

## Threat to close ComEd causes uproar

by Pat Jamison

Commonwealth Edison caused an uproar on Chicago's West Side recently when it announced the closing of its Austin area office, an act which community residents and organizations say will rob the area of 273 jobs as well as severely inconvenience customers.

The Austin West Garfield United Community, 4746 W. Rice, a coalition of five Austin organizations, is fighting to keep the office open.

"This office has been here for about 30 years, and now all of a sudden they want to close it," said Otto McMath, a board member of two of the Austin organizations.

"Commonwealth Edison just got a half billion dollar increase and they are saying they can save 14 million dollars a year by closing this office. Even if they do save some money, the community will not benefit from it. We will not stand for it," McMath continued.

The coalition, which joined forces a year ago in an effort to halt the closing of the 15th District Police Station in the area, deals with community problems, such as streets and sanitation, crime, city service, housing and jobs.

The police station was saved and the organizations, which include the Concerned Austin and West Garfield; Mid Austin Steering Committee; Northeast Austin Organization; Northwest Austin Council, and the South Austin Coalition Community Council, are continuing their efforts to upgrade the community.

"Every time there is a cut-back in the city's budget, the West Side is the hardest hit," Mary Volpee, director of Nor-

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# Pride in 'Fifth City'

## Grassroots organization a W. Side godsend

by Gloria Pope

In the heart of Chicago's West Side, East Garfield Park—an area which often evokes images of burned-out buildings, high crime and chronic unemployment—a grass roots organization named "Fifth City" has risen from its ashes like a phoenix to encourage economic self-sufficiency among its 8,000 residents.

East Garfield, bordered by Arthington and Taylor Streets on the south, the Northwestern railroad on the north, Hamlin on the west and Rockwell Avenue on the east, is a community faced with many problems.

Housing is one of the most serious problems. More than 96 percent of East Garfield's housing units were built before 1960, and in 1969, the city's Department of Urban Renewal declared that two-thirds of the housing structures located in the Madison-Kedzie area were either sub-standard or so dilapidated that they warranted demolition.

Today, demolition has eliminated most of the residential area, and much of what remains is abandoned. There are no theaters and only a few eat-in restaurants. Vacant lots full of abandoned autos and broken glass decorate the area's landscape, forcing residents to travel outside the community for their basic needs.

Lela Mosley, director of the Fifth City Community Center, believes that population losses must stabilize before real progress can be made.

"That will take new and improved housing," said Mosley.

"Housing is one of our greatest needs. But we don't want any high

rises. Elevators are dangerous and the buildings are just not a good place to raise children. We need more three story walk-ups," she added.

But housing isn't the only problem.

According to a 1980 census tract, 43 percent of East Garfield's resident live below the poverty level. And when severely depressed economic conditions resulted in the loss of thousands of jobs from the West Side as firms relocated to the suburbs, East Garfield became an area known for its statistics and high rate of juvenile delinquency, unemployment and inadequate housing.

Ultimately, these poor conditions forced thousands of residents to leave and today only 65,000 people live in the community, a number which is down from 112,000 in 1960.

Remaining residents had a choice. They could sit back and watch East Garfield become another abandoned area, or they could take the initiative and revitalize their neighborhood by creating a community of concern. And that's what Fifth City is all about—concern, commitment and determination of the thousands of people who have contributed to its success.

What is Fifth City? It is a 40 square block area, bounded by Madison, Congress, Independence and Kedzie; a "city" whose residents cared enough to initiate \$950,000 worth of business owned and operated by the community.

"If people think the City of Chicago is going to change mayors every four years and that they're going to have the mayor do their

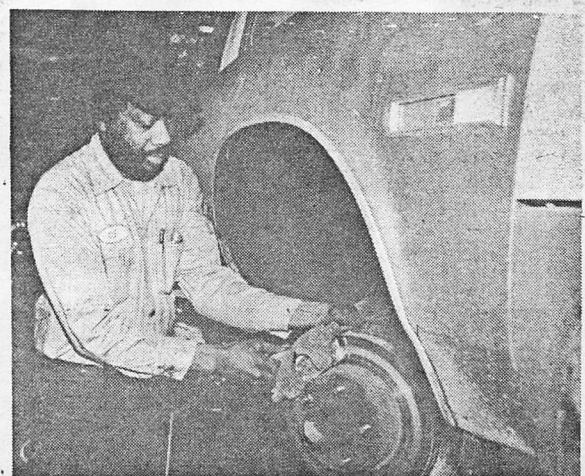
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Don Cherry, director of Fifth City's Industrial Promotion Corporation, stands in front of the Fifth City Shopping Center at Homan Ave. and Jackson Blvd. This sculpture reminds people of their decision to take responsibility seriously, build a plan and act on it.



De Lydia Smith (left) and Eunice Haynes (right) work on the micro-size machine at Citicorp Savings corporate headquarters.



