



UIC Neighborhoods *Initiative*

Building Partnerships for Stronger Communities and a Stronger University

Spring 1998

The University of Illinois at Chicago

Great Cities Institute

Pilsen Center Serves Community

Almost eight years ago, St. Vitus Church in Pilsen was closed down by the Archdiocese of Chicago because of high operating costs. It became a regular hangout for gangs and drug dealers in the neighborhood. The Resurrection Project (TRP), a community development organization in Pilsen, saw the destruction and could not stand by and watch this 100 year-old neighborhood church deteriorate. After long and hard negotiations to acquire the church, the Archdiocese of Chicago donated St. Vitus to TRP, who then began its transformation into a community asset. Today it is called *Centro Familiar Guadalupano*, or in English, the Guadalupano Family Center.

The center is- comprised of three buildings: the sanctuary, which is being renovated into a multi-use community center; the rectory, which is TRPs staff and program offices; and the school, which is a daycare and after school center. The aim of the multiuse community center is to develop and maintain a community-based performing arts center, an arts incubator for individual artists and arts organizations, and an educational institute to provide training in the arts at all age levels. The daycare is the largest single site daycare facility in Pilsen, serving over 200 preschool and school age children.

"TRP and its seven member parishes in the community have worked hard to develop this center and finally it's becoming a reality," said Juan Salgado, community program director for TRP "We are planning a spring test to celebrate the new rehabbing of the center in May or June."

The entire redevelopment project has created approximately 50 new jobs, making it one of the largest employers on 18th Street, and it provides assistance to 20 small

businesses and four arts organization's. The four arts groups are: The Mexican Folkloric Dance Company of Chicago, Pilsen Ballet and Dance Company, Latino Experimental Theater, and Romantic Guitars. These arts groups not only participate in the vocational activities and business development, but also help the center generate operating revenue by using the facilities on a consistent basis. "We count on grants and donations to run the center, but they do not cover all costs," said Salgado. "We are implementing a membership contribution fee for our regular performance groups in order to sustain the center."

The center also houses Camp Butterfly, a collaborative summer day camp serving 17 children, ages three to 11. The children are residents from two homeless shelters: *Casa de Maria*, a supportive housing program for homeless women and children; and *Su Casa*, a nearby shelter for the homeless.

TRP is working with several UIC departments in planning and developing various programs at the community center. The School of Art and Design developed a pilot program in 1996, including two classes in the visual arts, and selected three Arts Education graduate students to teach these classes. The main purpose of the program was to develop arts skills, cultural literacy, and experimentation through visual arts for the participants from the community.

The UIC Neighborhoods Initiative has acted as a facilitator between the center and various program developers at UIC. Besides the School of Art and Design, students and faculty from UICs College of Business, College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs, Center for Urban Economic Development, Department of Economics and Institute for Entrepreneurial

Studies are also active participants in the project.

If you would like to volunteer for clean-up and paint-up in April, or donate items such as paint, paint brushes, chairs,

tables and tile to the Guadalupe Family Center, please contact Juan Salgado at 312-666-1323. Part II of this article will appear in the Spring/summer issue and it will focus on the performing arts groups that are a part of the Guadalupe Family Center.

Upcoming Dates

The Great Cities Roundtable The UIC Neighborhoods Initiative will begin a series of monthly Roundtable Discussions with researchers and activists working on urban issues and policy matters.

* **Thursday, March 26** - Associate Professor, William Ayers, of the Department of Education at UIC, "A Kind and Just Parent." The Great Cities Institute, 412 S. Peoria, 4th floor, from noon-2 pm. Please bring a brown bag lunch.

* **Thursday, April 16** - Nacho Gonzalez of the UIC Neighborhoods Initiative, "Exploring New Frontiers in Community Organizations." Decima Musa Restaurant, 1901 S. Loomis in Chicago, at 6 pm.

* **Monday, April 6** - Loomis Mayfield and Nacho Gonzalez of UIC Neighborhoods Initiative, and Dean Wim Wiewel of the College of Urban Planning and Public Affairs. Panel Discussion: "University/Community Partnerships." The Great Cities Institute, 412 S. Peoria, 4th Floor, from noon-2 pm. Please bring your own brown bag lunch.

UIC Research Benefits Community Redevelopment

"Our money does not circulate in the community. It goes out and it does not come back here. We need real programs to establish real businesses. Something that is actually going to be for the people who live in this neighborhood." This is a comment from a resident who lives in the Near West Side community, located approximately two miles west of the Chicago Loop. This area consists of a predominately low income African American population.

Historically, Madison Street from Damen to Western Avenue has been the commercial spine of this community. Today, it suffers from severe decline and abandonment. Many of the long time residents remember Madison Street as a complete shopping boulevard including clothing, shoes, and grocery stores, as well as movie theaters and restaurants. "I would like to see more Black contractors and Black tradesmen. We need to put people to work in this area. We also need to support the entrepreneurs that are already in the community," said one Near West Side resident.

Many studies have been conducted in the past on how to redevelop and improve

this community. One of the studies was done by The Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement at the University of Illinois at Chicago for the Near West Side Community Development Corporation (NWSCDC). A redevelopment proposal for land acquisition was created from the study and submitted to the Chicago Department of Planning in September of 1997. If the proposal is approved and the land is acquired, a Walgreens will be built on Madison Avenue. To help finance the redevelopment, NWSCDC will be given \$237,000 as a part of a joint community development grant from the US Department of Housing and Development. The study, which was conducted by The Voorhees Center between December 1995 and April 1996, was requested by the NWSCDC and funded by the same grant. In the study, nine focus groups from the Near West Side were designed to solicit input from the residents and stakeholders in the community on the type of future commercial development they would like to see happen on Madison Street. Approximately 200 participants were represented in the focus groups and they were hosted by several organizations such as: the Henry Horner Boys and Girls Club; Unity

West; Damen Courts; and Crane, Dett, Suder and Herbert Chicago Public Schools.

The findings from the study showed that the main consensus among the residents was the immediate need for a service store, as well as other types of service oriented establishments such as grocery stores, fast food restaurants, hardware stores and entertainment facilities. These businesses would not only create jobs and increase the financial flow through local businesses, but they would also keep the residents from leaving the area and help strengthen their sense of community.

In a recent study, the Chicago Department of Planning and Development described the Near West Side as a community where most of the residents must either shop at local convenience stores described the Near West Side as a community where most of the residents must either shop at local convenience stores with higher prices and limited selection, or leave the neighborhood and spend their money elsewhere. The nearest fullservice chain store is almost two miles from the intersection of Madison and Western, and many of the residents do not own cars. One resident still has hope for the community and said: "I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to see this neighborhood get better."