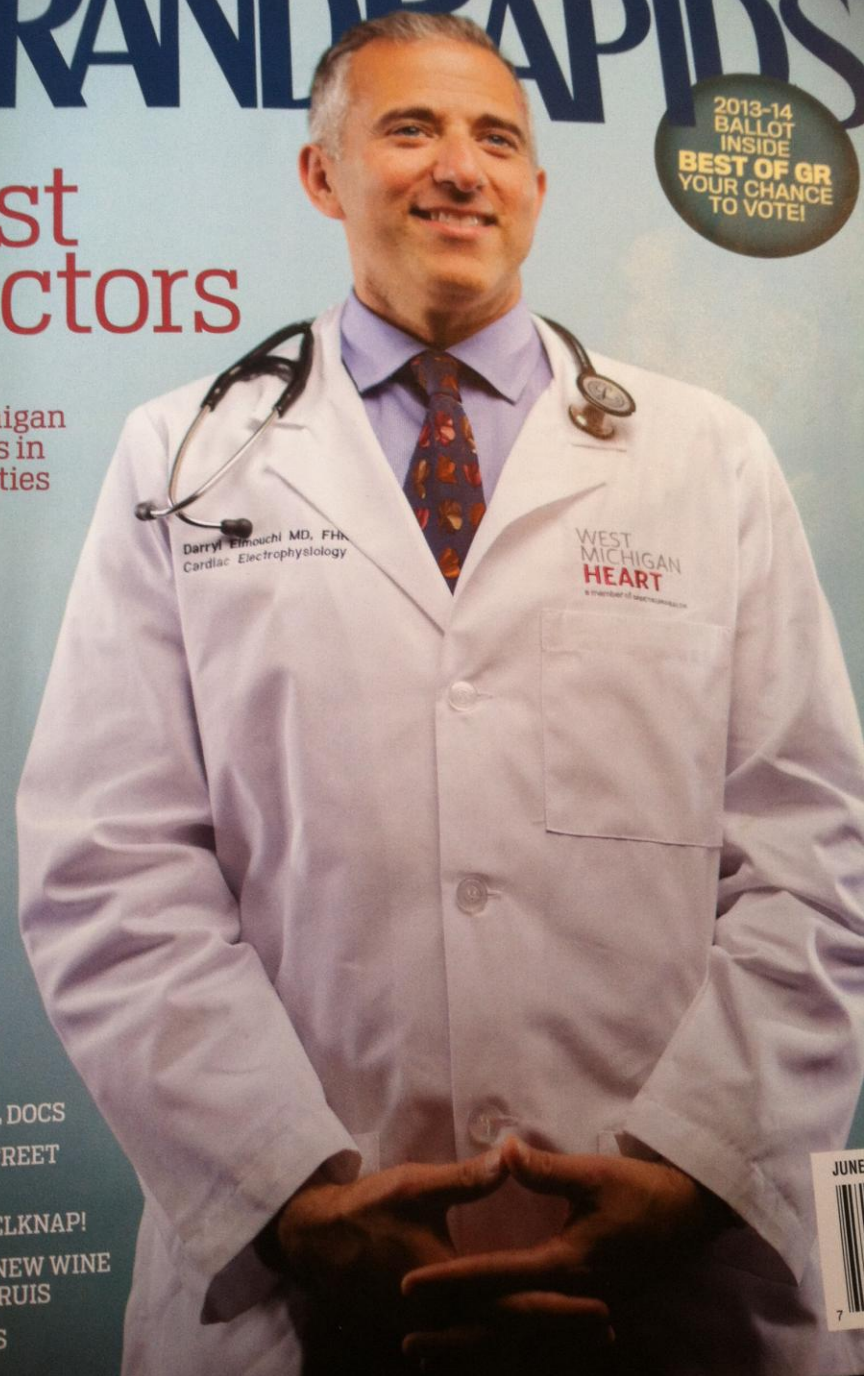


GRAND RAPIDS

2013-14
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SAVE YOUR SKIN:
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NOSH & SIP: OUR NEW WINE
COLUMN BY AMY RUIS
TWO PLATE: LEO'S

JUNE
7

By Daina Kraai
Photography by Johnny Quirin

The Belknap Lookout neighborhood combines grassy city parks with the hustle and bustle of the Medical Mile.

