



HISTORIC SPANISH TOWN CIVIC ASSOCIATION NEWSLETTER



AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 2009

DEMOLITION BY NEGLECT

Two weeks ago, well-known real estate speculator Richard Preis was bit on the derriere by his own handiwork and reputation. Instead of rolling over to the commands of a well-connected developer, the city barked back.

Preis is the owner of nearly a block of prime realty overlooking Arsenal Park, an oak-lined drive along Capitol Lake. With newcomer apartment developer David Slaughter, he's proposing at least four stories of modern apartments in the city's oldest neighborhood, Spanish Town.

Currently, Baton Rouge has two Historic Districts; Spanish Town and Drehr Place. They enjoy special protection from over-development. To make rules and police preservation guidelines, the city established the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC). Developers who want to build in a Historic District must present the HPC with plans that detail height, proportion, materials, etc.

When the first drawings of "Capitol Lofts" appeared three months ago, neighbors said it looked like the new, generic, sheetrock apartments near LSU. Neighbors also worry 200 extra cars will clog the one-way streets of a community with 800 residents. In short, Spanish Town doesn't want to be Perkins Rowe.

To make way for Capitol Lofts, bulldozers would roll on seven houses Preis owns and now rents. To make his case that the houses are old and in bad shape, Pries

handed the HPC surveys listing deficiencies like absent shingles and tilting pier blocks.

In Baton Rouge, tearing down a building – even a historic landmark – has always been easy. The owner pays for a survey. It concludes the place is in disrepair. City leaders then bless the wrecking ball.

In 1991, Preis did less than that before tearing down seven other houses on the same Spanish Town block in question. He then shocked the city with a Sunday morning leveling of an antebellum shop called the Ice House. This so angered preservationists and the public that the parish enacted its first demolition ban.

In direct fallout from Preis' activity, the parish then adopted preservation rules along with the ability to enforce them through the Historic Preservation Commission. Armed with Preis' own submitted surveys, the HPC voted two weeks ago to send him a letter about the certain seven houses located within a Historic District.

Citing exactly the deficiencies his own inspectors noted about the houses he wants to demolish, the HPC is now moving against Preis for "demolition by neglect." That's a real crime - really on the books – and could wind up costing Preis real money in fines levied for every day he doesn't repair the very houses he wants to bulldoze.

After the vote, Preis said he'll fight. We assume he'll claim retribution or being singling-out. But the HPC is hardly picking on him just because of his history of personal assaults on History. The rules that govern the HPC compel it to act when it's presented with evidence of "demolition by neglect."

It just so happens, the only owner to step forward and plop evidence in the commission's lap is Richard Pries.

Just two years ago, before Mayor Holden and the Council created tougher preservation rules, this would have ended badly for the seven houses that are still in Preis and Slaughter's gun sights. City leaders would have rolled over, the houses would be gone and preservationists – indeed, anyone who cares about Baton Rouge history - would be left frustrated yet again to learn of callous and useless demolition.

This time, the city did not roll over. It snapped to life and bit Mr. Preis squarely, legally and ironically in the only place that may catch his attention – the wallet.

- Jeff Duhe



Keep an eye out for the announcement of our annual meeting in September

VISIT US ONLINE AT:

www.spanishtown.us

Or email us at:

hstcabr@gmail.com

SEPTEMBER 2009

Sun	Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat
		1 Yard of the month contest begins!	2	3	4	5 Red Stick Arts Market
6 First free Sunday	7	8	9	10	11 Live After 5	12 LSU vs. Vander- bilt 6pm (home)
13	14	15	16	17 History of LSU Architec- ture	18 Live After 5 Supper Club	19 LSU vs. ULL 6pm (home)
20	21	22	23	24	25 Live After 5	26 Taste of Tiger Tailgat- ing
27 HSTCA Annual Meeting	28	29	30	<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;"> Check out the State Library's exhibit on Nazi Book Burnings running through September 20th . Fourth and Spanish Town Road </div>		

