

## Restoring Asylum Hill's Gateways

Ken Johnson, executive director of Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (NINA), knows that first impressions matter, both to potential homeowners and to NINA's corporate partners who want to recruit and retain employees. Therefore, NINA's recent efforts focused on strategic locations, transforming problem properties into assets at neighborhood gateways and important corners.

*"NINA's early years focused on restoring historic homes for new owners in Asylum Hill. We saw that while our homes were beautiful, their positive impact was curtailed by the presence of dilapidated properties at visually prominent locations. We determined to acquire buildings that gave problematic first impressions at gateway corners. By renovating them, we eliminated nuisances on key corners to create a single family home, apartments, offices and neighborhood-friendly retail. Now, people can see the potential of the entire block."*

Asylum Hill was a very desirable neighborhood of stately Victorian houses in the 1800s, home to insurance and manufacturing employees who worked at the corporations and institutions that still thrive here. Over time, the community lost investment and population, suffering physical decline. Revitalization of the neighborhood is important to residents and to corporations, whose employees value Asylum Hill's proximity to work, downtown culture and dining options. The recent addition of a CTfastrak stop is another catalyst to development here, important to people who prefer a smaller carbon footprint.

**Success:** Dartanian and Keiko, an entrepreneurial couple who founded the Hartford City Ballet and who draw just enough salary to live, needed an affordable rent. Familiar with the neighborhood, they are happy to be in a safe, convenient apartment. It allows them to save for a house they hope to buy in a few years, now that they have a new baby.

*"We love the accessibility, being close to downtown, our studio and the highway. There's a park at the end of the road and the building has ample, well-lit parking, so we have no safety worries. It's very quiet, but we can see neighbors walking by and it feels like a real community."*



John & Carolyn

**Success:** John and Carolyn had a house in the suburbs and kept a condo in Hartford, since they are Montessori school principals and feel a responsibility to be near work during the week. When the weekend house became overwhelming, they started looking around and were delighted to find their home while NINA was still completing renovations.

*"We are stewards of this house, whose beautiful history and presence elevate the neighborhood. We're each six minutes from work, which is comforting during the school year because we are always responsible for what happens in our buildings. CTfastrak was a figment of everybody's imagination when we started, and by the time we moved in it had blossomed, changing the neighborhood. It gets us downtown in three minutes, so we go out a lot and love the access."*



Dartanian,  
Keiko &  
baby



## When and where:

Since 2003, NINA has worked in the Asylum Hill neighborhood. The featured buildings, renovated in 2014 and 2016 respectively, are at the corners of Imlay and Hawthorne Streets, and Ashley and Garden Streets.

## What:

NINA has renovated or built both single-family homes and mixed-use buildings with commercial space. They operate programs for landscaping, streetscapes, community safety and youth development. Their Homeownership Incentive Program helps employees of Asylum Hill institutions purchase homes in the neighborhood. NINA also works extensively with volunteers from area corporations and institutions.

## Why and how:

LISC provided acquisition and construction loans totaling just over one million dollars for these renovations. NINA also receives capacity building grants and technical assistance from LISC and annual operating support through the Hartford Neighborhood Development Support Collaborative.

## Who:

NINA's major funders for homeownership development include Aetna, The Hartford, Saint Francis Hospital and Medical Center, Webster Bank, LISC, City of Hartford, Eversource, People's United Community Foundation, Travelers, William and Alice Mortensen Fund, Connecticut Department of Housing, Connecticut State Historic Preservation Office, Connecticut Natural Gas and Bank of America.

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