

the Bulletin

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Serving Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield, East Liberty, Lawrenceville and Stanton Heights Since 1975



ABOVE: Mick McNutt and son Dylan check out Maintenance Matt at the fourth annual GA/GI Fest on April 5. The robot by Donald Jones of Jones Robo Works was on display at EDGE Studio on Penn Avenue. Photo by John Colombo Photography

Buyback Aims to Reduce Gun Violence

By Carolyn Ristau

Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Garfield – Gun buybacks took place yearly in Pittsburgh from 1994 to 2009, initiated by two doctors at Allegheny General Hospital who were discouraged by the number of gunshot victims they treated. By the time the last buyback was held, more than 11,000 weapons had been taken out of circulation.

Executive Rich Fitzgerald, Mayor Luke Ravenstahl, City Councilmen Ricky Burgess and Patrick Dowd, and State Representatives Dom Costa, Edward Gainey and Adam Ravenstahl have joined forces to implement a new gun buyback program. It will be held in June, which is National Safety Month.

Given the recent spike in gun violence in the city, the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation, Lawrenceville United, County

The first goal of the buyback is to reduce the number of guns available for criminal use. Last year, Allegheny County experi-

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Mayoral Hopefuls Debate City's Future

By Wesley Davis *The Bulletin*

Highland Park – The Pittsburgh Community Reinvestment Group hosted a mayoral debate at The Union Project, 801 N Negley Avenue,

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COMMENTARY

Getting the Facts Straight and the Neighborhoods Together on Bottom Dollar

By Eileen Kraus-Dobratz and Gregory Heisler

Penn Avenue – As residents of Friendship and Bloomfield with strong ties to Garfield, we have been pained by the conflict that's arisen over the Bottom

Dollar grocery store proposed for 5200 Penn Ave. The city's Zoning Board approved the store's site plans in November, but some neighbors appealed

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Parade Honors Veterans' Service

By Susan McGrane *St. Mary's & Allegheny Cemetery Association*

Lawrenceville – Lawrenceville is a community known for preserving its history and traditions. One of those beloved traditions is the annual

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Art Found in Aboveground Bunker

By Christine Bethea *Bulletin Contributor*

Bloomfield – A recent post from the BUNKERproject page on Facebook read: "Do you eat canned food? I do, but not nearly enough to

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ABOVE: Community gardener Melissa Taylor chooses seeds at the Seed Swap and Perennial Exchange at Gator Gardens, 5414 Kincaid St. in Garfield, on April 6. Photo by Minette Vaccariello

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the Bulletin

Guns from page 1

enced its highest rate of homicides in five years, with a total of 92 county-wide. Forty of these homicides were committed in Pittsburgh, and 43 percent of those happened in Zone 5, which covers the East End. Garfield was the site of seven shootings between October 2012 and March 2013, which helped spark this initiative.

The second goal of the buyback is to take guns out of the reach of children. The Children's Defense Fund Annual Report 2012 stated that nearly a quarter of children living in households with a gun know where it is and have handled it. Children who learn gun safety and those who do not are equally likely to play with a gun, according to the report.

The gun buyback will provide citizens with an opportunity to be rid of their unwanted weapons anonymously, receiving financial compensation at a neutral site. Compensation will take the form of VISA gift cards, with owners of more dangerous weapons compensated at a higher amount. While police officers will be on-site to identify the weapons, there will be a strict no-questions-asked policy.

"People who turn in guns are never asked to identify themselves or where they live," noted Aggie Brose, deputy director of the BGC. Once the guns are relinquished, the weapons not identified as stolen will be melted down to permanently remove them from circulation.

For the gun buyback to have a meaningful impact, Brose said, "it is essential to have a significant pool of funds." The organizers would like to collect at least 1,200 weapons, Brose said, and will pay \$100 for handguns and rifles and \$250 for assault weapons. This requires raising \$150,000 to cover the compensation. However, based on experiences in other cities, that may be insufficient to meet the demand. Several gun buybacks have reported running out of funds to compensate the number of weapons brought in. If

funds run out, the organizers will close down the buyback until additional funds can be raised.

