

Planned heritage trail celebrates diverse past

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One of the city's most diverse and vibrant neighborhoods — Mount Pleasant — is planning a "heritage trail" to tell visitors how it got that way.

Roughly 15 signs will document a rich story that stretches from the Native Americans who lived at the juncture of Rock Creek and Piney Branch creek to the Latino businesses on Mount Pleasant Street that serve a flourishing immigrant community.

The Mount Pleasant project is the latest application for the neighborhood heritage trail program, sponsored by Cultural Tourism DC, which helps research the history of city neighborhoods and then erects signs to explain important sites. A \$16,000 grant was approved in late November.

The trail is planned to wind past the site of an 1851 estate on Newton Street that is now the Stoddard Baptist Home; ornate turn-of-the-century houses on Park Road; and the Rosemount Day Care Center, which was founded in 1911 as the House of Mercy, a "refuge for outcast and fallen women."



Bill Petros/The Current

The Rosemount Day Care Center, founded in 1911 as a "refuge for outcast and fallen women," is one of the spots on the planned Mount Pleasant trail.

"Our research tells the story of how our community evolved and how our diversity is our strength," says the application submitted to the Cultural Tourism office. It describes a neighborhood of "glorious front porches, civic activism, and demographic diversity..." See [Trail](#)/Page 46

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TRAIL

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where E Pluribus Unum is an everyday reality."

Mount Pleasant began as a distinct village outside city limits, according to the application, and evolved into Washington's first streetcar suburb when the trolley line extended up 14th Street. The population swelled with waves of war workers, African-Americans from the inner city, immigrants primarily from Latin America, and the hippies and young progressives who flocked to the neighborhood's once-cheap housing.

The tentative title for the trail, which the organizers hope will be in place by the end of 2005, is "Streetcar Suburb to Urban Village."

The trail is very much a community effort. In the fall of 2002, two neighborhood groups began working independently to research Mount Pleasant's history.

"Neither knew the other had formed," said Neil Richardson, a resident who helped spearhead the application and is also director of the mayor's Neighborhood Action program.

But the groups quickly combined their efforts and enlisted support from the local advisory neighborhood commission, Mount Pleasant MainStreet, Historic Mount Pleasant, Latin American Youth Center and Neighbors Consejo. Mount Pleasant's pioneering "Art on Call" project — in which call boxes were turned into historic markers — was brought in to make sure efforts were not duplicated.

An informal "heritage trail working group" conducted a dozen formal interviews, many informal interviews and library and museum research. A researcher in Wisconsin sent information on former Sen. Robert LaFollette, once a Mount Pleasant resident. Fliers were dis-

tributed to every home in the neighborhood in an attempt to fill in gaps in the story.

Richardson, whose parents met in Mount Pleasant, discovered during the research that his great-grandfather, a great-aunt and a great-uncle had once lived there, too.

The costs of the project to date have been less than \$300, but the new grant includes \$15,000 to hire a professional historian/writer to finish the work, and \$1,000 for miscellaneous costs.

Jane Levey, chief program officer for Cultural Tourism DC, said the heritage trail program receives grant money from a federal highway enhancement fund, channeled through the city Department of Transportation. Levey's office works with neighborhood groups to research their applications, then steers them through a grant committee of city officials and citizens, which actually awards the funds.

The District's first two neighborhood heritage trails are on U Street and downtown. On Friday, Capitol Hill residents celebrated the unveiling of the third, the "Barracks Row" trail on 8th Street SE. Trails are also in the works for Southwest and Adams Morgan, Levey said.

The goal is to promote community pride and help draw visitors into the city's historic neighborhoods. The sponsors hope the visitors will not only learn truly local history but will also spend some tourist dollars in shops and restaurants.

In Mount Pleasant, the research is not yet complete. The trail sponsors are still working to find old photos and stories and to select locations for signs. Richardson said they are having trouble finding pre-1975 photos of the neighborhood and welcome any help.

Some members also want to do more archeological work near Rock Creek and Piney Branch, where members of the Monocan Tribe lived and were later forced out by

the Powatans. They also want to research some earthen walls near the end of 17th Street that may be remnants of a Civil War fort, said Richardson.

The trail is intended as a sort of rough narrative of Mount Pleasant's history. Along the way, visitors will see:

- Triangle Park on Park Road, where Samuel P. Brown acquired land that became Mount Pleasant Village at the start of the Civil War. Union soldiers used the area as an encampment.
- The south end of Lamont Park, at 14th Street and Park Road, which became the terminus of the 14th Street streetcar line in 1892 and spawned the city's first "streetcar suburb."
- The southern tip of Asbury Park, where 16th and Mount Pleasant streets intersect. Until 1901, when some powerful landowners pushed to extend 16th Street straight north, it angled to the left there. "Old 16th Street" is now Mount Pleasant Street, the commercial heart of the community.
- The elegant houses of Park Road, surrounding its intersection with 18th Street. Built by "upwardly mobile middle-class Washingtonians" around 1900, "these houses were available for next to nothing" after the 1968 riots, according to the application.
- Shops like DiLone's that opened in 1962 on Mount Pleasant Street and served as a sort of social center that drew many Latinos to settle in the neighborhood.
- The north end of Lamont Park, where a 1991 riot — sparked by a police officer's alleged mistreatment of a Latino immigrant — brought calls for more respect and attention from city police.

Richardson said the location and wording of the signs are still being discussed. He said the working group would like to find a storefront to display photos and other artifacts of Mount Pleasant's history.