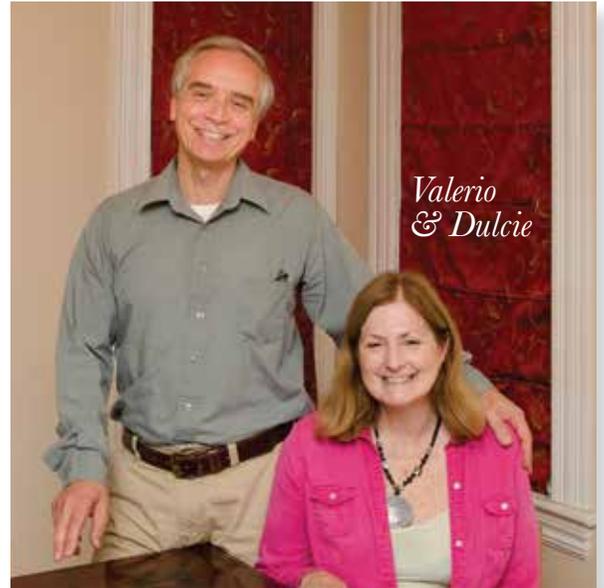


Supporting Homeownership: Hartford's Asylum Hill

Ken Johnson, executive director of Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (NINA), believes homeownership is a powerful catalyst for neighborhood revitalization. People who own a home make a big investment. They take pride in it, work to maintain it, get to know their neighbors and collaborate to make the neighborhood stronger.

“When NINA began, there were 49 abandoned buildings in a square mile, and blight begets blight. Our restored homes created pride of place, generating interest and momentum. This multiplies the positive impact by increasing the value of other homes in the neighborhood, enabling families to build equity and achieve the American dream.”

Asylum Hill, in the middle of Hartford, was a very desirable neighborhood of stately Victorian homes for insurance and manufacturing employees in the 1800s. Over time, the community lost investment and population, and suffered physical decline. Home to several large corporations and institutions, the revitalization of the neighborhood is important to residents and corporations alike. NINA's partner corporations know many of their employees value Asylum Hill's proximity to work, with easy access to downtown's culture and dining options.



Success: Dulcie and Valerio moved in a decade ago, after having lived in New York City and in Hartford's south end. He is an architect and she worked for city government, so they felt it was important to make a commitment to a historic neighborhood.

“We love our kitchen, designed for cooking, entertaining and building community around the island. Our dining room table even has details to match the flooring. Our house was moved here when a local corporation planned to demolish it for parking. It's a centerpiece of NINA's work.”



Success: Erin had been renting nearby and was employed at a local nonprofit when she saw a house being renovated. A friend encouraged her to inquire about it, and now it is hers. Erin is putting her horticulture degree to use by buying the florist shop where she works, secure in the knowledge that she has a stable, affordable home.

“While I like being close to the action and walking to events downtown, the best part is the community. I really enjoy my neighbors, cooking, and having guests. I saw this house and loved it, so instead of complaining about issues in Hartford I decided to be part of the change.”

Success: Juanita had been house hunting intensively, preparing to move from New York to Hartford. This was the last house she saw that day, and she couldn't get it out of her mind.

“My knees buckled with excitement when I saw it and I carried the paperwork around with me for days. I am so happy, and love my house so much, that I kiss the banister when I come down the stairs.”



When and where:

Since 2003, NINA has worked in the Asylum Hill neighborhood. Its homes are clustered on Ashley, Garden and Sargeant Streets, as well as on Huntington and Imlay Streets.

What:

NINA has renovated or built 20 homes and one mixed-use building, for a total of 31 units of housing and 5,805 square feet of commercial space. They operate programs for home improvements, 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 participates in NINA's work with loans for acquisition, predevelopment and construction. LISC also provides capacity-building and operating support grants, technical assistance and training. NINA was a winner of the LISC Safety MetLife Foundation Community-Police Partnership Award.

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 Economic and Community Development, Connecticut Natural Gas and Bank of America.

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