

invasion of fire-flies across the night sky.

White-owned businesses took the brunt of the mob's violence. By the time the madness ended, two apartment buildings, three houses and most of the businesses along 31st Street and on Linwood near Prospect were smoldering ruins.

After the riots, what had begun as a social and commercial migration to the suburbs became a massive exodus. Flight from areas nearest the riots — areas as seared and stark as a battlefield — was especially intense. Many of the businesses around Santa Fe Place were destroyed in the riots. And the

owners of the ones that remained decided the area was a far too volatile marketplace. The steady, wholesale retreat of the business community would prove to be the most destructive blow to Santa Fe Place.

The 1960s were Santa Fe Place's most violent times. But even the rage which precipitated the riots and the prolonged destruction which followed did not extinguish the neighborhood's resolve. As the city reeled from the riots, forces were already in place to ensure that Santa Fe would rise up — literally — from the ashes.



CHAPTER 6

A United Stand

*"You're either part of the solution
or part of the problem."*

— Eldridge Cleaver
Speech, San Francisco, 1968

Santa Fe Place wasn't alone. The turbulent 1960s significantly changed the make-up of the entire black community in eastern Kansas City.

But even with the changes, Santa Fe Place firmly maintained its identity — its sense of neighborhood. The civil rights struggles of Dr. Miller's day and, later, the civil rights battles of the 1960s only strengthened the resolve of Santa Fe residences to endure and to overcome.

Early on, Santa Fe Place residents had learned that the single most powerful tool to combating adversity was organization. Unite to survive. Unite to stay strong.

Nobody understood the value of this formula better than Willard C. Shelton, a Santa Fe Place resident. In 1970, he had a brainstorm: why not

unite all the street clubs within the Santa Fe neighborhood? Individually, each club, guided by by-laws and overseen by elected officials, was a powerful force within its limited area. But Mr. Shelton envisioned a united force which could attain even greater accomplishments than a divided force.

One day in the early 1970s he invited all the club presidents to his house on Victor to tell them his proposal. From that meeting, the Santa Fe Area Coalition, later called Santa Fe Council, was born. On June 9, 1979, the Council adopted official by-laws. On July 29, 1986, the State of Missouri granted the Santa Fe Council registration as a not-for-profit corporation.

Mr. Shelton served as the Santa Fe Council's first president. Through his tireless efforts, Santa Fe Place was able to secure new curbs and gutters,

update street lights, participate in the city's paint program, and replace diseased elm trees that lined the streets.

Mr. Shelton and the Council's other elected officers closely monitored any issues or programs which could negatively or positively affect the neighborhood. From its inception, the Council became the clearinghouse for information relating to such things as government loan programs and private development plans. It was a clearinghouse and a powerhouse. When confronted with ill-advised plans from the outside, the Council took action.

When the Council learned, for example, that the



The Palestine Missionary Baptist Church at 3100 East 31st Street, is home to the Black Health Coalition and Outreach. The original building was constructed as a neighborhood movie theatre and then became the church. The Santa Fe Council held its first meetings here.

government planned to eliminate the Indiana Avenue post office, neighborhood leaders wasted no time before acting. A committee from the Santa Fe Council contacted the Postmaster General of the United States and formally protested the elimination of the neighborhood's post office. The fight was successful. In the end, Santa Fe Council retained these important postal services.

In 1979, the Santa Fe Council began one of the most important projects the neighborhood had ever undertaken. In that year, the long process of applying for recognition by the National Register of Historic Places began. Alan Wheat, a state representative and later a United States Congressman from Missouri's Fifth District, helped coordinate the massive application efforts. Several organizations, including Kansas City's Historic Preservation Committee and the Black Archives of Mid-America, Inc., founded and headed by Horace Peterson, III, also contributed to the process.

The Register is the official listing of the nation's most worthy cultural resources. For Santa Fe to attain such a prestigious honor involved a complex process. Historical, architectural, demographic, legal and topographic data was gathered. Ultimately, the vast amount of research materials went into the Register's lengthy application, a bound book presented to the United States Department of the Interior, Office of the National Park Service's National Register of Historic Places. Seven years after the huge project began, the neighborhood was successful.

The prestige of the award was not the only advantage to being cited by the National Register. If Santa Fe Place were selected, the neighborhood would automatically receive limited protection of its historical character. Plus, there were tax incentives. The Tax Reform Act of 1976/78 and, later, the Economic Recovery Tax Act of 1981 established tax advantages for the rehabilitation of certified historic places for commercial use. This tax incentive opened the door for major renovation projects which would follow in the 1980s and 1990s.

