

• NEIGHBORHOODS •

Orchard blooms



Jason Rearick / The Citizen

Members of the Orchard Street Area Neighborhood Association (Phyllis Milillo, Arlene Ryan, Louise Charles and Katie McIntyre) gather around one of the nine flower pots that line Orchard Street. The pots, decorated by students at West Middle School, are a result of the association's work securing a Community Development Block Grant along with local donations.

Block grant funds new flower planters

ANNE GLEASON
The Citizen

Many of the long-time residents of the Orchard Street neighborhood, like Arlene Ryan and Katie McIntyre, have never considered moving out, despite a gradual decline in the area over the last decade.

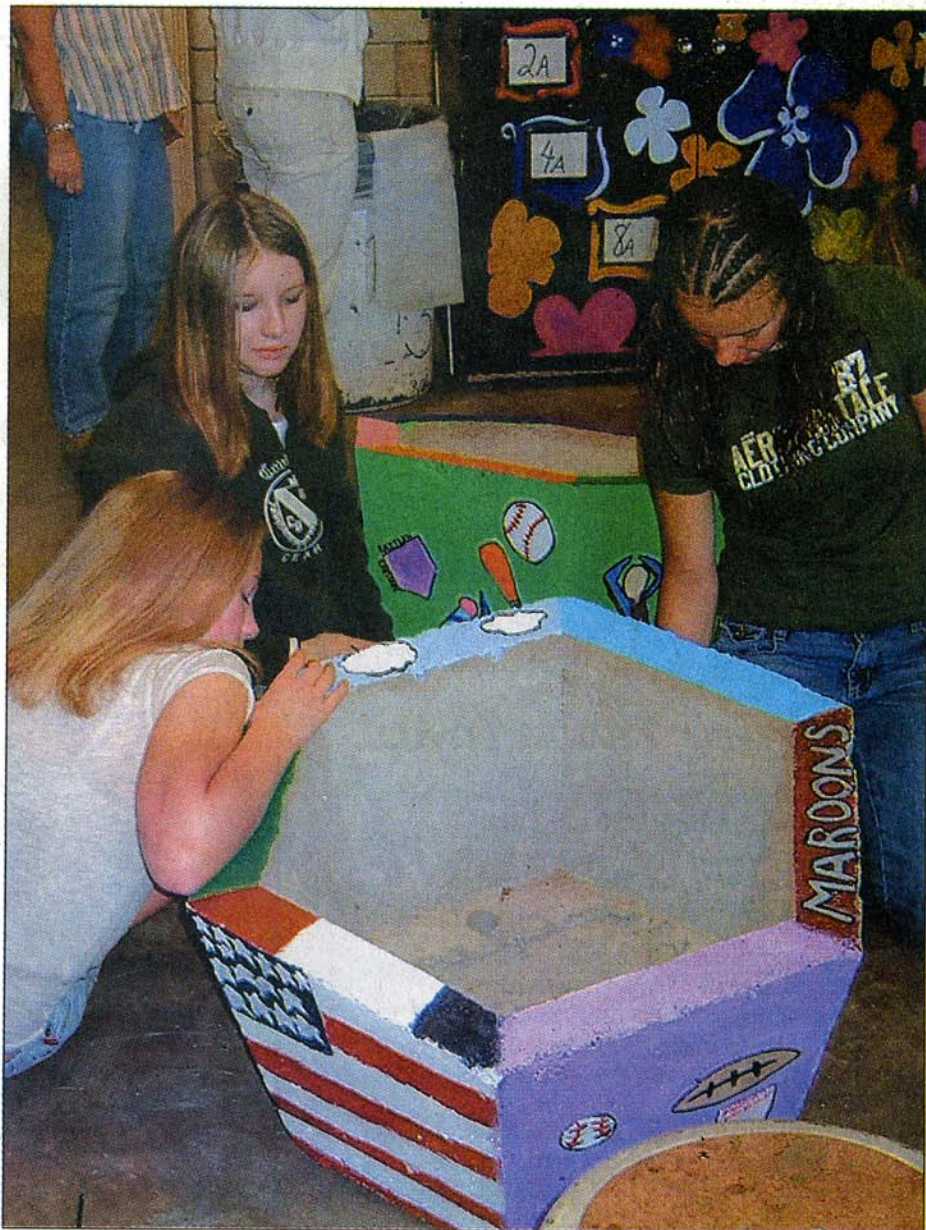
Instead, they're trying to do what they can to make it a better place to live.

"I like my house," said McIntyre, who has lived on Orchard Street for 31 years. "I'm not going to leave just because some creeps move in (the neighborhood)."

The only alternative, Ryan said, "is to improve where you are."

Last year, the neighborhood became one of four in the city to be granted \$3,000 worth of Community Development Block Grant funds for neighborhood improvement projects.

The Orchard Street Area Neighborhood Association decided to beautify the area with curbside flower pots, and they enlisted the help of West Middle School students to design and paint the planters.



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West Middle School students paint planters to be used on Orchard Street.

Photo provided

Neighbors look to brighten Orchard Street

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"We're trying to improve the image of the neighborhood, to show that we are trying to do better in this neighborhood," Ryan said. "Most older neighborhoods have been diminished by people who are non-caring."

The nine flower planters were placed along various streets in the Orchard Street area by city public works employees last week. The flowers haven't yet been planted, so the pots are still empty, but Ryan said residents in the area have expressed interest in caring for the flowers.

The association also has plans to use funding to create rack cards to advertise benefits of the neighborhood, such as its close proximity to the Cayuga Museum, the Schweinfurth Memorial Art Center, the Seymour Library and the post office.

Jenny Haines, planning and economic development program manager in Auburn, said the \$3,000 grants were initially provided to help the three neighborhoods that underwent comprehensive improvement plans in implementing recommendations. The initial targets were the Five Points, Owasco-Osborne and Dunn and McCarthy neighborhoods.

"It can be used for neighbor-



Photo provided

West Middle School students participate in a project to help beautify Orchard Street.

hood beautification kinds of things," Haines said, adding the grants are intended to give neighborhood stakeholders "ownership" of some of their improvement projects. The individual neighborhoods are able to use the funding to implement their own approved ideas for how to address problems specific to their areas.

Ryan believes her Orchard Street neighborhood has too much history and shouldn't settle for it's current state.

"Talking movies were born here in our neighborhood, in our backyard," she said.

The flower pot in front of Ryan's house features neighborhood buildings in the Orchard Street area, including Dom's Grocery, West Middle School, Seymour Library and the post office.

The eighth-grade studio art class, consisting of 17 students at West Middle School, worked on the community flower planter project. Art teacher Cari Adams said she challenged the students,

many who live in or near the neighborhood, to create designs they believed represented the area and Auburn, as a whole.

"They were interested not only because they get to put (the planters) in their neighborhood," Adams said, "but also because they get to see it when they're walking up and down the street."

In past years, the neighborhood association has used every resource offered to them to keep the area from slipping further. They've received sidewalk replacements through the city and new trees through Grow Auburn's Trees for their public right-of-way strips.

This summer, Ryan said the association plans to host a neighborhood picnic, "to just kind of bring people together."

While community policing in the neighborhood has had to be scaled back for budgetary reasons and the absentee landlord situation in the area has not turned around, Ryan and the neighbors in the association believe the small improvements can go a long way.

"We kind of want to upgrade it. We want people who care," she said.

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