

## Pottstown's Mosaic Community Land Trust Revitalizing Pottstown from the Ground Up



### DOWNTOWN MARKETING & DEVELOPMENT

By Barry Cassidy

Where you live becomes a part of who you are. In most cases, goods and services provided locally are your window on the consumer world. The location of goods and services is only part of the story associated with the quality of life of a place. The entire living experience relates to the quality of life you enjoy in your localities. In many cases the older neighborhoods, since the 1960s, have experienced disinvestment, outward migration and job loss. What was once the hub of pre-World War II society had lost its sense of place, as the "old" moved out and there was no "new" ready to move in to many of the buildings and spaces.

People in these communities have responded to the challenges to work to bring about change for the better in the communities. Through grass roots leadership, the seeds of renewal have spread to many communities. In Pottstown, the Mosaic Community Land Trust has been seeding renewal in the borough for about

nine years. They have a mission to improve the quality of life in Pottstown, with a wide array of responsibilities including Housing, Community Gardens as well as Community Arts.

A Community Land Trust is a little different than other non-profits in as much as it seeks to be a land owner. To date, there

are 255 Community Land Trusts across the nation, and there is a National Community Land Trust Network. The mission is much the same as a community development corporation, as it is a sustainable model for community involvement and partnerships, increased homeownership, neighborhood stabilization, arts & culture, greening/community gardens.

Mosaic's community garden manager is Daniel Price. A lifelong resident of the Pottstown area, Dan knows the area well. Dan has brought a wealth of knowledge on not just Pottstown, but the trends in revitalization of older Pennsylvania communities. He assisted in the revitalization of West Chester Business Improvement District. I personally view this as his "return to nature" period of his life.

There are currently five community garden sites located in Pottstown — two on Chestnut Street, one on Walnut Street, and the others on the grounds of Rupert and Barth Elementary Schools. At three of the garden locations, residents are able to rent

garden plots to grow their own healthy and organic produce. Volunteers and Mosaic staff, as well as community members, are often educated through workshops and hands-on assistance offered at the garden locations.

The overall mission of Mosaic is the improvement of Pottstown. Mosaic recently purchased its first home at 417 Chestnut, located right next to one of its gardens. In coming months, they will be partnering with Habitat for Humanity to demolish the building and rebuild. It will be the first house in the borough sold under the Land Trust model. Mosaic's Community Arts wing also assists in community-wide art endeavors that include murals, children friendly events and a variety of community outreach efforts, including the founding of the Youth Orchestra of Pottstown last summer.

The entire effort is used to build the community and create a sense of place for both residents and visitors alike.

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# FOCUS ON THE REVITALIZATION OF POTTSTOWN

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A Community Garden is more than a garden where members of the community gather together to grow fresh produce. It becomes a way to interact with your neighbors, even if they live further away from you within the community.

Community Gardens are not that easy to set up, but they are harder to make go away as they become a focal point of the community. I remember having a significant community garden on South Street in Philadelphia. I also remember that a developer wanted to use the space, and there was significant community pushback concerning the conversion. I also remember the same thing happened in Phoenixville when the housing authority wanted to get rid of the community garden and the sacred Labyrinth. That also was not pretty.

Dan has done a good job keeping up the momentum on the gardens, as the idea has caught fire in Pottstown. During the summer months, Mosaic's Kids' Club is a weekly educational program that inspires kids to be engaged in the community and to be environmentally conscious. He has also initiated workshops that are held in the gardens,

at the Mosaic offices, and in locations hosted by many of our community partners, including the Pottstown Regional Library, the YWCA and YMCA, Olivet Boys and Girls Club and Art Fusion.

Dan has developed and instituted rules that people must abide by in order to be a member of the garden. They have to agree to abide by the garden rules for MOSAIC Community Gardens.

If a potential member is a beginning gardener, they will be required to attend at least one orientation session for new gardeners. He requires members to attend at least three (3) of the monthly "Garden Party Work Days" to maintain common areas, borders and paths, and to get to know other gardeners and foster a sense of community. He insures safety by requiring that members not give out the Garden lock combination to anyone.

These are simple rules that lay out the responsibilities for the participants, and fosters a sense of community interaction which is the essence of community quality of life.

*Barry Cassidy is a freelance grant and economic development consultant. He can be reached at barrycassidy@comcast.net.*



The popular trolley tour of investment opportunities will return this year to the Pottstown Investors Conference.

## Third Annual Pottstown Investors Conference to Advance Local Economic Development

The Third Annual Pottstown Investors Conference will be held Friday, April 12 from 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. in The Hill School's Center For The Arts, 760 Beech St., Pottstown, Pa. This conference is geared toward real estate investors, developers, business owners, entrepreneurs, state and federal officials, and Pottstown community leaders.

There is no charge to attend, although participants are asked to pre-register with Stephanie Trauner, administrative manager for Hobart's Run, at [strauner@thehill.org](mailto:strauner@thehill.org) or by calling 610.705.1018. The program will inform individuals who may be interested in opening a restaurant or entertainment venue, retail shop, or other business, or moving to Pottstown and buying, restoring, marketing, and/or residing in real estate featuring the Borough's architecturally diverse housing stock.

Building off the previous two well-attended events and participant feedback, conference planners from Hobart's Run are varying this year's format so there will be fewer "speeches," more conversational story-telling by Pottstown stakeholders and entrepreneurs, and further showcasing of intriguing real estate opportunities here in our hometown during a session dedicated to this requested topic. Participants also will be treated to a guided trolley tour (also a popular feature of the initial conference). Details are being finalized for a keynote speaker.

The event will again offer a "Taste of Pottstown" lunch featuring fare from local restaurants – and, this year, the delicious food samplings will be paired with a "gallery walk" displaying information and literature about nonprofits and other organizations that



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