A neighborhood with a view



Robin Kelly, Natashia Nelson and Trinitee Manning walk the steps from the Belknap Lookout neighborhood down to Division Avenue. They go up and down five times for exercise. Right: View from Hastings Street as it overlooks the highway.

If you're looking for the best views in the city, look no farther than Belknap Lookout. Set atop a 160-foot bluff overlooking Grand Rapids and the Grand River, this neighborhood occupies the highest ground in the city.

"We have a special breeze that blows up here, unlike any other neighborhood," said Angel Gonzalez. "You have to spend a summer evening up here to truly appreciate it."

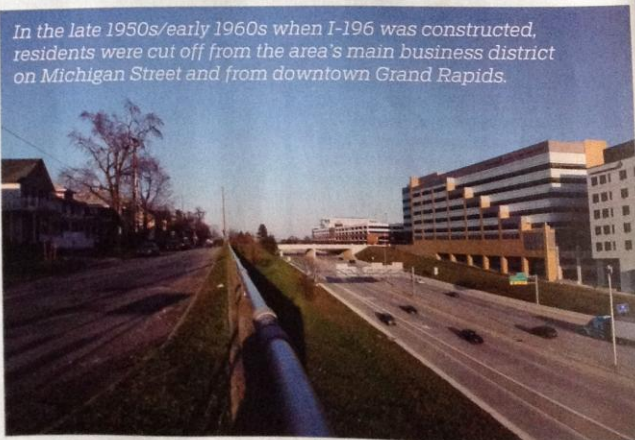
The neighborhood boundaries are Leonard and Crescent streets to the north and south, College Avenue to the east and the Grand River on the west. It includes the Monroe North Business District and the

Medical Mile along Michigan Street.

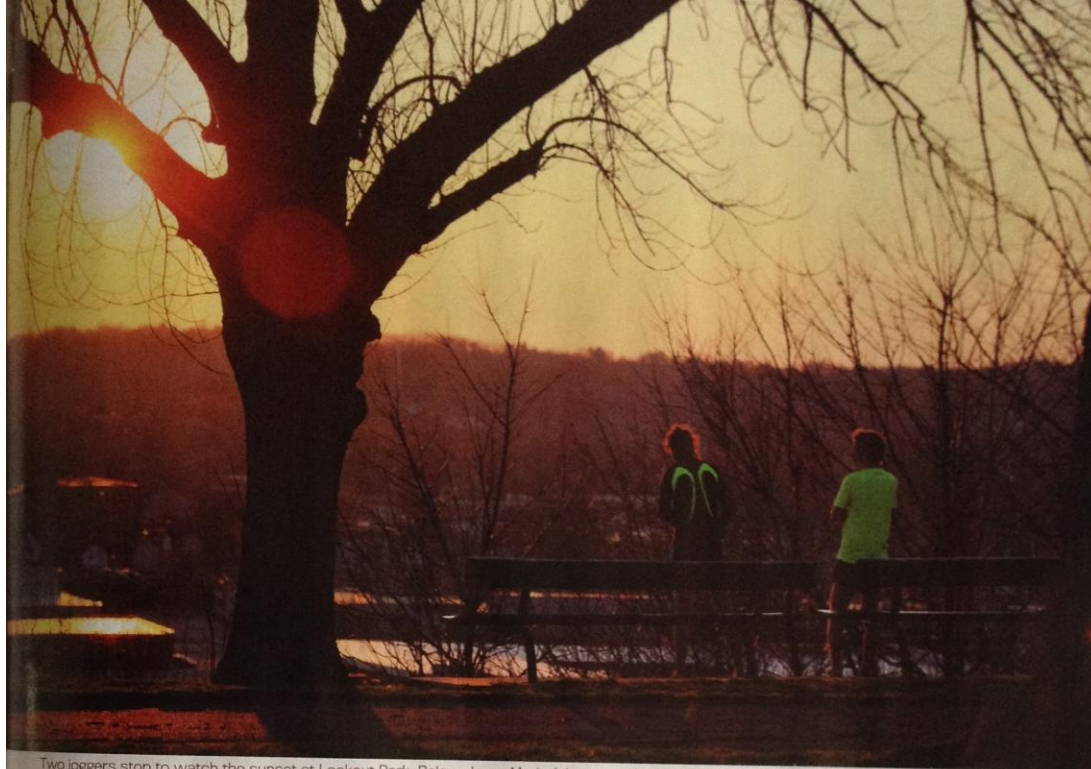
Residents take advantage of the many green spaces in the neighborhood, including a community garden and six city parks. The grassy hills make for not only great views but also winter sledding at Belknap, Coit and Mary Waters parks. Canal Park and 6th Street Bridge Park are at lower elevations for a leisurely stroll along the river. Folks gather in Lookout Park and along Hastings Street to watch the July 4 fireworks.

