

# T H E H E I G H T S

Newsletter of the Houston Heights Association



Volume Thirty-One, Number Twelve, Dec. 2005

## Holiday Home Tour — December 2 and 3

It's time again for the Houston Heights Holiday Home Tour and Wreath/Tree Auction! Please join us on Friday and Saturday, December 2 and 3, for a glimpse of the rich architecture, history, renovation, adaptive reuse, and new construction that embodies the homes in Houston Heights.

The Annual Holiday Wreath Auction provides a venue for friends and neighbors to join with professional artists, designers, and florists to create original art in the form of holiday wreaths and decorated mini-trees. The auction will be held during regular tour hours (6:00 – 9:00 PM on Friday and 3:00 – 9:00 PM on Saturday). Final bidding will take place at the Fire Station during the after-tour party on Saturday from 9:00 to 11:00 PM, complete with complimentary drinks and party food. Don't wait until Saturday night to check out the display and find your favorites.

On the days of the tour, tickets will be available for \$15 at the Heights Fire Station and at each of the homes. All day Saturday, Metro mini-buses will be running between the homes, but there will be no free transportation on Friday night.

For more information, please visit [www.houstonheights.org](http://www.houstonheights.org).



## General Meeting

The program for the December 12 General Meeting will be "Festivals of Light." Coinciding with the winter solstice and Christmas, ancient festivals of light have been held throughout the world for thousands of years. The Romans paid homage in lights to Saturn; the Jews celebrate Hanukkah, the rededication of Solomon's Temple, with the lighting of ceremonial candles; and Persians lit fires in praise of Mithra, god of light. Britons and Saxons celebrated the Yuletide with fire, warmth, and light against the cold and darkness of winter. The ancient Egyptians held a festival of light to honor Isis, mother of the sun god, and the festival of lights, Diwali, is still celebrated by Hindus in many countries.

*continues on page 2*

*The Houston Heights Association is proud to have the following 2005 Platinum sponsors:*



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## Education Grant Program Reminder

In support of our commitment to learning and to become involved in our schools, the Education committee has established a grant program. Schools — charter, private, and public — which are within the boundaries of the Houston Heights Association have been asked to submit proposals for projects which will enhance and enrich their learning environments. Through a screening process, worthy projects will be selected and funded up to \$1,000.

The deadline for these one-page proposals is December 10, 2005. Awards will be made at the Association's general meeting on January 9, 2006. Questions? Contact Sheila Tybor at [stybor@houston.rr.com](mailto:stybor@houston.rr.com) or Karen Derr at [karen@karenderr.com](mailto:karen@karenderr.com).

## Winter Sponsors

In addition to the Platinum Sponsors shown on the front page, the Houston Heights Association is proud to have the following sponsors for the Winter 2005 quarter:

### Bronze Sponsors:

Allison Hughes Jones, Attorney  
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*General Meeting continued from page 1*

Dr Lynn E Mitchell, Director of the University of Houston Religious Studies Program and a recognized expert in the study of comparative religion, will give a short lecture on Festivals of Light, a time of hope, and the victory of light over darkness. Professor Mitchell received his doctorate from Rice University and served on the faculty of the University of Saint Thomas before moving to the University of Houston.

The Saint Mark's United Methodist Church Bell Choir, well known in the Heights, will perform. It was founded in the early 1990's and many of its members are Heights residents. The handbells were donated in memory of Reverend and Mrs G.C. Brannies. The choir performs regularly at worship services and is one of the special attractions of the annual Lights in the Heights festival. Claudia Dyle, the Director, also directs handbell choirs at the High School for the Performing and Visual Arts and at other churches.

## Community Improvement Nominations

Once again it is time to look around the neighborhood and see who has been improving it. The nomination form and rule sheet for the 2005 Community Improvement Awards are included with this issue and will be on the HHA web site soon.

## Holiday Food Baskets

On December 19, 20, and 21, the Houston Heights Association will combine forces with the Rotary Club of Houston Heights to prepare and deliver food baskets to 100 needy Heights families. These foods are not exclusively holiday fare, but staple items capable of feeding a family for an extended period with a minimal supplementation of fresh items. Recipients of the food baskets are selected by Family Services from their client list.

