

The 3600 block of "Marvelous Marv" was so transformed it won an award. Neighbors unite through cleanup, repair effort

By Stephen Salisbury
PHILLY CULTURE WRITER

It wasn't a bad block in the olden days — more than a couple of months ago.

There were no crumbling rowhouse shells, no mountains of trash, no walls tagged with black and silver spray paint.

Just an ordinary block in the city, candy wrappers blowing along the sidewalk, blank rowhouse fronts, people hunkered down.

Then Lawrence Burgess, who has lived on the 3600 block of North Marvane Street in Hunting Park for nine years, tore his rotator cuff badly, couldn't work, and began to think.

"One day, I just looked around and I said, 'I'm tired of living like this,'" he said Sunday afternoon. "I want to come outside to some beauty! I'd come out and there'd be papers flying around. Paint peeling. No one knew anyone else."

It was an epiphany for the 45-year-old

block captain. He organized a meeting of neighbors about two months ago, and, maybe not surprisingly, it touched a chord.

People were ready for change. They were ready to sweep, paint, decorate, plant, repair, and redo the neat two-story rowhouses with the bowed fronts and porches that dominate the block.

And on Friday night, the 3600 block — it calls itself Marvelous Marvane now — won the top prize as the city's best "clean block" at an awards banquet at the Sheet Metal Workers Union Building on Columbus Boulevard.

Sunday, neighbors were out — some cleaning, some chatting, some just enjoying the wash of crisp autumn sunlight.

There was Mr. Bill, who's been on Marvane since 1965, when he was only the third African American to move in, standing with a broom. Used to be an Irish block, See **BLOCK** on B8



APRIL SAUL / Staff Photographer
Block captain Lawrence Burgess and his wife, Sharon, sit in the mosaic "Healing Garden" at the corner of Marvane and Venango.

Block

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he said, "just a plain, ordinary block."

Jackie Hargrave tended the "Healing Garden" created by block residents with the aid of CosaCosa Art at Large, a Manayunk art organization. The garden, with its mosaic wall, bench, and posts at the corner of Marvane and Venango Streets, is in part a memorial to Hargrave's mother, Margaret.

"We all did this," she said with great pride and satisfaction. "We bought the tiles from the Home Depot and broke them up."

William Hilton, who lives around the corner on Old York Road, dropped by to see Burgess. Hilton, a fine woodworker, built flower boxes for many of the houses. The first, on Burgess' porch, has a carved red Phillies "P." Down the block, another house has a Marvelous Marvane sign carved from wood.

The boxes and decorative wood, Hilton said, were his idea.

"I wanted to help out," he said.

Neighbors started meeting regularly in response to Burgess' plea. They decided they needed to paint their house fronts, patch walls, plant flower beds, and decorate, decorate, decorate.

On Sunday, lots of homes had fancy strings of plastic leaves in fall colors wrapped around porch and step railings. When the season changes, so will the leaves. Christmas lights are on the way.

Veronica Bashir, who's lived on the block with her husband, James, for 27 years, said the transformation on Marvane can certainly be seen in the neat and decora-



APRIL SAUL / Staff Photographer
Woodworker William Hilton built decorative flower boxes for many houses on the block, as well as the "Marvelous Marvane" sign on the house behind him.

tive homes, the clean sidewalks, and the well-planted flower beds.

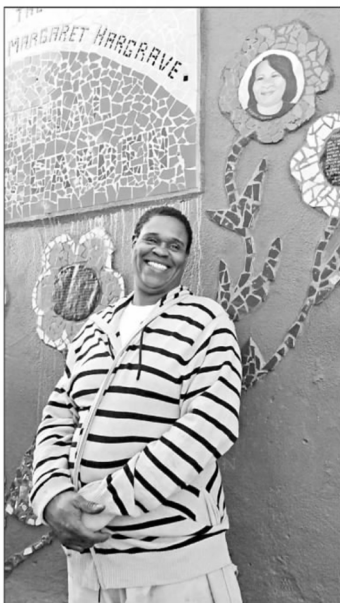
But the real change is in the people, she said, and the sense of community that has emerged from the cleanup effort.

"Before, people would never really speak to you," she said. "They didn't really know you. Now, it's a community with everyone. It's more like a fellowship. Now you know their names. It's more like a family block, like it should be. Everyone is looking out for everyone else."

Bashir's 20-year-old daughter, Aasiyah, agreed enthusiastically.

"Yes!" she said, her face bursting with a smile. "I love it!"

Contact culture writer Stephen Salisbury at 215-854-5594, ssalisbury@phillynews.com, or @SPSalisbury on Twitter.



Jackie Hargrave stands under a portrait of her mother, Margaret, in the neighborhood's "Healing Garden," built in her honor.



Lucille Edwards decorated her North Marvane Street front porch with artificial flowers and a leprechaun.