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Investing in Our Community

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STORYTELLER: Mary Varnado

CARILLON I've been in the neighborhood since '62. Almost everyone I know is gone now, but I moved here to be with my family.

A lot has changed in the neighborhood since I've been here. Dayton used to be a flourishing manufacturing city and a booming town with lots of entertainment, but after I-75 came—that's what broke up the whole city as far as I'm concerned. They tore down good homes—they were nice houses—but they wanted the road from Michigan to Florida to get the goods moved, so they just tore up Dayton. Just in our neighborhood, we had stores, a good restaurant—lots of families would go there and eat. There was a filling station, barbershop, ice cream shop, but when manufacturing went out, all the people and jobs went with them.



I was the neighborhood association president for 10 years. I stayed because nobody else would do it and I couldn't let the neighborhood not have a say with the City. I think the thing I'm most proud of was getting our community's park name changed from Welcome Park to the Virginia McNeal Park. She was the one who started the Carillon neighborhood association when 75 divided the city up. She was instrumental in getting the University of Dayton to let us have meetings there since we were in the neighborhood. She was on the School Board, she worked in government. She was on committees and had lots of influence all over the city. She was one of the "Most Influential Women" and really did a lot for our community.

BUT NOW, I WORRY ABOUT THE LACK OF INTEREST IN COMMUNITY BUILDING FROM THE YOUNGER GENERATION. I wish they would get more involved and invested in maintaining the neighborhoods. Once my generation is gone, there will be no one else left looking out for Dayton and its wellbeing. I'd say within the next 25 years, this neighborhood might not even be here. Young people just don't want to put in the time and it's not that hard; they just don't want to be bothered. You can't even get them to come to meetings. They find all kinds of excuses. Even

at church when we have something, they don't come; they want their time to be what they want to do. They don't like being told what to do, and would rather spend their time doing whatever they please instead of spending it helping the Dayton neighborhoods flourish.

Like I mentioned before, the Carillon neighborhood might not be here 25 years down the road because there's been a lot of changes in the neighborhood which are not necessarily good for the neighborhood. A lot of children are moving back to take care of their parents, which is a good thing, but the problem is young people don't take care of their parents' properties as they would their own property. There's been a lot of empty houses which tear the neighborhood down. Several houses are owned by individuals who fix them up and rent them out. **IF PEOPLE OFFER THEM ENOUGH AND THEY SELL, THEY COULD TURN THIS INTO A WHOLE NEW BALLGAME. WE NEED PEOPLE WHO WILL INVEST AND STAY ACTIVE. IF NOT, THE NEIGHBORHOODS WILL GO AWAY.**

We need people who are invested and not just here for the money. To me, politicians are just going through the motions. It has to be more than just talk. We need someone in office representing us and our neighborhoods; we need a voice in government that will fight for us and not against us. I think internships would get young people invested and interested in government which will then help Dayton because we would have someone fighting for us for the right reasons.

I think Dayton Early College Academy is really a good thing they are starting too. A lot of charter schools were just in it for the money and they are not doing what they're supposed to be doing. They are given money and not held accountable for it; they never spend it like they are supposed to, they just waste the money. I know of 8 or 9 charter schools around here that have closed. But I think DECA is more strong. They have more teaching invested in the city.

I think that education and internships are going to help Dayton a lot. But it's going to take several years. There's a lot of small pockets of good and hopefully they will all bloom out. I think that talking and sharing is so important. What's the hurt to sit down and talk? You don't know who might be listening, those who can

learn from this and move to the neighborhood and be engaged in the city and know some things that are going on. Students are still learning and Dayton is still growing.

We have a new neighborhood president, Gwen Buchanan, one who is doing a fantastic job. We had a meeting last night with the City and she always knows all of the right answers and how to use Facebook and all this new technology. We've got quite a lot of good things going on to get us back on the right path. It's beautiful.