The schedule of activities is as follows:

Monday, December 19, 9:00 AM until completion — Set up the first floor of the Heights Fire Station as a mini grocery store stocked with \$5000 in groceries. Heights Rotary volunteers will handle this.

Monday, December 19, 6:00 PM until 9:00 PM — Assemble food baskets. All volunteers will be welcome and appreciated.

Tuesday, December 20, 9:00 AM until completion — Finish assembling food baskets as required. Done by Rotary.

Wednesday, December 21, 11:00 AM until completion — Deliver food baskets to recipients. Volunteers again appreciated. Lunch available from Hickory Hollow for \$10. Those wishing lunch should call Bob Pearson at 713-858-1316 to make a reservation.

This annual Heights tradition is chaired this year by Lauriel Hindman for the Houston Heights Association and by Bob Pearson for the Heights Rotary Club.

## New Format for the HHA Business Member Directory

The Business Committee of the Houston Heights Association will be publishing a new Directory/Shopping Guide for 2006. It is in a new brochure-style format and will include business name, address, phone number, and web address, as well as a short description of the business or service. The cost to be included in the new directory is only \$25 per year (plus annual business membership).

We plan a much wider distribution than in the past. Brochures will be at the Downtown Houston Convention and Visitors Bureau, hotels and other tourist info centers, local realtors, and Heights Association events such as Home Tours etc. as well as at the individual businesses.

This new Directory/Guide replaces the Business Member Directory previously published as part of this newsletter.

If you want to be included in the Directory/Shopping Guide, please reply to Donna Buchanan via email at [business@houstonheights.org](mailto:business@houstonheights.org) or call 713-426-4485. Note that it is very important that we have your email address.

## Restoration

The December Houston Heights Restoration/Historical Committee Meeting will be held on Thursday, December 15, from 7:30 to 9:30 PM at 124 W 17th Street, the home of Laura and Dennis Virgadamo. This home is a 1908-vintage two-story mixed transitional Victorian Queen Anne, Arts and Crafts, and Four Square styles which is listed on the City of Houston historic register. It was originally built by the Newbanks brothers for railroad man Edmond V. Whitty and his wife Maude.

E.V. was instrumental in the development of theater in Houston and appeared in a fundraiser for construction of the Heights Woman's Club Building at 1848 Harvard. The fundraiser was called the "Gilded Fool"; proceeds went to build the clubhouse on land that was donated to the club by Mrs. D. D. Cooley as a birthday present from her husband. Maude was a founding member of the Heights Mandolin Club, which became part of the Heights Woman's Club.

This wonderful home has had custom interior treatments and recent porch renovations to exactly follow the original style from photos. A lot of Houston Heights history will be discussed at this meeting.

Another special feature of this meeting will be viewing of the Community Improvement Award winning "17th Street Community Garden" next door to the Virgadamo residence. The garden area held unsightly abandoned buildings for many years before they were demolished by the City and a vacant lot remained. Neighbor Dennis Virgadamo pursued a vision of the lot becoming a community garden. The resulting garden, registered with Urban Harvest, provides a venue for garden celebrations and provides a very attractive site for nine rows of vegetable, herb, and flower gardens and an opportunity for neighbors to enjoy visits, to work together to improve the community, to inspire others to nurture more gardens, and for society to better sustain itself.

This very special meeting will be enjoyed by those in the neighborhood interested in detailed restoration with a very historic property and in how a community garden can add so much to the neighborhood. Meeting attendees should bring gardening questions and thoughts as to how they might preserve a historic property in the best way possible.

Please contact Committee Chairman Dean Swanson if you have a restoration project, an historical structure, historical information, photos, or articles pertaining to the Houston Heights for use at meetings to communicate historical knowledge to the neighborhood. Contact Dean at [restoration@houstonheights.org](mailto:restoration@houstonheights.org) or 713-880-2832.

## Donovan Park Tiles Update

Some tiles at Donovan Park, damaged from abuse and some improper installation, were replaced in mid-November. The front and back borders of black glazed tile were replaced with more durable porcelain tile.

