

GENA History

GENA was started in 2009 by a group of concerned citizens in Girard Estate who saw the need for a more active, transparent neighborhood civic organization answerable to the members through scheduled and consistent elections. The existing civic association, GEAR, had a long and distinguished history and had done much for the neighborhood, but as of 2009 had not held elections for many years and had little interaction with the community. Many neighbors were frustrated by their inability to persuade the leadership of GEAR to hold elections and meetings and to represent the neighborhood democratically and transparently. Furthermore, many neighbors became frustrated due to a lack of a meaningful ability to volunteer their time to improve their community. It should be noted that several prominent members of GENA were once members of GEAR.

The spearhead for this new effort was Vince Ricchiuti. He announced neighborhood meetings to bring together a core group of volunteers to begin organizing for a new civic association. After several meetings, the core group adopted the name Girard Estate Neighbors Association (GENA), established by-laws, and voted for Vince as President, Frank LaMacchia as Vice-President, Loretta Rossi as Secretary, and Sal Patti as Treasurer. The same ticket was reelected 2 years later. During their tenure, GENA grew rapidly.

In its first few years, GENA held regular meetings, started a website, distributed newsletters to the neighborhood, made several improvements to the park including painting and repairing benches, and developed a detailed proposal for infrastructure improvement for Girard Park. GENA revived Christmas in the Park and, led by Frank LaMacchia, sponsored a health fitness day in the park. A Safety and Security Committee was formed and representatives became regular participants at the police Captain's Town Halls and in Town Watch. A Zoning Committee was formed consisting of neighbors with legal and technical expertise who understood the issues involved. In 2012, the Zoning Committee began holding open meetings on a monthly basis, and publishing the meeting minutes on GENA's website. In 2013, the Zoning Committee was renamed the Zoning and Blight Committee so it could take an expanded role related to nuisance properties.

Through the Zoning and Blight Committee, GENA has looked after the interests of the neighborhood with a number of accomplishments. In 2011, GENA brought the pawn shop application to the attention of the residents by calling a neighborhood meeting and rejecting a private "stakeholders" meeting that would preclude community input. More recently, it halted ACME's application for a beer license until restrictions could be put in place to protect the interests of the residents. The Zoning and Blight Committee collected signatures and lobbied the city to return Shunk Street to one-way status past 22nd street in order to limit excessive traffic in and out of the shopping areas to the west of the neighborhood. Through the Zoning and Blight Committee, GENA vigorously continues to address nuisance issues such as trash and blight as well as acting as a traditional zoning committee.

In 2013, pursuant to the by-laws, new elections were held. A committee was formed to seek candidates and organize the election. Following a spirited contest and an election

night in which all the candidates had a chance to describe their vision for GENA and for the neighborhood, a new team of officers was elected. In only a few months, the new leadership team sponsored 2 major events: Christmas in the Park and the Easter Egg Hunt. They also rebuilt the website, and started Facebook and Twitter accounts for GENA. In addition to active Zoning and Safety and Security Committees, committees for events, membership and communications also have been formed.

Membership continues to grow, volunteers continue to increase, and more is on the way!