Santa Fe Council's endeavors to advance the neighborhood continued and, in 1989, the Council organized Santa Fe Place's participation in the Missouri Community Betterment Awards Competition, sponsored by the Missouri Department of Economic Development. Annually, groups state-wide submitted scrapbooks to conference judges. The scrapbooks chronicled the neighborhood's activities through newspaper clippings, photographs, minutes of group meetings, and other documentation. Each group competed in seven categories according to population. In 1989, Santa Fe placed third in the competition.

Through the years, the Santa Fe Council became more and more sophisticated, well qualified to preserve and protect the integrity of the neighborhood. In time, the Council became a force to be reckoned with. The association, with representatives from all the neighborhood clubs, met monthly.

Frequently, city officials, developers and other

community leaders attended Council meetings. As citizens, as homeowners, as taxpayers, Santa Fe Place residents and their Council had learned that to insure the welfare of the neighborhood they must — and could — exercise considerable political clout.

Time and again their collective voices would be heard. And time and again their collective goals would be realized.

Not every challenge was political. On September 12, 1977, the rains came. Santa Fe had



When the government planned to eliminate this post office at 3308 Indiana, the Santa Fe Council contacted the Postmaster General of the United States and protested. They were successful and retained postal services at this location.

its share of nature's problems to face as well. That autumn had already brought record-breaking rainfall, but this particular Wednesday was different. Nobody could remember anything like it. Within 24 hours 12 inches of rain had fallen on the city. Flash floods raged throughout the metropolitan area. By the time the waters receded, 25 people were dead.

Called "The Plaza Flood" because of the damage caused to the famous Country Club Plaza shopping area, this natural disaster caused major damage to businesses and homeowners alike. Throughout Santa Fe Place, basements flooded. William Blakely, who lived on 32nd Street, reported to *The Call* that all his neighbors on the north side of his block had four to five feet of water in their basements. Sewers backed up throughout the neighborhood. The intersection of 32nd and Indiana was a lake. For days afterwards residents hauled out hundreds of bags of flood-damaged debris from their homes. Most of their clean-up had to be done without help from the City's emergency assistance crews who concentrated their efforts in the Plaza and surrounding neighborhoods.

The catastrophe made at least one thing very clear: a neighborhood needs constant care. Problems could — and often did — erupt without warning. As with any dynamic entity, a neighborhood flourishes only when its citizens commit to its care and maintenance. Making Santa Fe Place a safe and friendly community required vigilance.

Even with the establishment of the Santa Fe Council, individual street clubs still thrived.

Our Family Pledge

The _____ Family pledges to assist with keeping our neighborhood safe and pleasant by promoting and preserving its beauty and cleanliness (streets, sidewalks, yards and home exteriors), discouraging and controlling noise and participating in the neighborhood watch to prevent unlawful activities.

Our Family will fulfill this pledge by:

- ___ Making sure our property and the adjacent areas (street and sidewalk) are free of trash and litter.
- ___ Planting and grooming flowers and shrubs.
- ___ Controlling noise levels and outside activities that are disturbing and reflect negatively on our block.
- ___ Working with the City, Schools, East Patrol Division of the K.C. Police Dept and Project NeighborH.O.O.D.
- ___ Helping with the monthly meeting activities.

Signed _____

Neighbors in Santa Fe Place are asked to sign and uphold a family pledge to keep up the neighborhood.

Neighborhood Clubs

Neighborhood clubs were born out of a desire "to keep our home beautiful."

Once family members began to mow lawns, cut flowers; learn the homes of their children's friends, gather at neighborhood sites like the laundromat, grocery store, dime store, drug store; identify the owners' skates, bicycles, bat, balls that were left on the sidewalks in front of our door, talk developed from among the home owners of the desire to form a block club so as to communicate our hope to maintain our homes. We wanted to keep the market value of the properties and to continue to keep up the beauty of our neighborhood, we who had been placed as the keepers and the waterers of the flowers.

Neighborhood block clubs began to form throughout the Santa Fe Area, independent of each other.

Presently there are nine neighborhood block clubs within the Santa Fe Area, and these neighborhood block clubs are incorporated as the Santa Fe Council, with Mrs. Rosemary Lowe serving as the current president.

The Victor Neighborhood Club was organized in 1951 by Mrs. Clara Miller, the first president. Other presidents included: E. D. Franks, Harold Mezile, Homer Briscoe, Rufus Smith, James Waterhouse, Louis O'Neal, Dr. T. T. Lowery, Rev. Joyce Wallace, Yvette Fanniel and Zonie Owens.