Schedule of Events

- Sept. 5: BREDA's monthly Arts Market in conjunction with their weekly Farmer's Market. 5th St. between North and Main.
- Sept 6: First Free Sunday: Free entrance to downtown museums and galleries
- Sept 11: Live After 5! The Neighborhood Stars. 5pm Galvez Plaza.
- Sept 12: LSU vs. Vanderbilt. 6pm at Tiger Stadium
- Sept 17: History of LSU Architecture Lecture by Michael Desmond at the Old Governor's Mansion (\$10)
- Sept 18: Live After 5! Chubby Carrier and the Bayou Swamp Band. 5pm Galvez Plaza.
- Sept. 19: LSU vs. ULL 6pm at Tiger Stadium.
- Sept 25: Live After 5! The Elvin Killerbee Band. 5pm Galvez Plaza.
- Taste of Tiger Tailgating: River Center (\$20)
- Sept 27: HSTCA Annual Membership Meeting and Board Elections. At State Museum. Details TBA

For other events going on this month in the downtown area. visit these sites:

www.artsbr.org

www.redstickfarmersmarket.org/main

www.downtownbatonrouge.org

<http://manshiptheater.org/site.php>

<http://www.fhl.org/indexFHL.shtm>



To find out about more fun stuff going on in Baton Rouge, join the Cherry email list at: rougecherry@gmail.com or Cherry Baton Rouge on Facebook

SPANISH TOWN'S FERAL CAT COLONIES: WORKING HARD FOR YOU!

Spanish Town is known for more than its unique architecture and Mardi Gras parade: it is also a place where residents love animals. Some areas of our neighborhood have colonies of feral cats. Some people might be tempted to see these cats as nuisances because they don't understand the positive contributions they make to the neighborhood or that these colonies are reasonably well managed. In fact, these colonies perform two valuable services for our neighborhood.

Nearly all of the cats in Spanish Town have been fixed and received rabies shots through the neighborhood's Trap, Neuter/Spay and Release (TNR) program, which is sponsored by Cat Haven. TNR is a proven and cost-effective practice to control cat populations. Humane traps are set, and cats are taken to be spayed or neutered and given a rabies vaccination before they are released. Each cat that is spayed or neutered has the top portion of one ear cut flat while the cat is under anesthesia. This provides a very easy identification mark that lets anyone know (including EBR Animal Control) that this cat is no longer fertile (and therefore no longer a public health threat or nuisance). Spayed and neutered cats can't breed anymore, so they don't roam as far, fight nearly as much, or spray to mark territory.

Even better though, the feral cats of Spanish Town are working hard for you in two important ways. First, the cat colonies actually *stop* more cats from moving into the neighborhood: a colony with a population that has been stabilized through spaying/neutering prevents new cats from joining the group. Second, the cat colonies help keep down the rodent population, a service we all benefit from here in Spanish Town where our old wooden buildings are unfortunately attractive to rats.

TNR is a much more humane and less expensive alternative than sending the cats to Animal Control, where they are kept for very little time before they are killed. Instead, TNR cats are returned to the immediate area where they were trapped. In their familiar territory, the cats have a steady source of food and shelter and have worked out a predictable pecking order with the other cats in the area.

Spanish Town's TNR program has been enormously successful. Before its inception in 2004, it was a common sight to see several new cats or kittens in the neighborhood every month. Five years later, we know that TNR is working. It is far less

common for new cats and kittens to appear in Spanish Town, and rare is the feline without the tell-tale notched ear. Many neighbors have come to enjoy the feral cats who take up residence on their porches or under their houses. The cats are familiar presences who interact with their humans in many ways in spite of their aversions to being pet, or even getting too close to the people who share their domiciles.

"TNR is a much more humane and less expensive alternative than sending the cats to Animal Control"

If you have or know of feral or stray cats that need to be managed, please call or email Cat Haven at 225-

3 4 6 - 4 2 3 8 o r cathaven@cathaven.org. Please be sure to say or write "For Feral Committee" in your voicemail or email and leave both phone and email contact information. Your voicemail or email will be directed to the Feral Committee, and someone will get back with you.