Naomi Smullian's Art on the Boulevard students contributed about 50 new painted tiles. Most of the students' new tiles were installed on the vertical faces at the ends where there were previously many plain white tiles and in the middle of what should have been proper expansion joints.

Unfortunately, a very small number of original painted tiles were lost. The new installation accommodates the existing concrete expansion joints, which should prevent future damage.

You can help us keep Donovan and Marmion Parks in good repair and ready for use. If you notice damage or excessive wear to the park facilities or the playground equipment, please let us know by calling 713-861-4002 and leaving a message.

## Suzanne Morris, Renowned Author, To Sign New Book At Heights Fire Station

Suzanne Morris, best selling author, will appear at the old Heights City Hall and Fire Station on Saturday, December 3, from 11:00 AM to 4:00 PM, to introduce her latest novel, *Look Back with Longing*. Proceeds will benefit the Houston Heights Association.

*Look Back with Longing*, set in the United States and England from the dark days of WWI through the reckless 1920s, weaves an intriguing story of love and betrayal; loss and redemption. A major portion of the story is set in Houston Heights between 1914 and 1931.

*Look Back with Longing* is the first of the *Clearharbour Trilogy*, which includes *Elizabeth's Legacy* and *Clearharbour*, the second and third books to be published in 2006.

Readers will remember Suzanne Morris, a native Houstonian, from her previous works: *Galveston*, a historical novel set in the island city between 1877 and 1920, was published in 1976. *Keeping Secrets*, a novel of political intrigue set in San Antonio during World War I, followed in 1979. *Skychild*, a contemporary novel of a child believed to be autistic, was published in 1981. *Wives & Mistresses*, the story of a prominent Houston family (fictional) between 1887 and 1961, was published in 1986.

Suzanne has also written a six-part history of a prominent old Galveston family, *The Browns of Aston Villa*. Commissioned by Ashton Villa, it was originally published in *In-Between* magazine.

You can meet and greet Suzanne Morris at the Historic Heights Fire Station, 107 W. 12th at Yale.

## Election Results

After tallying the ballots, the Election Committee announced at the November General meeting that the following members were elected to three-year terms on the HHA Board:

Jim DePitts  
Genie Mims  
Taylor Moore  
Jim Potter  
Mark Sterling

We wish to thank all of them for agreeing to run and to serve on the Board if elected.

We also wish to thank the following retiring Directors for their service over the last three years:

Kathy Butler  
David Cassidy  
John Hennessy  
Pamela Kunkemoeller  
Kent Marsh

The Board appointed the candidate who came in sixth, Sheila Sorvani, to fill the last year of the term of Gonzalo Camacho, who had resigned after the election process had begun. Thank you, Gonzalo, for your service over the past two years.

## New Members

Please welcome the following new or returning members to the Houston Heights Association.

Debra Dewitt &  
Laurie Vandiver  
Houston Chapel,  
David & Sherrie Parker  
Lou Ann Phillips &  
Keith Sharp  
Square Moon Gallery,  
Marné Modine

## An Invitation from the Houston Heights Association

by Robin Franklin, President-Elect

The Houston Heights Association would like to extend an invitation to you for a fun-filled year in 2006. Wherever your interests or passions lie, we have an opportunity for you. If you love decorating, join one of our Spring Home Tour committees and let us bring out your inner Martha. If neighborhood issues interest you, join our Land Use Committee. If education is your passion, we have a wonderful Education Committee that would love your participation.

You can bring your skills to our committees or we can help develop your skills. Volunteering can be a wonderful way to reinvent yourself. Donating one hour or a few hours per month can benefit you in many ways, including getting to know your neighbors and keeping current with all the exciting events and happenings in the Heights.

It's never too early to start planning, and recently a group of former home tour volunteers got together for an evening of conversation and refreshment to discuss the Spring 2006 Home Tour chair and committees. Everyone agreed that the committees should be structured so that the volunteers have a lighter load, reinforcing the old adage "many hands make light work."

Kathy Russell, the owner of Squash Blossom on Yale Street, has accepted the position of Spring Home Tour Chair. Kelly Simmons is a hard act to follow, but we believe that Kathy Russell has the leadership and style for the position. The committee is in the process of selecting homes and accepting volunteers right now.