In addition to collecting donations from corporations and foundations, a grassroots fundraising component is being set up online so anyone wishing to support the project will be able to donate as much as they are comfortable giving through a link on the Public Safety page of the BGC's website - www.bloomfield-garfield.org.

All funds raised will be directed to an account dedicated to the gun buyback program set up by the BGC. Checks should be made out to "BGC Gun Buyback." The funds will only be used to purchase the gift cards and to cover the operating costs of the Buyback. Any funds left over will be available for the use of future gun buybacks in Allegheny County with the approval of the Gun Buyback Fundraising Committee.

The BGC's Activity Center will be one of the collection sites; additional locations are in the process of being identified. Each location will be staffed by police officers and members of community organizations. The police will be responsible for identifying and handling weapons, while community groups will distribute the gift cards.

To have a wider impact on public safety in the community, there will also be a complementary preventative campaign, which will continue after the gun buyback. One of the components of this campaign will be to provide free gun locks, which prevent accidental firing.

"The goal of the buyback is to remove as many guns as possible from our neighborhoods," remarked Brose. "However, we'll consider it a success if one weapon is collected. One less gun in our neighborhoods means one less potential tool for murder and one less potential instrument of harm to a curious child." ♦

"We'll consider it a success if one gun is collected."

Penn Reconstruction Project Out for Bid

By Paula Martinac
The Bulletin

Penn Avenue - "There's no turning back now," announced Patrick Hassett, Assistant Director of the city's Department of Public Works (DPW), at the April 4 meeting of the Penn Avenue Reconstruction Committee. The plans and specifications for Phase 1 of the reconstruction project, which extends from Mathilda to Evaline Streets, were advertised on March 31, with prospective construction contractors given four weeks to get their bids in.

At press time, a contractor had not yet been selected. Early this month, PennDOT will award the approximately \$5.5 million project to one contractor, who will then have 90 days to begin construction. That means shovels in the ground this August, according to Hassett.

"It's been a very long process," said Brian Krul, project manager for L.R. Kimball, the engineering firm in charge of the design and engineering for Phase 1. "But we stayed on schedule."

According to Krul, reconstruction will proceed one block at a time, starting at Mathilda, with work done on the north side of the street first. As previously reported, Phase 1 encompasses repaving of the four-block stretch, plus new sidewalks, signage, lighting, traffic signals and streetscaping such as benches and tree grates. In addition, the Pittsburgh Parking Authority will remove the old, decapitated parking meters and install kiosks.

Michael Baker Corporation, a professional engineering and consulting firm, has been chosen as the construction inspection/management firm - essentially

the liaison between the contractor and businesses and property owners during construction. Baker's chief inspector on the project will be Aaron Pickering.

The Phase 1 team will hold a final community meeting on Thursday, June 27, at the St. Maria Goretti Activity Center at 114 N. Atlantic Ave., from 6 to 8 p.m. The chosen contractor, the inspection firm, Pittsburgh Water and Sewer Authority, DPW and Kimball will all have representatives on hand to answer questions about the plans, present the schedule for construction and outline traffic patterns and detours. The final drawings for the reconstruction will be on display, and refreshments will be served.

The project will extend through two construction seasons, ending in December 2014, noted Krul. "We're going to have to be patient," said Aggie Brose, deputy director of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation. "It's a big investment, and this is an exciting time for our neighborhood."

According to Hassett, \$500,000 in federal money has been earmarked for Penn Avenue's Phase 2, the next stage of reconstruction to revitalize Evaline to Aiken Avenue. However, the new mayor elected in November will have to commit more funds to the project in order for reconstruction of that section of the avenue to move forward.

For more information about Phase 1, including detailed plans and committee and community meeting minutes, visit www.lrkimball.com/penn-avenue.aspx. ♦

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