The 29th Street Neighborhood Club was organized in 1953 by Mrs. Fannie Wright. The following persons have served as president of the 29th Street Club since its formation: Fannie Wright, Catherine Williams, Vernita Hightower, Ora Moore, Rosemary Lowe, and Georgia Richardson.

The Twenty-Eighth Street Neighborhood Club was organized in 1950. Mr. Clarence Simmons served as the first president. Others who served as president include: Mrs. Bernice Tyson, Mrs. Vernice Wyatt, Mr. Eugene Lyle, Mr. Eugene Lewis and Mrs. Virginia Williams.

The Lockridge Neighborhood Block Club was organized in 1954 under the direction of Mrs. Louise Johns. A Proclamation from the Office of the County Executive, Dale Baumgardner, Jackson County Executive, June 29, 1979, was issued for this Neighborhood Club in celebration of its 25th anniversary. Mrs. Ermerlean Epps served as president of this club for a number of years.

Thirtieth Street ABC&W Neighborhood Club was organized in 1967 — the purpose of the club was to continue the pride of home ownership. Mr. Harold Evans was the first elected president. Mrs. Lessie Canton serves as the present president.

Madame Jessie White served as the first president of the 30th Montgall Block Club. The 31st and Montgall Block Club was formed in July, 1981 with Mrs. Eula Penn as president.

The 31st Street Block Club was formed in 1970 under the leadership of Mrs. Elinora Reynolds and Mrs. Betty Shackley. The 31st Street Block Club was among one of the first neighborhood block clubs to affiliate with the Santa Fe Council.

The Thirty-Second Street Neighborhood Improvement Association was organized in 1955 by Mrs. Elizabeth North, the first president. Other presidents have included Mr. Steve Young and Mrs. Delma Johnson.

D.J.

Their continued operation was vital, allowing for a focused management of the neighborhood. Through the years, for example, Santa Fe's street clubs worked to curtail nuisance noise, to secure burglar-resistant features for homes, to file official protest letters against property tax-hikes, to organize Neighbor-hood Paint-Up Programs, and to petition the city to condemn abandoned buildings and enforce the exterior code violations.

When residents complained about the quality of merchandise at the 7-Eleven store on 31st & Indiana, the president of the 32nd Street Club, Mrs. Delma Johnson, took prompt action. The result was a reassuring letter from the company's division manager. "It is 7-Eleven's intention to always be a good corporate citizen and neighbor; additionally you have my personal assurance that our merchandise selection will be in good taste . . . I would like to visit with your group and personally express my appreciation for your interest and support of our store."

By the end of the 1980s, approximately 3,200 people lived in Santa Fe Place. Almost three-quarters, 75 percent, of the single-family residences were owner-occupied. With these statistics and the neighborhood's formidable grassroots organizations, Santa Fe Place had gained the respect, and the attention, of the community at large.

The single greatest crisis facing the community during the 1980s and into the 1990s was crime. By the mid-1980s, 80 percent of Santa Fe Place's population was elderly, which made the community especially vulnerable to crime.

Block Club Presidents/Members

Twenty-Eighth Street Neighborhood Club - Mrs. Virginia Williams

Lockridge Neighborhood Council - Mrs. Bessie Carey

Twenty-Ninth Street Neighborhood Club - Mrs. Rosemary S. Lowe

Victor Neighborhood Club - Mrs. Zonia Owens

Thirtieth Street ABC&W Neighborhood Club -

Mrs. Lessie L. Canton

Thirty-First Street Neighborhood Club - Mrs. Elinora Reynolds

Thirty-Second Street Neighborhood Improvement Association -

Mrs. Delma Johnson

Thirtieth and Montgall Neighborhood Club - Mrs. Verna Murray

Thirty-First and Montgall Neighborhood Club - Ms. Eula Penn



The Santa Fe Council was established for the purpose of helping neighborhoods work together for the benefit of the community. It is composed of nine block clubs and covers an area from Prospect Avenue to Indiana and 27th Street to Linwood Boulevard.

Santa Fe Place actively participated in the Kansas City Police Department's Block Watch program and supported the Ad Hoc Group Against Crime and Neighborhood Alliance efforts. Every block within Santa Fe's boundaries was involved.

