

Volunteer of the Month – Jennifer Cassidy

Our regular volunteer for this column has done something recent or specific to be featured. This month we should change the column name to “Volunteer of the Decades”. Jennifer Cassidy first came to Asylum Hill when she grew tired of her commute from Unionville to her job at The Hartford. It wasn’t long after renting an apartment on Laurel St that she fell in love with the beautiful Victorian architecture, and it wasn’t long after that when 34-36 Ashley St became available. Jennifer said “I fell in love with the double front porch, so I ...” She credits Jonathan Clark with getting her involved in the neighborhood, first with the Sigourney Square Civic Association that focused on cleanup, safety and monthly meeting to get to know your neighbors. From there came Hill Housing Inc., where she served as chair for several years. It was the development arm of the Asylum Hill Organizing Project (AHOP). She was also a member of Asylum Hill Inc.



All of this took place before AHNA, then called the Asylum Hill Problem Solving Committee, that came into being in 1995. It was soon after that that she took over as the chair of the AHPSC for about a year before Michelle McFarland joined her as co-chair.

Jennifer continued to be active in The Asylum Hill Problem Solving Revitalization Association (AHPSRA) as it was called and served on several different committees often as chair. Her favorites were Housing and Transportation committees.

Then in 2008 and 09, we had the opportunity to rewrite a strategic plan for the neighborhood and Jennifer played an important role in that process as well. It was with the adoption of that plan that the change to Asylum Hill Neighborhood Association (AHNA) was made, and I think that was Jennifer’s suggestion.

Perhaps the most important role that Jennifer accepted was as co-chair of the Welcoming Committee along with Nancy Caddigan of Hartford Public Library. It began in 2012, as a partnership with The Hartford Public Library and through a grant from the Institute of Museum and Library Services. Asylum Hill was chosen as the neighborhood to partner with due to the many newly arriving immigrants and refugees here as well as the active NRZ that AHNA had become. Jennifer and Nancy were key in organizing many events. One very memorable one was the New Voices of Asylum Hill program on June 20th, World Immigrants Day in 2014. It was a live event at CT Public featuring the stories of 7 immigrants told by them in their native language with interpretation by members of the community. Jennifer spoke the story of Ganga a young Bhutanese girl speaking Nepalese from It was video recorded and is still available at <http://bit.ly/newvoicesAH> Following that in 2015 was a month long arts event titled “We Are Asylum Hill” that featured works of art and performances, including a fashion show. All of this took place at various venues in Asylum Hill. Photos of many events are available at: <http://bit.ly/nvoices>

Nearly 10 years ago though, Jennifer began thinking ahead and planning for her future. She had heard about intentional communities, kind of like condos only where people share more than just lawn-care and parking areas. Her two-family home on Ashley St was getting to be too much to manage, and co-housing in an intentional community sounded like a good idea. After doing a lot of research she discovered a community called Burlington Co-housing East Village in Burlington VT. It comes complete with community gardens, chickens, bees and lots of other things in common. They self-managed, and consist of 32 units along with a large common space where there are often community dinners. They have a mix of apartments, townhouses and duplexes, and a waiting list of people wanting to buy in. One of them was Jennifer until recently when a one bedroom home became available. She bought it and now she's in the process of tying up loose ends here in Asylum Hill so she can begin the next chapter of her life. I don't know much about this community, but if they're looking for volunteers, they're in for a pleasant surprise. I'm sure this is not the last that you will hear about Jennifer Cassidy.