During summer months, neighbors are likely to congregate on front porches.

"Just last week I went over to a neighbor's house so she could cut my mom's



In the late 1950s/early 1960s when I-196 was constructed, residents were cut off from the area's main business district on Michigan Street and from downtown Grand Rapids.



Two joggers stop to watch the sunset at Lookout Park. Below, Jayne Marie Johnson works with Coit Academy students Imani Crenshaw and Quamairon Jones at the Cultivating Hands Children's Garden.

hair, and another neighbor came over and then another stopped by," said Amanda Bevan. "Everyone kept coming over and talking, and my mom commented on how we have a real sense of community here — and we really do."

Ruth Gamble, who runs a day care from her home, has lived all over the city. "This is the only place I've really gotten to know my neighbors," she said. "We really try to work together with our kids and support each other."

At the center of the neighborhood is Grand Rapids Public Schools' Coit Creative Arts Academy, formerly Coit Elementary and the oldest operating school in Michigan, built in 1880.

Students at Coit benefit from having the arts integrated into all subject areas, and from the Cultivating Hands Children's Garden, where volunteers from the Belknap Beautification Committee help children plant, cultivate and harvest vegetables, and

offer canning classes to families in the fall.

The Belknap Lookout area has had its challenges through the years.

Charles Dexter purchased the land from the government in 1831, but the neighborhood is named for Charles E. Belknap, a veteran of the Civil War who later served as mayor and then U.S. Congressman. "Look-out" was added for the outstanding views of the city and Grand River from atop Belknap Hill.

In the late 1950s/early 1960s when I-196 was constructed, residents were cut off from the area's main business district on Michigan Street and from downtown Grand Rapids. As people flocked to the suburbs, Belknap turned into a transient neighborhood with fewer homeowners and more renters, earning the nickname "Hippy Hill" during the 1970s because of the abundance of college students.

