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## Area churches, contractors help Radnor Township Civic Association with renovations

May 5 fundraiser, information session planned

By Linda Stein [lstein@21st-centurymedia.com](mailto:lstein@21st-centurymedia.com) @lsteinreporter on Twitter Mar 15, 2018



Volunteers working on the Radnor Township Civic Association building. Volunteers work on the Radnor Township Civic Association building.

submitted

RADNOR >> To some, it may be just an old building. But to others, it's the heart and soul of the historically black area of Radnor Township.

The Radnor Township Civic Association (RTCA) is undergoing a major renovation with the help of area churches and many contractors who have volunteered their time to renovate the Highland Avenue structure.

A 2015 article in Main Line Suburban Life piqued the Rev. Tom Ebersole's interest.

"Somebody (Dr. Paul Shillingford) clipped your article out and put it on my desk, put the words, 'Maybe we can help them out,'" said Ebersole, the pastor of Wayne Church.

And they certainly have helped, earmarking big chunks of their Christmas Challenge fundraising efforts over the last few years toward RTCA; starting with Christmas 2015, the RTCA received \$20,292; \$13,902 in 2016; and \$12,512 for Christmas 2017. Ebersole said the church's Christmas Challenge is for members to make a donation equal to what they spend on Christmas presents for themselves.

And other area churches, including Central Baptist, United Methodist, Wayne Presbyterian, Christ Church Ithan and St. David's Episcopal Church, have also given money to help the RTCA.

Ray Daly, the Radnor Township building code officer, has also brought contractors onboard, said Kevin Stroman, who grew up in Tredyffrin Township section of Wayne and graduated from Conestoga High School. Tom Hipp from St. David's has been very helpful, said Stroman.

"Those two have been instrumental in grabbing different contractors to come and apply their talents to help finish the building," Stroman said. "Ray Daly's son has a drywall business, so he's been doing that. Scott Borzell from Borzell & Norbury plumbing has been instrumental in doing the plumbing side of it. And Paul Leighton started the electrical, and Keith Martin stepped in to finish the electrical. We're doing everything up to code."

Builder Todd Pohlig is installing a ramp for the disabled, and architects Gardner/Fox Associates provided design services, he said.

"We're looking to finish the basement and the main floor somewhere in the summer," said Stroman. "We have an aggressive schedule right now where we're really getting things done. We're not going to tackle the third floor right away."

He said he hopes they'll then be able to open the building, start a tutoring program for children and allow the traditional uses for the RTCA building to resume.

"We are definitely getting a lot of support throughout the community," he said, including volunteers for Villanova's Day of Service. Grove's Plumbing Supply donated the boiler.

"Once this thing got a little ground swell, people have just come out," said Ebersole. "It's been the vendors and the churches. And people in the neighborhood have been great."

Stroman added, "That's one of the good things. It's not just putting the Band-Aids and fixing the initial problems. We're actually doing the whole building, which for longevity purposes and uses, it's much, much better. It's going to be nice."

Volunteers have performed a lot of the labor.

"We would not have been able to raise enough money to cover all the labor that has been done," said Ebersole.

"It's a labor of love and we so much appreciate it," said Stroman, of Norristown.

Stroman said he remembers going to the RTCA when he was a kid and is now a board member.

Board President Louella Luchie, with her late husband, Lewis, have been in charge of the RTCA for years. She said the RTCA offered a place where African-American Main Line residents could hold wedding receptions and parties when they were not welcome at other venues.

It has been closed since 2014, said Charles Marshall, also a member of the RTCA board, since water damage from a leaking chimney led to black mold. And workers remediating the mold ripped out walls to reveal old knob and tube electrical wiring that had to be replaced. Daly also told the board members the building needed to add a first-floor restroom to make it ADA compliant.

The RTCA is the only black-owned community center on the Main Line and serves the traditionally African-American neighborhood around Highland Avenue in Wayne, Stroman said.

Marshall, of Paoli, got involved in the RTCA through an Undoing Racism group supported by the Central Baptist Church in Wayne, which has been helping to fund the RTCA for a number of years.

"That was the only place that Afro-Americans could rent to have their activities," said Luchie. "As time progressed, things changed, of course. But at the time, we gave parties. ... As I looked at the history, I found that Central Baptist was involved with the RTCA years ago. Also, the RTCA started up as a place where individuals could come and get food and clean up during the Depression."

The RTCA was founded in 1932 as a relief organization for the community's poor and working class during the Depression, said Luchie. The building, which includes a main hall that can hold 150 people, a kitchen, a second-floor women's room, a first-floor sitting room with red-brick fireplace and a second-floor meeting room, dates back to 1916.

Before the Luchies ran the RTCA, Alice and Spencer Gettys kept it going, she said.

"We hope to deal more with the community needs and activities, addressing you people's needs and adult needs, such as health care," she said.\

The Wayne Senior Center will partner to provide adult needs, Stroman said.

"To me it's limitless," he said. With the upgrades, the building will be more useful than before the plumbing mishap.

"I've been here since 1944," said Lucie. "I came from Columbia, S.C. I dealt with lynchings, the Klan and all that stuff. But when I came north, it like a little hidden stuff. ... Although we're in the minority here on the Main Line, we still should voice our opinion on what's going on, whether it's the police department or the churches. Martin Luther King called it the most segregated time of the week, on Sunday."

She said she remembers a friend telling her that she went to a church in Bryn Mawr and not being welcomed.

"It's those things that we need to deal with."

Even now, black and white youngsters don't mix much, she said.

"I think the RTCA needs to deal with these issues and the churches."

Eventually, Stroman said he also hopes to have a museum at the site to house historical artifacts from the longtime African American community on the Main Line. Many people don't know their history, he said.

"We try to get our children to excel in all aspects of life," he said, and knowing the history of their community is a part of that. For example, some of the World War II Tuskegee Airmen (the first black service members to serve as pilots) lived in Paoli, he said.

Stroman plans to hold a fundraiser and informational program at Second Baptist Church (next to the RTCA) on May 5 from 2 to 4 p.m.

The RTCA is a tax exempt organization. Donations can be sent to: The RTCA, The RTCA, PO Box 8141, Wayne, PA 19087.