Several sub-committee positions are open, and we need leaders and workers, especially docents. If you can donate just a few hours to the Spring 2006 Home Tour, we can promise you an exciting, fulfilling experience. If you would like to join us as a volunteer for the Spring Home Tour, which includes a candlelight dinner, art auction, and, of course, the opportunity to view fabulous Heights homes old and new, please contact us through our website. We look forward to hearing from you!

## Board Meeting Notes

The HHA Board considered the following topics at its October 17 meeting.

The expense of the Heights Festival has grown over the years, mostly due to increased fees and requirements of the City of Houston. As a result, it may not be feasible to hold future Festivals, so another revenue stream will be needed to cover our obligations to maintain the Heights Boulevard esplanade. Past President and Heights Festival founder Paul Carr proposed a bicycle road rally. The Board decided to pursue the concept.

The chair lift installed in the Fire Station in 1996 failed and was not repairable. The Board accepted a bid to replace it. *[The new lift has since been installed.]*

Following debate over the wording of proposed deed restrictions on the 1414 Ashland property, the Board voted to defer a decision. A special committee was created to make recommendations on the wording.

The Board deferred a plan to involve Directors as block captains for deed restrictions.

Gonzalo Camacho has resigned from the Board. There being six candidates running for five three-year terms as Director, the Board voted to appoint whichever candidate receives the smallest number of votes to finish the last year of Gonzalo's term.

This issue of the newsletter went to press before the notes from the November 21 meeting were available. Items expected to be on the agenda include public relations, the Heights Festival, deed restrictions, a revision to the mission statement, and 1414 Ashland.

*[See story "1414 Ashland Update" on page 6 for more information on that last agenda item.]*

# Land Use Committee Meeting Notes

by Mark Sterling, Land Use Chair

At the November 7 meeting of the HHA Land Use Committee, local architect Dillon Kyle presented plans for new residential construction on Columbia, and Jeff Zarr of Texas Heritage Properties discussed possible plans for multifamily development in the Heights area. Both came to the Land Use Committee meeting looking for neighborhood input. Dillon represented a Heights resident concerned with properly interpreting his new property's deed restrictions. Jeff asked for insight into appropriate design and placement of potential larger building renovations and higher density housing. The Committee did not hesitate to offer their opinions, thoughtful and impassioned alike. The dialog was productive, and both men promised to continue working with the committee in the future.

The November meeting was well attended, with the welcome addition of many residents from Sunset Heights, who reported on their recent prevailing lot size application, covering over 30 block-faces north of 23rd Street, just west of North Main. Committee involvement in the application has helped answer the HHA charge to serve the area bounded by "North Loop 610, North Shepherd Drive, Washington Avenue, and Studewood to North Main continuing to North Loop..." (HHA Bylaws, Article III).

Spreading interest in establishing prevailing lot sizes and the possibility of favorable changes to the City's PVLS ordinances has led to the initial planning for a second neighborhood PVLS/PVBL/Deed Restrictions Workshop, tentatively scheduled for early next year. Look for details on the HHA web site.

While November's meeting had an air of accomplishment, committee regulars have requested that a reasonably detailed agenda be available at least a week in advance of the monthly meetings. Forewarned is forearmed. For the time being, that will be accomplished by e-mail (but eventually through timely posting on the HHA Website, as well). If you would like to be added to the current Land Use Committee e-mail distribution, please sent your request to [landuse@houstonheights.org](mailto:landuse@houstonheights.org). Suggestions for topics of discussion are also welcome.

We all need to hear your experiences and your ideas. Please join us on the first Monday of the month at 6:30 PM in the Fire Station.

## 1414 Ashland Update

by J. Kent Marsh, President

I'm sorry to report that after a great deal of effort on the part of many people, not one, single reply was received for the Request for Proposal for development of 1414 Ashland. We advertised on our web site, an article was written in the Leader, a press release was prepared and sent to the media, and a sign was posted on the property. Additionally, personal phone calls were made to possible interested parties.

Never let it be said that the Houston Heights Association did not try their very best to allow a workable solution to saving the magnificent trees on the property, but we cannot just "inventory" the property. It must be sold and redeveloped. The HHA Board has extended the deadline for proposals until January 31, 2006.