Verdell Trice, owner and manager of Fifth City Automotive Service Center, inspects a brake pad with one of the center's certified machines.

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# 'Fifth City' a W. Side godsend

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 poration. Students played the roles of corporate president, director and sales staff. Our goal was to make a profit. Fifth City Business Careers prepared me both physically and mentally for the work world. I was responsible for myself. Our instructors didn't force us to work. If we didn't succeed, it was because of ourselves," she added.

Fifth City builds achievers through its Business Careers program, a 14-week curriculum of job training classes that build skills, employability and self confidence.

Instructors in the program have learned that inadequate self-images, reinforced by lack of skills can be latered with practical, successful experience.

This is the main challenge of career preparation. As the trainees images of self-worth, significance and productivity develop, their self-reliance and practical business skills rapidly improve.

"In a simulated office environment, trainees experience the business world," said Shirley Mueller, director of the program.

"The program provides for the practical application of skills in accounts payable and receivable, typing and general office procedures.

Courses include general business skills, financial management, career planning, resume building and job search.

Women participating in the program are required to wear skirts or dresses and men must wear a shirt and tie each day. Students are expected to be present and on time.

Why the stringent rules? "We build images," said Mueller. "When you dress as if you feel important, then you will be important. The stability of being present and on time is not always a common experience for our trainees. Responsibility for one's self is what holds our trainees in the program," added Mueller.

Eunice Haynes, a young woman who heard about Fifth City Business Careers through her area's Urban Progress Center, travelled over an hour each way, in mid-winter, to attend the program.

"There is no reason for people not to have training," said Haynes, who has also been employed by Citicorp Savings, which has recently made a \$5,000 grant to the Business Career Program.

"The opportunity is there for all of us to succeed; all we have to do is grab it," she said.

"I hope that corporations such as Citicorp Savings stay involved in the community—not only through financial contributions, but by continuing their "hands-on" interaction with students through simulated and actual interviews."

How successful has the program been? The effectiveness of the Fifth City Business Careers approach is evident in the 70 percent

placement of its graduates and the 80 percent retention of these people in their jobs one year later.

Changing images in central to all of Fifth City's programs for everyone from pre-schoolers to seniors. The Fifth City Pre-School has been a pioneer in encouraging community and parental involvement.

The Pre-School also uses the Imaginal Educational Approach, which was developed 22 years ago when the pre-school was first started. Much more than a day-care center, the pre-school has a full-day curriculum which is adapted to each age group from 2 to 6 years old.

The curriculum provides positive images of the children's self-worth and their ability to shape their own destiny.

The school is staffed by community residents, all of whom are recipients of Early Education Certificates. The pre-school regularly draws 40 or more parents to this monthly meeting, and parents commit a certain number of work-days each year to keeping the center in shape.

In addition, Fifth City operates an Elder Action Center, which provides creative activities for more than 150 senior citizen weekly.

The center offers seniors continuing education in cultural and nutritional studies, personal care, creative writing and craft projects.

It sponsors community service activities such as inter-generational visits with public school children and participates in the city's Senior Caucus. Noon meals are also served five days a week. Two volunteers deliver meals to the home-bound seniors.

Fifth City also has implemented a housing program that rehabilitated buildings owned by low-income families more than 200 apartments have been rehabilitated since 1970. The community also maintains an extensive block club organization which assists homeowners in neighborhood clean-ups, community gardens and weatherization workshops.

Fifth City founders and other residents have shared their experience with urban and rural villages around the globe, in such places as India, Kenya and the Philippines.

In the United States they have

been a model for residents in Arizona and South Dakota and in farm towns from Maine to California.

Why? "What other community organization do you know of that has a 40-year plan? Fifth City organization truly knows how to develop community responsibility among its residents."

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## Austin uproar

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theast Austin Organization, said. "This community has been so chopped up in the last 10 years. We have gone through a change from an all white community to a minority community. The banking industry moved out about 20 years ago. Industry has moved out. The only way to have strength on the West Side is for us to unite."

Volpee added that unemployment in West Garfield and Austin is at a record high and the jobs which are provided by the Commonwealth Office are very much needed.

"These people are not being fired, only transferred," said Tim Schulte, spokesman for Commonwealth Edison's Austin office.

"There are 273 positions at the Chicago Central Headquarters that are now being transferred to other offices," Schulte said.

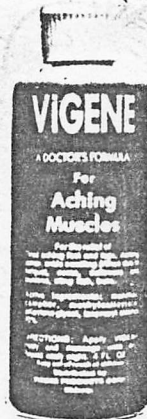
"In fact," he said, "the majority of these 273 people being transferred to other locations do not live in the Austin community, but live in the suburbs."

Schulte added that Commonwealth Edison is closing the Austin office as a cost saving measure to eliminate future rate increases.

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