great to see a developer interested in cleaning up a brownfields site and creating a development that will bring a long-needed supermarket to the area. On a similar note, ground has been broken for Aldi's Supermarket which will be located in front of BJ's Club on New Park Avenue.

Check Out the Online Auction

The Rotary Club of West Hartford is having its annual auction and dinner on April 25th at "The Pond House Café" This year there will be an online auction in addition to the live one. The website is www.whrotary.cmarket.com, All are welcome to bid! If you want tickets to the event, e-mail: jimpalma@snet.net. All net proceeds go back to local charities.

The Children's Museum will be having its Annual Gala and Auction on Saturday, May 9th at Tumblebrook Country Club. For info and tickets contact Dawn Diana: ddiana@thechildrensmuseumct.org

One more bit o' good news from the Rumor Mill

Ice Cream is coming back to Elmwood! To be located in Elmwood Plaza next to the Pastry Shop!

Have a great spring!