Sometimes those efforts required dramatic and confrontational action, as was the case when Santa Fe Place residents participated in the Ad Hoc "Anti-Dope House" Task Force. Many center city neighborhoods were plagued with drug houses. During a single month in 1991 the Ad Hoc Secret Witness Hotline received 117 calls city-wide. Callers identified the location of 73 drug houses, several within Santa Fe Place.

"The distressing part," said Ad Hoc's Aasim Baheyadeen, "is that Ad Hoc members personally witnessed visitors of these dope houses — many of our junior and senior high schools' children with school books in hand, going in and out of many of these houses. We have seen persons dressed for work, both in office and factory attire. And we have seen dope houses where persons stand on the porch in line waiting for a hand to come through an opening in the door, then give money in return for a substance in a plastic bag."

Santa Fe Place worked with Ad Hoc on a unique strategy to flush out the dope houses. During the late 1980s, Ad Hoc members and supporters formed car caravans which traveled throughout the drug-troubled areas. On one caravan, Ad Hoc and its supporters visited 65 dope houses, including some in Santa Fe Place. During the caravan trip,

which lasted several hours, Ad Hoc speakers used bullhorns to draw attention to the protest, while Santa Fe residents and other volunteers distributed flyers. Ad Hoc always invited the news media. The anti-drug caravans received the support of the Jackson County Prosecutor and the Police Chief.

This aggressive action against drug abuse brought national attention. On August 7, 1989, the nation's "Drug Czar" William Bennett, visited Santa Fe Place, where neighborhood residents



These columns, placed around the neighborhood, mark the boundaries of Santa Fe Place. They were dedicated in 1988, the 40th anniversary of the neighborhood.

had closed a crack house.

"This is a very nice neighborhood," Mr. Bennett observed as he walked along the tree-lined streets. Obviously impressed with what he saw, Bennett noted that Santa Fe Place residents took enormous pride in their neighborhood. Most residents had good jobs, college degrees and belonged to block associations. They were people who would not hesitate to call the police and join together in outrage over a crack house in their midst. This was the pride which had kept them powerful and a positive force



Participants at a service honoring the 40th Anniversary of Santa Fe Place included (from left to right) Richard Berkley, Charles Hazley, Rosemary Lowe, Phil Curls, Archie Welch, Horace Peterson, Bill Waris, Orchard Jordan Hollis and Fletcher Daniels.

for 40 years.

Santa Fe Place was jubilant with celebration in 1988 when the neighborhood hosted its 40th Anniversary. On October 8th, an outdoor celebration commemorated several highwater marks for the neighborhood: Santa Fe's placement on the National Register; the dedication of neighborhood columns marking the boundaries of Santa Fe Place; the opening of Linwood Shopping Center; and the plans for building Justin Place, a new multi-family residential development.

Planned activities were held from morning until night. Celebrants placed three wreaths at the Leon Jordan Park: one for Mr. Jordan, founder of Freedom, Inc., one for Mr. Bruce Watkins, a Councilman who served both the 3rd and 5th Districts, and one in honor of Santa Fe's pioneer black residents. Interviews with Santa Fe early residents were audio taped. These remembrances gave vivid testimony to the rich history of the neighborhood. Each family received a copy of the official document that won Santa Fe a place on the National Register. The day was filled with street club lawn parties, picnics, an ice cream social, front porch get-togethers, and minivan tours of the neighborhood for the elderly and handicapped. More than 200 people assembled to end the historic day in a vesper service held at St. Paul United Presbyterian Church. The Mayor of Kansas City, Richard Berkley, awarded a special "Proclamation in Honor of the People of the Santa Fe Community."



The 40th Anniversary Committee, shown in 1988 (left to right) front row: Lessie L. Canton, Emerlean Epps, Rosemary Lowe and Delma Johnson. Back row: James Baucham, Carolyn Jones, Zonia Owens, Felicia Safir, Eula Penn, Thelma Glenn, Bessie Kind and Aasim Baheyadeen.



Congressman Alan Wheat attended the 40th anniversary ceremony, along with Rosemary Lowe.



Many members of the community assisted in placing wreaths at the Leon M. Jordan Memorial Parks. (From left to right) front row: Rosemary Lowe, Charles Hazley, Ruby Rucker, Delma Johnson, Les McReynolds, Orchid J. Hollis, Richard Berkley, Jackie McGee, Fletcher Daniels, Archie Welch and Donald Strother. Back row: Unknown, Police Officer John Cooley, Phil Curls, Sarah Beauchan, Aasim Baheyadeen, Carolyn Jones, Marshal Williams, Keith Brown and Vernon Thompson.