## Donations

Our thanks to the following for their generous support of the programs of the Association.

Another Place in Time, Mike  
Lowery — Beautification/  
Boulevard Projects  
Halliburton Foundation  
in recognition of Alma  
Cantu — Boulevard  
Maintenance  
Linda Kerr — Boulevard  
Clementina Lopez — Flower  
Gardens  
Jim & Doris Murdock —  
Boulevard Maintenance  
Donna Thomas — Flower  
Gardens, Parks,  
Boulevard

## Calendar (continued from back cover)

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
January 1, 2006	2 HHA Land Use 6:30 PM Fire Station	3	4	5	6	7 Heights 1st Sat.
8	9 HHA General 7:00 PM Fire Station	10	11	12	13	14
15 Community Improvement nomination deadline	16 HHA Board 6:30 PM Fire Station	17 Holiday Home Tour meeting 6:30 PM Fire Station	18	19	20	21

### Community Calendar

Events planned by other community organizations or at the Fire Station.

Dec. 3, 9:30 AM - 3:00 PM, Sacred Harp Singing - Antique American Religious Music, Heights Church of Christ, Heights Boulevard at 16th St. Open at no charge to anyone who wishes to come and observe. For more information, call the church at 713-861-0922.

“Sacred Harp” refers to the human voice. The songs are rendered *a cappella* as they were in the 1700’s in most churches. Sacred Harp is also known as “shape note singing” because it is written with only four notes that have a distinctive geometric shape (as opposed to our seven shape notes). The song Amazing Grace originated as a Sacred Harp song. The soundtrack of the movie Cold Mountain features Sacred Harp songs and singers.

Dec. 10, 6:00 - 9:00 PM, Woodland Heights Civic Association presents Light in the Heights® along Bayland Avenue and Highland Street between Norhill and Florence. For more information, see [www.woodland-heights.org](http://www.woodland-heights.org).

Jan. 7, Opera in the Heights presents Liederabend, an evening of song at Lambert Hall, 1703 Heights Boulevard. For more information or to buy tickets, call 713-861-5303.

Jan. 26- Feb. 4, Opera in the Heights presents Bellini’s *Norma* at Lambert Hall, 1703 Heights Boulevard. For more information or to buy tickets, call 713-861-5303.

### Television Watch

Look for a preview of some of the Holiday Home Tour locations on early morning shows the week of the tour. Channel 26 (KRIV) is scheduled to visit one of the tour homes on Wednesday, November 30. Channel 11 (KHOU) will visit another home on the next morning, Thursday, December 1.

### Future History

February 26, Awards Dinner  
 March 31-April 2, Home Tour  
 June 3, Fun Run  
 October 1, Festival cancelled  
 October 15, bicycle road rally  
 December 1-2, Holiday Home  
 Tour

More information on these and other events can be found on the Houston Heights Association web site at

**[houstonheights.org](http://houstonheights.org)**  
 or by calling 713-861-4002.

*The Heights* is published monthly by the Houston Heights Association. Its purpose is to acknowledge achievements and to inform HHA members of events.

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## Calendar of Events for December 2005

Sunday	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Saturday
				1	2 Holiday Home Tour 6:00 - 9:00 PM See page 1.	3 Heights 1st Sat. Holiday Home Tour 3:00 - 9:00 PM
4	5 HHA Land Use 6:30 PM Fire Station	6	7	8	9 Education Grant proposals due tomorrow. See page 2.	10 Lights in the Heights® See Community Calendar, p. 7.
11	12 HHA General "Festivals of Light" 7:00 Fire Station	13	14	15 Restoration 7:30 - 9:30 PM 124 W. 17th & Comm. Garden	16	17
18	19 HHA Board 6:30 Fire Station Food Basket Assembly	20 Food Basket Assembly Continues See page 2.	21 Food Basket Distribution See page 2.	22	21	24
25	26 HHA Education 7:00 PM Fire Station	27	28	29	30	31  continued within

HHA headquarters: The Fire Station is on the corner of Yale and 12th Streets.

HHA web site: <<http://www.houstonheights.org>>