

Neighborhood FOCUS

Finding the Beauty in Old Things

Open Hand Ministries Wins YPA Promise Award for Preserving Homes for Low-Income Homeowners

By Carolyn Ristau *The Bulletin*

Garfield/East Liberty —The Young Preservationists Association (YPA) awarded Michael Stanton and Open Hand Ministries (OHM) the Michael Eversmeyer Promise Award for their work rehabilitating homes in Garfield and East Liberty for low-income, first-time homeowners. The award was presented on June 2nd at YPA's 10th Anniversary Celebration at the Union Project in Highland Park.

In his acceptance speech, Stanton said there is a "great beauty" in the neighborhoods of Garfield and East Liberty that is overlooked when people see the statistics and physical condition of the area. When talking with *The Bulletin*, he described this beauty further as the dedication and love of the residents for their families and neighbors and their perseverance despite adverse circumstances. He explained, "People driving through Garfield don't see the beautiful man who has lived here his whole life, and survived, endured and persevered. He takes care of the elderly woman two doors down, shoveling her walk and knocking on her door." Stanton said OHM "works to preserve the integrity and beauty of the neighborhood."

Stanton, a resident of Garfield since 2005, started OHM after participating in Hosanna Industries' East End Blitz in the summer of 2007 during which five houses were rehabbed. Inspired by the success of the Blitz, Stanton decided to continue rehabbing houses for low-income families year round. The first work day was held



ABOVE: Open Hands Ministries volunteer coordinator Emily Rosenthal, volunteer Terron Paxton and founder Michael Stanton accepted the Promise Award at YPA's 10th Anniversary Celebration. Photo by Carolyn Ristau

"People driving through Garfield don't see the beautiful man who...takes care of the elderly woman two doors down."

on a Saturday in December 2007. Since then, OHM has completed 10 homes for 10 families, and is now working with their 11th house and family.

YPA established the Promise Award in 2005 to acknowledge emerging leaders who show great promise for the future of preservation through new or recent work while also engaging youth. Dan Holland, a Friendship resident and founder of YPA, explained that when YPA designed the award, "We didn't want a lifetime achievement award to give to an established leader. Rather, we wanted to recognize work not yet recognized." Previous winners of the Promise Award include The Union Project of Highland Park in 2005 for its preservation of the church at the corner of Negley and Stanton avenues as a community center and the students at Peabody High School in East Liberty in 2011 for their work in researching, writing and publishing a book on the history of their community.

Holland first became aware of Stanton's work with OHM through an article in the *Pittsburgh Post-Gazette* from April 29, 2012. Holland said, "Stanton exemplified what the award is about." The three guidelines for the Promise Award are preserving buildings, working with low- and lower-income communities and exhibiting a commitment to youth involvement. Holland explained that Stanton and OHM "fit the profile by not just fixing houses, but by being focused on families of modest means and recruiting young people to help."

"When it comes to preservation, children are not programmed to see old things as beautiful," Stanton told *The Bulletin*. "It takes time to look at a building and

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understand what it was.” Stanton said he enjoys the opportunity to teach local youths the beauty of older housing as they help with gutting and rehabilitating homes in Garfield and East Liberty. He explained that when the plaster walls are torn out and all that is left are 10-foot high walls uniformly covered in hand-nailed strips of lath, the youth volunteers “discover the building’s significance and understand the need and importance of preserving it.”

Terron Paxton, a young man who lives in Garfield, started volunteering with OHM over a year ago. After meeting Stanton at Valley View Church, Paxton started volunteering every Wednesday and every first Saturday with OHM. Paxton said he likes working with people on the workdays and “helping people out.” He has learned many new skills through volunteering with OHM such as drywall,

carpentry and electrical work.

In addition to presenting Stanton with a plaque, YPA donated \$500 dollars to OHM through the sponsorship of PNC Bank. “We wanted to contribute financially to the organization,” Holland explained. “We are thrilled to honor Stanton and his work. He is dedicating his life to improving our neighborhood.”

Stanton said, “When I realized the prestige of YPA and their impact on the region and indirectly nationwide, I felt very honored and humbled to receive this award.”

Volunteers of all skill levels are welcome to join OHM for its first Saturday of the month workdays. Visit <http://openhandspittsburgh.org> for more information. To learn more about YPA visit www.youngpreservationists.org. ♦



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