-June Pulliam



RECENT CRIMES IN SPANISH TOWN

The neighborhood has experienced an uptick in suspicious and/or criminal activity, not atypical for the summer months. It is almost entirely individuals passing through "shopping" for items that appear easy to steal and returning at an opportune time to do so. We have received reports of cars being "tossed"; various tools, BlackBerry, a/c unit stolen; and the famous scam where someone bangs on the door at night needing cab fare to visit their mother in the hospital. One thing that stands out in incidents dating back to

May is that the perpetrator is often on a bicycle.

It is vital that we diligently report ANY suspicious activity. Examples: a stranger peering down driveways or into parked cars; one whom you pass who turns to see if you are watching; one asking for work or money or if a house is for rent. We can usually discern a stranger. If you are a victim or a witness or your instinct says so, observe their features; try to draw someone else's attention to verify identity and for your own safety.

Call the police 911 or 389-2000 for BRPD or 342-5911 for Capitol Police. If we actively demonstrate our collective resolve against even the perception of illegal behavior, word will flow through the ranks of the bad guys that Spanish Town is NOT a place to hang out. And of course, do your part to financially support the private security patrol! We're friendly people in a wonderfully diverse neighborhood, but trust your gut reaction! -Shawn O'Brien

HISTORIC DISTRICT GUIDELINES: WHAT DOES IT ALL MEAN?

You've been hearing a lot lately about the Spanish Town Historic District guidelines, but what are they? These rules and regulations provide the framework to preserve the neighborhood's historic architecture. They also describe in detail how new structures must be designed to integrate into the neighborhood's existing houses.

These guidelines generally govern only things that can be seen from the front of a house or property. If you're planning to make a change to the front of your house, please consult the guidelines FIRST. A major exterior change or addition requires review by the city-parish Historic Preservation Commission who will grant a Certificate of Appropriateness (COA) for the work. Remember, building permits are still required.

Simple repairs and restoration of existing features generally do not require a COA.

Historic District Guidelines: Timeline

August 2004—Metro Council adopts the city-parish's first historic preservation ordinance 13045 creating the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC).

- May 2007---Bill Good, chairman of Historic Spanish Town Civic Association forms a committee to draft district guidelines
- June-September 2007---Draft guidelines posted on HSTCA website and reviewed in newsletters.

- September 2007---The entire membership unanimously approved the proposed district guidelines for Spanish Town at HSTCA's annual meeting.
- April 2008---Following approval by the HPC and the Planning & Zoning Commission, the Metro Council approves historic district guidelines for Spanish Town. John Sykes is serving as the neighborhood's first representative on the HPC.

For more information and a copy of the guidelines,

See www.spanishtown.us ;

Or East Baton Rouge Historic Preservation Commission:

<http://brgov.com/DEPT/PLANNING/historic/historic.htm>

-John Sykes



YARD OF THE MONTH CONTEST! WIN CASH AND PRIZES!!!

Recent press about the neighborhood has been less than complimentary about its appearance. In the current issue of the Baton Rouge Business Report, writer JR Ball refers to the neighborhood as "a dump". Andres Duany, much lauded city planner, called the seven endangered houses "virtual mud huts". OK, fine, we get the message. Even though the neighborhood has come a long way, there are things we can do to continue to make it better.

In that light, the HSTCA announces the launch of its neighborhood beautification program. The first event will be a yard of the month contest.

We will offer \$100 and a golden flamingo for first prize. Yards will be judged simply on general aesthetic appearance. You don't have to spend lots of money on plants and pots. Be creative and have fun!

A prize of \$50 will be awarded to

the yard that most improves. So if you haven't mowed your yard all year, you could win some easy cash just by making the effort. If you don't have tools ask your neighbors to share.

Later on in the year we will announce other activities designed to increase neighborhood beautification efforts.

If you have a nomination for yard of the month or most improved please e-mail us at hstcabr@gmail.com or use our snail mail address. We would also love to see before and after pictures to put in our next newsletter.

