



UNIVERSITY PLACE
ASSOCIATION

University Place Association & Super Neighborhood Report July 2012

University Place, the unique community bounded by Kirby Drive, US59, Main Street, and North Braeswood, was one of the first Super Neighborhoods designated by Mayor Brown, and served as the model for Super Neighborhoods all over Houston. For more than 20 years, the University Place Association (UPA) has been monitoring, advocating, defending and lobbying to preserve and enhance the quality of life in University Place for residents and business owners. The UPA Board of Directors is comprised of representatives from civic clubs, institutions and businesses in the area, and serves as a unified and highly effective voice for the unique and diverse interests of our community. Active participants include Boulevard Oaks, MAMA, Morningside Place, Old Braeswood, Southampton, Southampton Extension, Southgate, Christ the King Lutheran Church, IBC Bank, Rice University, the Rice Village, and the South Main Alliance. UPA employs a paid part-time Executive Director, Kathie Easterly, to assist with UPA's work in the neighborhood. In addition to tackling street construction issues, traffic and parking concerns, monitoring and ensuring compliance with City of Houston ordinances, ensuring protection of our street trees during street and construction projects, and helping to resolve community issues, Kathie runs the UPA office and responds daily to residents' and business owners' needs. Erik Eriksson of Southampton is currently President of UPA. UPA Board Meetings are held quarterly. One of the meetings also serves as UPA's Annual Meeting, and at least one board meeting per year is a public meeting, with notice posted on the UPA website and sent to civic clubs and businesses for distribution.

Security. One of the most important aspects of University Place Association's community involvement is security. UPA hosts a Quarterly Security Breakfast that includes all of the agencies that police in or near University Place. These include the Houston Police Department (HPD), METRO Police Department, Rice University Police Department, West University Police Department, Harris County Precinct One constables, Southampton/BOCA Patrol Service, and Texas Medical Center Security. These casual breakfast meetings are for sharing information and maintaining the close working relationship that exists between our community and the officers who work in or near it.

Last November, UPA partnered with the Museum Park Super Neighborhood (the Super Neighborhood immediately to UPA's east) and the South Main Alliance to host a Crime Prevention Town Hall at St. Paul's United Methodist Church. The presentations were very helpful and informative and covered some topics not usually covered at such meetings. Attendance from residents, businesses, community organizations and institutions totaled almost 50. Detailed questions and answers followed each presentation and continued through the end of the program. H.P.D.'s Sgt. Aguirre gave a detailed presentation about crime statistics citywide and in our South Central District in 2011 as compared to 2010 (most major crimes were down across the board).

H.P.D. South Central's Differential Response Team (DRT) advised about effective security measures for homes, neighborhoods and businesses, including H.P.D.'s free security audit service for homeowners and businesses. Other H.P.D. divisions gave reports about homelessness and mental illness, theft, burglary, and narcotics issues (the latter currently dominated by the major abuse of prescription drugs currently taking place in Houston, as well as most other U.S. cities). METRO Police reported about their collaborative efforts with

H.P.D. and also informed the group that METRO vehicles and facilities function as safe havens for any and all persons seeking protection from a criminal threat. Another UPA Crime Prevention Town Hall will be held this fall – the date and venue will be announced in late August.

Kathie also attends South Central H.P.D.'s Positive Interaction Program (PIP) meetings held on the third Tuesday of each month at 7:00 p.m. at South Central H.P.D. at 2202 St. Emanuel. PIP meetings are one-hour community meetings that include a presentation from a different police division or law enforcement agency each month, and afford community members the opportunity to meet the officers who patrol our neighborhood, and get to know them on a first-name basis.

Sometimes attendees hear what a judge, assistant district attorney, state prison warden, or a county boot camp director has to say about fighting crime. Additionally, each month an attendee is offered the opportunity to ride with a police officer on a tour of duty; at the next month's meeting, the "citizen-rookie" talks about his or her experience. Crime statistics are provided at the monthly meeting, and are also available on the Internet. Sometimes fellow citizens give crime tips, or the group might honor an officer for outstanding work in the community. In addition to supporting HPD's PIP Program and the officers who stay late to participate in them, and maintaining a consistent working relationship with H.P.D., UPA attendance at PIP meetings helps us stay abreast of what's going on in nearby neighborhoods.

