

Park Support Groups of Baltimore City: **Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello Community Corporation**

The Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello Community Corporation (CHMCC) came together through the synthesis of several different community associations in 1976. Residents of the CHM neighborhood were concerned about a lack of community services, as well as other pressing problems in their neighborhood. With the support of the mayor's office, the new non-profit corporation set out to improve all aspects of life for residents. That commitment continues today, and CHMCC remains a major force for positive change. The organization's staff includes two paid employees – an executive director and a community organizer – while the Board of Directors is made up of volunteers from the neighborhood.

CHM is located in northeastern Baltimore City, just west of Clifton Park. Once an affluent area, the neighborhood has suffered along with the rest of the city in recent decades. CHMCC's leaders are committed to their vision of changing things for the better. A glance at a list of goals on the chalkboard in the CHMCC office brings to mind the term "results-oriented." The group's agenda includes items that are both ambitious and specific, like "acquire all city-owned vacant lots" and "improve tree canopy on St. Lo Drive & Harford Road." Some of CHM's greatest potential assets are its parks and open spaces, and CHMCC seeks to improve these wherever possible.

One of the organization's most recent greening projects was the creation of Serenity Garden at what was once a weedy, trash-filled lot. Together with

Civic Works, CHMCC formed a plan for the space and gathered residents from the surrounding neighborhood. A small grant from the Parks & People Foundation's Neighborhood Greening program supplied money for plantings and the Baltimore City Department of Recreation & Parks pitched in with trucks and materials. Today, the garden is a beautiful testament to the possibility of change, with a spiral path, striking flower arrangements, and strings of bells and mirrors hanging from the branches of trees. The Green Party of Baltimore has its headquarters nearby, and donates water to maintain the space.

Coldstream Park may be the place where the organization has done its most extensive greening work. Wedged between a school and a recreation center, Coldstream should have been an asset to the area around it. Instead, it languished as an overgrown dumping ground for a number of years. In the spring of 2005, CHMCC received a Partnerships for Parks grant – funded by Recreation & Parks and administered by Parks & People – for equipment to improve the space.

The community corporation began small, cleaning the site and planting trees donated by Recreation & Parks. Eventually, CHMCC collaborated with a number of partners to work on the space, including Living Classroom's Project Serve, Baltimore ClayWorks and the Neighborhood Design Center. The park now features decorative bollards created by local children, a new garden, and improved trails. Leftover funds from the Partnerships for Parks grant were used to

host a huge Halloween party in the park, which drew approximately 300 neighborhood children.

Mark Washington is CHMCC's current executive director and a life-long resident of CHM. In his opinion, the biggest strength and the biggest weakness of the community are the same... its people. He sees every resident as an "army of one," with the ability to help turn things around. Although the community corporation has a strong, growing nucleus, it still needs more volunteers to run its many committees and implement important projects.

The greatest strength of CHMCC may be its ability to turn every project into a collaborative effort. Whether dealing with foundations, other non-profits, or city agencies, the organization has shown an excellent facility for locating and connecting with those who share similar goals. These partnerships feed into each other – each effort that is successfully completed encourages further cooperation and sharing of resources. This strategy is especially evident in CHMCC's interaction with smaller community-based entities. The corporation consistently encourages and supports local outreach programs and other groups, giving them technical assistance, volunteers and even office space whenever possible.



Spiral path at the center of Serenity Garden

WHAT: Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello Community Corporation

WHERE: Coldstream Park, Clifton Park, Briscoe Park and vacant lots in the Coldstream-Homestead-Montebello (CHM) neighborhood of northeast Baltimore City

WHEN: Since 1976

WHY: To provide a safer, healthier neighborhood for the residents of CHM by "transforming environments and minds" and "meeting the needs of the community."

Based on an interview with Mark Washington and on information compiled during the summer of 2006.