

Giving and Receiving with Open Hand Ministries

By Carolyn Ristau *The Bulletin*

East Liberty – Every first Saturday of the month, I try to set aside time to volunteer with Open Hand Ministries (OHM). I got involved because of my interest in revitalizing Pittsburgh's vacant properties. OHM rehabs homes in Garfield and East Liberty for low-income, first-time homeowners with the assistance of volunteers. The use of volunteers is crucial to keep the houses affordable for the new owners.

This summer, OHM is working on a home in East Liberty for a single mother with three children. The house is more than 100 years old and had previously been converted into a multi-family unit. Now OHM is restoring it to a single-family dwelling and adding improvements such as spray foam insulation and higher ceilings in the attic.

The first Saturday of every month, volunteers of all skill levels are invited to lend a hand in preparing the house for its new family. During the August workday, I helped deconstruct the aluminum siding on the

house. We removed the old siding, which was damaged in places, to put foam insulation over the old shingles, which will then be covered with new siding. A few other volunteers and I removed the siding and folded it up, so that it could be recycled. The money OHM receives for recycling the aluminum goes straight back into the house.

Every time I volunteer with OHM, I know I am a part of helping a deserving family own its own home. In addition, I always meet new and interesting people and learn new skills. In August, I learned how siding is installed from the ground up and therefore the best way to take it off is from the top down. In July, I learned three new words—"parget," "trowel" and "hawk"—as we covered the stone walls in the basement walls with cement. This is called pargetting. We each used a trowel and hawk to apply cement.

"[You're] learning something along with creating something habitable from a derelict building," said Jack Jessup, a fellow volun-

teer, about why he likes working with OHM.

Jessup was part of the team deconstructing the siding. After we removed the siding, we discovered some of the shingles underneath were rotted and needed to be removed using a circular saw. Neither Jessup nor I had experience using power tools. However, Jessup decided this was his opportunity to learn.

"I looked death in the face," he said when I asked him about using the circular saw. Jessup felt he grew from the experience by "going out of my comfort zone, working with things that can kill you and being okay with it."

The first Saturday workdays are open to all volunteers. Future 2012 workdays are Sept. 8, Oct. 6, Nov. 3 and possibly Dec. 1. Skilled volunteers are also needed every Wednesday. For more information on volunteering with OHM, email Michael Stanton, OHM executive director, at mstanton@pts.edu. ♦



ABOVE: Volunteers work at removing aluminum siding from a house and folding it up to be recycled. Photo by Emily Rosenthal

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1862 Mystery Explosion Commemorated

By James Wudarczyk *Lawrenceville Historical Society*

Lawrenceville – At 2 p.m. on Sept. 17, 1862, the first of three explosions ripped through one of the laboratories at the Allegheny Arsenal in Lawrenceville. In the worst civilian disaster in the history of the American Civil War, the deadly blasts claimed the lives of 78 persons, many of whom were teenage girls. The cause of the deadly explosion remains one of the great mysteries of the 19th century.

On Sunday, Sept. 16, from 11 a.m. to 4 p.m. in Arsenal Park at 40th Street, the Lawrenceville Historical Society and the Sons of the Union Veterans of the Civil War will commemorate this tragedy with a series of programs. The commemorative event, "A Memorial: Lawrenceville's 1862 Arsenal Explosion," is free and open to the public.

From 11 a.m. to noon, Tom Powers (author of *Portrait of an American Community: O'Hara Township, Pa.*) and Jim Wudarczyk (*Pittsburgh's Forgotten Allegheny*

Arsenal) will present a PowerPoint lecture that examines the events and theories behind the explosion. Using government documents, newspaper accounts and other sources, Powers and Wudarczyk meticulously examined the data and will shed new light on the subject. During the presentation, the Lawrenceville Historical Society will unveil a three-dimensional animated illustration of how the laboratory looked in 1862 and the sequence of explosions. This lecture will be repeated at 1:30 p.m. on Sunday and on Thursday, Sept. 20th at 7 p.m. at Canterbury Place, 310 Fisk St.

There will be demonstrations from 12:30 to 1 p.m. and 2:30 to 3 p.m., and music performances will take place from 12:30 to 1:30 p.m. and again between 3 and 4 p.m.

Historic re-enactors will be on hand, and the Lawrenceville Historical Society has reissued a limited reprinting of the book *Pittsburgh's Forgotten Allegheny Arsenal*. ♦

BELOW: The Allegheny Arsenal emblem. Photo by Tom Powers

