

www.baltimoresun.com/news/local/baltimore_city/bal-md.waverly03aug03,0,6913844.story

baltimoresun.com

Neighbors celebrate Waverly's renewal

Parade gives the community a chance to show off its thriving 'Main Street'

By Kevin Rector

Sun reporter

August 3, 2008

When Casey Jenkins opened his award-winning, upscale restaurant, Darker Than Blue, on Greenmount Avenue in Waverly last year, he saw it as an opportunity to lead by example in revitalizing the area's up-and-coming business strip.

"We're trying to attract more people to the area who are conscious of quality," Jenkins said. "The more reputable businesses that come to the area, the better the area will be."

Yesterday, Jenkins smiled as he watched the third annual Greenmount Avenue National Night Out Kick-Off Parade come rambling past his restaurant's front door. The parade was an outward sign, he said, that Main Street Waverly - the stretch of Greenmount between 35th and 28th streets - is becoming a local hub for business and community activism.

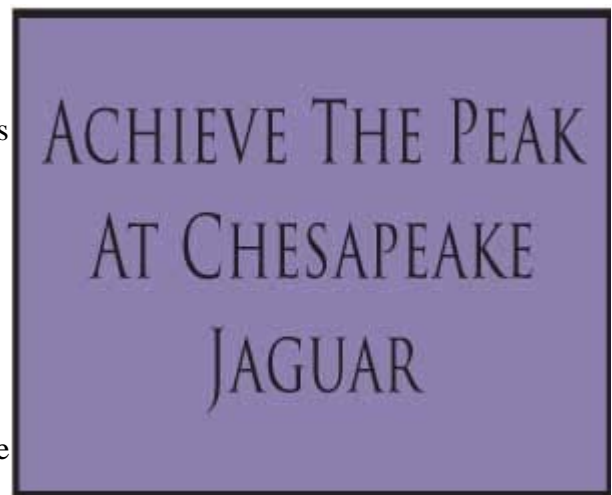
"If people are out in the streets, the rest of the bad elements will go away," he said.

A local marching band and dancing troupe passed by, as did Miss Maryland - Alicia Taylor, who grew up down the block - Mayor Sheila Dixon, McGruff the Crime Dog and a slew of local residents riding bikes and walking their pets. Balloons lined the street, and shop owners and residents lined the sidewalks, taking it all in.

"There are a lot of great things happening in the area, so it's great to have it out in the daylight for everyone to see," said Judith Geller, a 20-year resident of the area.

The parade was a precursor to National Night Out, which will be held Tuesday in the city and throughout the country. Neighbors, law enforcement agencies and businesses will come together for block parties and parades in an effort to build community identity and reduce crime, organizers said.

Greenmount Avenue has been designated as one of the city's "Main Streets" and targeted as an area ripe for commercial revitalization and development in the city's Baltimore's Main Streets Network, which was launched in 2000.



The avenue has seen big changes in recent years. Residents and community activists - including those from the nonprofit groups Waverly Main Street and Greater Homewood Community Corp., which organized the parade - said the community has made great strides.

"I've heard from people that the streets are cleaner, it seems safer at night because there seems to be more good activity in the evenings, people are walking around," said Laura Kindseth, manager of Waverly Main Street. "Back in the '70s, it used to be pretty lively, and we definitely want to bring that back. We want to make it a destination."

Michelle Blue, founder and executive director of Follow Your Dreams Inc., a youth center in Harwood that uses hip-hop music to channel kids' creativity into healthy activities, said she looks at the changes "as a renaissance."

"It really seems that a lot of merchants are coming in, a lot of new businesses," she said as she led kids from her center in the parade.

Jill DiMauro, who moved onto 28th Street in Waverly four years ago, said she has seen the neighborhood change rapidly.

When she first moved in, teenage drug dealers frequented her front steps, she said. Now they aren't around.

DiMauro said she's happy to see the neighborhood's vacant buildings filling up with new residents, and that while things seem safer and cleaner, the character of the neighborhood hasn't been entirely disrupted.

"The problem with gentrification is that it just changes one [economic] strata for another, but the gentrification here isn't changing the strata, it's just filling the houses," DiMauro said. "What I like about our neighborhood is it's never going to be snooty. There aren't huge brownstones. We're always going to be a neighborhood."

Kindseth, who smiled as bikers and pet owners gathered after the parade at St. John's Church in the Village at Greenmount Avenue and 30th Street, said she would like to see Waverly Main Street designated as a national historical district. Like DiMauro, she doesn't want Waverly to change completely, but for its historic character to be able to shine through.

"We would like to see all of these really historical, beautiful buildings highlighted," she said, "to have all the modern plastic signs removed."

Baltimore police Commissioner Frederick H. Bealefeld III, who was at the parade, said he views all the community involvement as "a clue that we're really moving forward. This is a clue that people are engaged.

"It's an incredible shot in the arm to see this many people energized and committed," he said. "These people are prepared to take care of their own community, and what you really need is communities taking care of communities."

Dixon agreed, and pointed to the parade and National Night Out as opportunities to revitalize communities like Waverly across the city.

"This is to really bring the community, the Police Department and other partners together to talk about how to better the area," she said. "It's really all of us collaborating together."

kevin.rector@baltsun.com

Copyright © 2008, [The Baltimore Sun](#)