We will announce the winners at the annual meeting in September. You do not need to be present to win, but it will make winning more fun if you are!

Special thanks to Father Hall for his wonderful suggestions and support!





THANK YOU!!!



Over the past few months, Spanish Town has been embroiled in a fight to maintain the integrity and history of our small and vulnerable community.

The HSTCA board spent many hours working to prevent the demolition of seven historic homes and the subsequent construction of an inappropriate and out of scale high rise apartment.

The response from our membership and the larger Baton Rouge Community was more than we could have imagined. Indeed, word of our fight even reached the national level and resulted in the National Trust for Historic Preservation sending a letter to urge

the city to save the homes and preserve the historic character of Spanish Town.

The board would like to give a heart felt thank you to all of you. Without the support and tenacity of our friends and neighbors we would have lost this fight long ago.

We would especially like to thank the Foundation For Historical Louisiana and our fellow civic associations including Southdowns and Poets and Philosophers.

Please know though, that the fight is not over. The vacant land is still vulnerable to inappropriate development and the seven homes

may still be demolished or even worse allowed to become blighted and thus a neighborhood safety and health hazard.

Keep your eyes and ears open. We will surely need your support in the future. We will be sending out updates via our e-mail list and our Facebook page; Save Spanish Town, and of course the Capital Grocery bulletin board. If you are not already on our e-mail list and would like to be, please send your request to hstcabr@gmail.com.

Again, THANK YOU!!!!!!!

- Melissa Eastin

HAVE YOU LOST OR FOUND AN ANIMAL?

Check out the new blog
"Lost and Found Hound"
 on Facebook
 Designed to keep Baton Rouge's animals safe and happy.

PLEASE CURB YOUR DOGS!!!

It has been a consistent plea from our community that dog owners please curb your dogs! One letter the HSTCA received states "My 6 yr old cannot even go barefoot in our front yard anymore". Spanish Town has always been an animal friendly area and we want to keep it that way. Just grab a bag and scoop the poop. Its simple, considerate and creates the good will among neighbors that

Spanish Town is so well know for. Everyone will appreciate your consideration. THANKS!



If you are interested in contacting any of our City Government leaders, there are several ways you can do this. Go to

<http://www.brgov.com/dept/council/pdfs/mcmaillist.pdf>

If you do not have access to a computer send a self addressed, stamped envelope to the HSTCA (Re: Government Contacts) and we will send you a copy of the list.



P.O. Box 3282 B.R., La. 70821-3282

Historic Spanish Town Civic Association

P. O. Box 3282

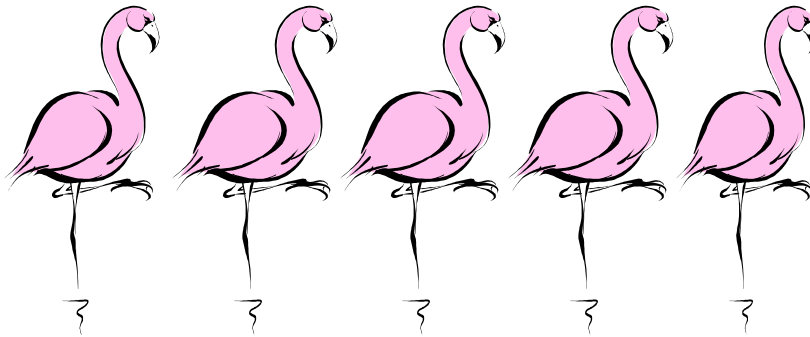
Baton Rouge, La. 70821-3282

VISIT US ONLINE AT:

www.spanishtown.us

Or email us at:

hstcabr@gmail.com



Spanish Town Civic Association Membership and Security Donation Form:

Membership dues are \$20.00 for non-students and \$10.00 for students. Donations for our privately funded security patrol are accepted and appreciated in any amount.

HSTCA

P.O. Box 3282

B.R., La. 70821-3282

Name: _____

Address _____

City/State/Zip _____

E-mail _____