

South Ward Neighborhood Committee

Good Morning Mr. Chairman and members of this Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to speak to you today on the issue of community revitalization in time of economic stress.

The Borough of Tamaqua has been a designated Pennsylvania Elm Street community since March of 2007. My name is Kathleen Kunkel and I have been the manager of the Borough's Elm Street program since July of 2007.

The Elm Street program, known as the South Ward Neighborhood Committee, depends heavily on volunteers and partners with the Borough of Tamaqua through a management agreement. The borough provides the matching funds for our Elm Street residential re-investment funds as well as in kind services.

Our office is located at 230 Race St., Tamaqua, thanks to the efforts of our volunteers. The office was originally a storage shed on the grounds of the South Ward Fire Company. It was donated to the South Ward Playground Association and moved three blocks to its current location. A large part of our Elm Street 5 Year Plan is the construction of a Community Center, which will then house the Elm Street office. Knowing this project would be several years in the making, volunteers from throughout our community decided to convert the storage shed into an office. All the materials and labor were donated and the conversion was completed within two months.

While awaiting confirmation of an Elm Street designation, volunteers kept busy by conducting numerous clean up campaigns in our ward, which lies within an area using SR209 and SR309 as our boundary lines. A pocket park that was in a state of disrepair was refurbished, again using volunteer hours and donated equipment and paint. A major project for our volunteers was replacing a roof for an elderly resident who could not afford the repairs and was worried about the possibility of losing her home. In one afternoon, the badly damaged roof was replaced by volunteer effort, allowing the homeowner to remain in her family homestead to this day.

Our fund raising efforts are all volunteer generated and include an annual festival, a Halloween Spooktoberfest, and an annual visit with Santa.

An effort is now underway to preserve the heritage of our section of Tamaqua, as volunteers visit with long time residents, collecting their memories. We have also established a "Spruce Up Award," presented to residents who take pride in their homes

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and surrounding areas. A project currently under review is a community tool shed, which will allow residents to undertake their own minor home improvement projects. A Neighbor Helping Neighbor Project is also in the planning stages and would match volunteers and their individual skills with residents in need of assistance. Our volunteers have also taken the lead in re-establishing the Borough of Tamaqua's Crime/Neighborhood Watch program. Volunteers have also created and maintain our website www.southwardtamaqua.org.

In two short years, our volunteers have made a huge impact on our neighborhood and plan to continue these efforts well into the future. Their goal is to improve the neighborhood and its parks, assist neighbors and make improvements designed to make the South Ward a better place to live, work, play and raise a family.