District C Candidates Forum. Last October, UPA hosted a District C Council Member Candidates Forum at First Christian Church. All five candidates attended and participated in the forum, all were asked the same questions, and all were given the opportunity to make opening and closing statements. The forum, free and open to the public, was attended by residents and business leaders throughout University Place and beyond. Refreshments were provided by Julie Mastroianni, Prudential/Gary Greene Realtors, Inner Loop Office.

Monitoring Compliance with Ordinances. UPA maintains close working relationships with City of Houston department heads and our elected public officials to help ensure that ordinances such as the Sexually Oriented Business Ordinance and the Offstreet Parking Ordinance are complied with. The Offstreet Parking Ordinance is particularly important with regards to Rice Village, where parking is tight. UPA is also called on to look into possible violations of city ordinances within University Place, and report them to the City if and when found.

UPA and the Rice Village Alliance work together on numerous projects, including working to resolve parking problems in the Rice Village and efforts to establish a circulator trolley for the area. Last year, UPA and Rice Village property owners worked together to resolve specific parking problems in the Rice Village. UPA sent a letter of request, signed by 90% of the Rice Village property owners, requesting that:

1. All permit parking signs in the Rice Village be removed.
2. The City install 2-Hour Parking signs from 9:00 a.m. to 6:00, Monday through Saturday throughout the *entire* Rice Village (not just north from Rice), on all streets except Chaucer.
3. The existing 2-Hour Parking signs in the Rice Village be revised to reflect the same days and times as requested above.
4. The existing 2-Hour Parking signs in the Rice Village that were faded be repainted or replaced.

The City made of all the changes we requested.

UPA was also called upon by residents in M.A.M.A. to try to help resolve noise and parking problems associated with the new Grand Prize Bar (formerly Ernie's) on Banks near Montrose. Council Member Cohen facilitated a meeting for M.A.M.A. board members, the owners of Grand Prize Bar, and Kathie Easterly to discuss the problems and work together on solutions. The owners were receptive and eager to be good neighbors and address the concerns of M.A.M.A. residents, including parking issues and a food vendor truck that was parking on the street 24/7. Much progress has been made, the food truck is gone, and the owners continue to work with residents and the civic club in a mutually supportive way.

Rice University. Rice University and UPA work together on a variety of issues including neighborhood traffic projects, street light installations, neighborhood and university events, tree preservation, and more. Our communication is helped by Rice's service on the UPA board of directors, and Rice's Quarterly Community Luncheons, with attendance by representatives from UPA as well as from civic clubs, businesses, and institutions throughout University Place. These community luncheons, hosted by Rice for 20 years now, help keep our community united, informed and connected.

Kirby Drive Overlay. In late April, UPA learned that the Upper Kirby Management District had offered the City of Houston \$5 million to assist with funding the "85% reconstruction" of Kirby Drive from US59 to Bissonnet. This work would have included burial of utilities, planting of street trees, and installation of new sidewalks and street furniture. We also learned, unfortunately, that the City had turned down the offer, and opted instead for a City-funded \$200,000-\$400,000 asphalt overlay of this portion of Kirby Drive.

At the direction of a majority of the UPA Board, we wrote to the Mayor and City Council expressing our disappointment in their decision, and urged the City to accept Upper Kirby's offer of substantial reconstruction. We also expressed disappointment that the City made this decision without reaching out to the residents of University Place, and we requested an opportunity to further discuss this important issue.

The City went ahead with the short-term repaving, but we continue to request the substantial reconstruction of this segment of Kirby, which serves as a main route for residents and visitors enjoying the amenities of University Place, and as a gateway to events at Rice and Reliant Stadium.

Relationships with Elected Officials.

The City of Houston charter requires an increase in the number of city council districts from nine to eleven when the city population exceeds 2.1 million residents. That threshold was passed after the recent census, and so two new council districts were created – District J and District K. As a result, since the last election our city council numbers sixteen members, eleven elected from districts A through K, and five who serve at-large. Seven of these sixteen council members were elected for the first time last year, and so are unlikely to have worked with our civic clubs and Super Neighborhood in the past.

With this in mind, each month UPA's President and Executive Director are meeting with a different council member or City department head to introduce (or reintroduce) each of them to our community, and its needs and its expectations. Establishing and maintaining strong working relationships with elected public officials and agency staff are important prerequisites for their assistance, as we work to preserve and enhance our University Place neighborhoods.