

City Neighborhoods

3 galleries have made over a city block that was once typical for its stability, continuity

Thursday, March 15, 2007



Steve Mellon, Post-Gazette

Artist David Calfo his Blue Collar Gallery on Hatfield Street in Lawrenceville.

By Diana Nelson Jones, Pittsburgh Post-Gazette

If Pittsburgh has a sustaining story of neighborhood, it's that many families keep the same house for generations.

In Lawrenceville, the 4700 block of Hatfield Street is a microcosm of a shift that may soon put that claim in the remnant bin with the moniker "Steel City."

Once the epitome of generational continuity, the block has seen about half its properties change hands in the last decade. Well off the beaten path of gallery-strewn Butler Street, three art galleries sprang up on the block a year ago this month.

As Pittsburgh's story continues to change, Lawrenceville may bear the most dramatic witness, with its fading blend of old-country mores and bounty of galleries.

Hatfield is several blocks toward the river from Butler, "the frontier of the frontier," said Kate Trimble, executive director of the Lawrenceville Corp., a neighborhood development nonprofit. "But I see the appeal of Hatfield. It's the industrial edge. It's gritty and authentic."

Hatfield runs from 44th Street to 50th, with the ghost of the Heppenstall steel mill behind it, and the millworker housing still looks like millworker housing.

Dan Tomasovich grew up on the block, worked as a blacksmith at Heppenstall for 30 years and ran Dan's Bar at 4715 Hatfield until 1989. He moved away from Lawrenceville from his residence in the 1960s, when his parents died.

His old bar is one of the block's few vacant properties.

"I still go over there to clear the snow," said Mr. Tomavich, who now lives in Ross. "But the last girl I knew who was born on that street, they buried her seven, eight years ago." Of the art galleries, he said, "I think it's great."

In 2001, David Calfo bought an 8,700-square-foot warehouse that had been empty since the 1960s.

He was making art from the salvaged contents of old buildings in his spare time when he got laid off from a job in restoration construction. It took some guts to open a gallery, he said, "but everyone I know told me, 'Go for it.' "

DNA: a Blue-Collar Gallery is his offering to the neighborhood he has lived in most of his life. "Most people here know me," he said. "I'm a regular guy with a pickup."

Several doors down, Elizabeth Monoian's Hatfield House has an artist-in-residency. It is one of three locations she and her sister, Barbara, operate as an exchange program for artists. The other two are a fishing boat in Alaska and a rent-controlled loft in the East Village of



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Dan Glasser prepares for a show at Trinity Gallery on Hatfield Street.

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New York City.

A New York transplant, she lives two blocks from her gallery. She finances her art projects with work as a Web designer and teacher.

Photographer Dan Gaser bought a building that had been a rooming house, speakeasy, beer distributor, VCR repair shop and house at the corner of 48th Street almost two years ago. He renovated it into the Trinity Gallery for fine art photography.

Mr. Gaser said a synergy developed among the galleries when they were all planning to open.

"Elizabeth said, 'Why don't we just call ourselves "the Hatfield Street Galleries" and see if we can bring people down from Butler?' "

They opened in tandem and, since, each has opened for the others' receptions. Together they threw a block party last summer to thank the neighbors.

"We all have the same goal: to promote art and this new culture of Pittsburgh," said Mr. Calfo.

Mr. Gaser's reception last Saturday for artists Jayne Osgood and Jesse Sharrard drew 400 people.

Two of them were Kate and Josh Bayer, who moved to the block three years ago after 27 years in Penn Hills.

"It's really cool to walk across the street to an event," said Ms. Bayer.

Josie Bajoras, at 82, is one of the only single-family homeowners left who can claim 40 years on the block. She lives in the home her sister sold her in 1973 and makes cookies for DNA Gallery's openings. She also gives Mr. Calfo household items she doesn't use anymore for his sculpture.

Textile artist Kate Morrison-Bagin said she and her husband, Christian, a Pittsburgh native, "had no clue" they were moving onto a street that would sprout three art galleries. They had lived in New York before moving to Pittsburgh.

They also had no idea their toddler would be one of five on the street. "The old-timers told us there have been no babies for years and years," she said.

Meanwhile, the past lingers in the view behind their house, the ghost of steel.

"We love our view of the Heppenstall plant," she said. "It's probably only a matter of time before UPMC or somebody wants it, but in the meantime, it's very unique and there's nothing else that gives such a sense of place."

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