

## OPINION

### City Avenue bridge lighting highlights our best connections



#### VILLAGE VIEW

Bonnie Squires

It was like a scene from *The Music Man* last week as participants streamed out of the PNC Bank reception in front of the new Target store, walking along behind the St. Joseph's University marching band, in their red and white uniforms, crossing over the pedestrian bridge to where Mayoral candidate Michael Nutter waited for everyone to assemble. Nutter was given the honor of pushing the button that lit the pedestrian bridge and the CITYAVE sign, signifying the cooperative venture.

Just the night before at a reception at Joe Manko and Robb Gold's law firm on City Avenue, looking out the window at the bridge and the sign, Montgomery County Commissioner Ruth Damsker and former Congressman Joe Hoeffel, a candidate for county commissioner, had talked of the need for more

cooperation to enhance economic growth and development, "regionalism" again in vogue.

Former Lower Merion Commissioners Joe Manko and Lita Indzel Cohen (who also was later a state representative) were crushed that they could not be there for the bridge-lighting, a metaphorical as well as a physical bridge between the city and the suburbs. The two of them had been instrumental in creating the City Avenue Special Services District, and they continue to play an ongoing role with the organization.

For those of us who spent our first years in Wynnefield, before moving across "City Line" to Lower Merion, it has taken a long time to get used to saying "City Avenue." And we always feel as if we have one foot on each side of a divide, which shouldn't be the case. It was Cohen who trained me to say "City Avenue."

Do you remember when former Philadelphia Mayors Richardson Dilworth and Joe Clark (who also was later a U.S. senator) began courting suburban residents, trying to regionalize the Philadelphia school system? They were practically run out of town on a rail, and the notion has never ever resurfaced.

But economic development is quite another story, and it's the new tune that city and suburban officials and residents are singing in unison, fortunately.

Terrence Foley has been the CEO of the City Avenue Special Services District for the past 18 months, and he was absolutely delighted with the mixing and mingling last week among Wynnefield Residents Association members; Father Timothy Lannon, the president of St. Joseph's University; a number of the St. Joe's staffers; and elected officials and candidates from both sides of City Avenue, including state Sen. Connie Williams, state Rep. Kathy Manderino, Lower Merion Commissioners George Manos, Liz Rogan and Bruce Reed, Curtis Jones Jr., candidate for city Council from the 4th District, which includes Wynnefield, was one of the enthusiastic people in attendance at the event.

In a little ceremony at the PNBC Bank reception, Foley presented awards to three key people who facilitated the cooperative venture in lighting the sign on the pedestrian bridge over City Avenue: Jerry Batoff, Esq., a Lower Merion resident, the Target site developer; Kim Baker, representing the new Target store; and Chris Sulpizio, from PREIT, the Pennsylvania Real Estate Investment Trust (whose owner, Ron Rubin, is a Lower Merion resident as well).

Did you know that, while there are many service districts in specific regions throughout the country, the City Avenue Special

Services District is a most unique partnership because it is the first multi-jurisdictional special services or business improvement district in the United States? Imagine that! Here we are, smack in the middle of the one-and-only city-suburban collaboration in the whole country. Wow!

By the way, the City Avenue Special Services District extends from Schuylkill Expressway, where it empties onto City Avenue, up to 63rd Street and Wynnewood Road.

According to Foley, the City Avenue Special Services District has a focus on public safety as well, with a full-time bike patrol from 10 a.m. to 8 p.m., six days a week. And there are several streetscapes projects, including landscaping on the four corners at the Presidential Apartments. The peculiar-shaped piece of land at 63rd street and City Avenue, across from the train station, has also benefited from streetscaping. You may have noticed the line of

evergreens in large pots that spruce up that corner of City Avenue.

There is one mystery question, however, and that is: Who actually owns the pedestrian bridge over City Avenue? According to Foley, that is "the subject of much debate."

But not open to debate is the phrase "Golden Mile," because of the desirable real estate on both sides of City Avenue. Both 6ABC and NBC10 plant themselves firmly across the street from each other, and the former is in the midst of building a whole new facility on their property. The 10! show opened a window on to City Avenue, and a bunch of radio stations are within a stone's throw of the thoroughfare.

And Target has also been a magnet for a couple of banks, a food store, a Starbucks, and a delightful public space with benches and tables behind the stores.

There is shopping, with Saks

Fifth Avenue, Lord and Taylor, and a variety of specialty shops. There are also Philadelphia College of Osteopathic Medicine (PCOM), numerous class A office buildings and apartment complexes and hotels.

So the celebration made people aware of the mission of City Avenue Special Services District: to improve the image of the district, influence positive growth and development in the area and to increase levels of public safety.

The weather was balmy last week, the music was lively, the PNC Bank reception food was delicious, and the stroll down City Avenue and up to the pedestrian bridge was like a stroll in the park. Best of all, it brought people together from both sides of City Avenue.

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