During the 1980s, crime and drugs infested the area around Clancy Avenue



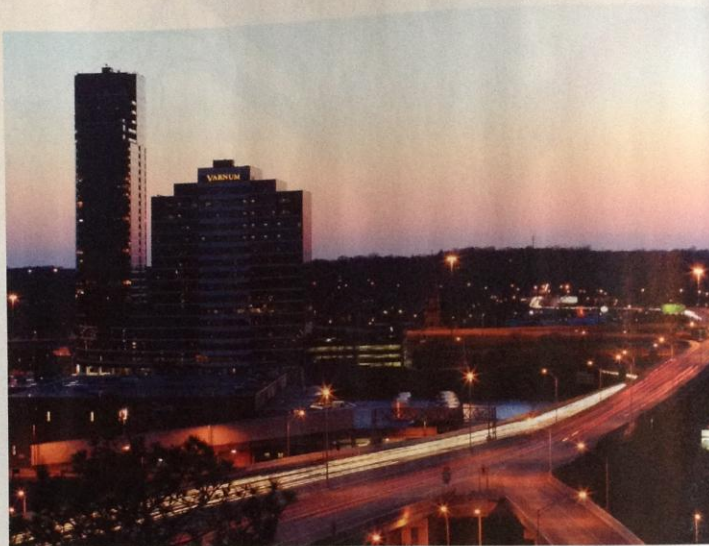
near & far

IN OUR BACK YARD / EXPLORING MICHIGAN

"We are a destination neighborhood, not a pass-through neighborhood. I often hear first-time visitors to Belknap begin their description with 'Wow, I had no idea.'"
— Angel Gonzalez



Clockwise, playing softball at Belknap Park; dramatic nighttime views of Grand Rapids as seen from Lookout Park; historic sections of Trowbridge Street and North Avenue feature original field cobblestone streets, unique in the city.

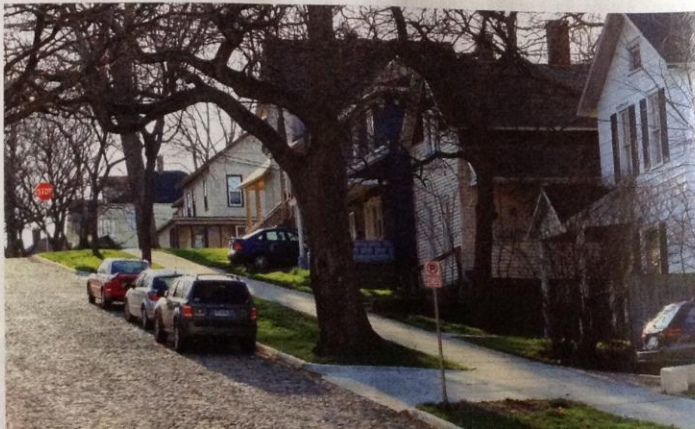


east of Belknap Park. Steve Faas began Clancy Street Ministries in 1992 as an outreach of the Reformed Church. The Christian community development organization helped foster relations between neighbors and the Grand Rapids Police Department to curb drug traffic.

Today, Clancy Street Ministries offers

support groups, financial literacy and youth entrepreneurial programs.

In the 1990s, as medical buildings on Michigan Street began to expand, tensions began to arise. The so-called Medical Mile of development on both sides of the street began in 1996 with the founding of the Van Andel Institute. Now it includes Grand Rap-



ids Community College's Calkins Science Center, Spectrum Health's Butterworth Hospital complex, Grand Valley State University's Cook-DeVos Center for Health Sciences, and the Secchia Center, Michigan State University's College of Human Medicine, among others.

"The neighborhood has been challenged by the difficult economy and various impacts from the institutional development along Michigan Street," said resident Louis Canfield. "But we have many dedicated neighbors working to maintain our residential character and improve Belknap."

Having the Medical Mile within its southern border along Michigan Street has provided both advantages and disadvantages.

"Near Spectrum Health and Grand Valley, we have a huge parking problem," said Kristi DeKraker, executive director of Neighbors of Belknap Lookout. "We're working with the city to look at implementing permit parking."

On the positive side, she said, the neighborhood is now safer and more appealing, attracting renters and homebuyers who work in the nearby medical facilities.

Christine Warner is an MSU medical student who recently moved into the neighborhood. "It is very convenient to live here because it is only a 10-minute walk to the Secchia Center campus," she said.

Today, with a mix of rentals, historical

homes on the west side along the bluff, condos along North Monroe in old factories such as the Boardwalk in the old Berkey and Gay building, and a community called Newberry Place, the neighborhood is set for continued growth and redevelopment.

"Newberry Place is a high-density pocket of 20 owner-occupied homes added to the neighborhood in 2008," Canfield said. "It feels like an extended family."

Each home is energy-efficient, with parking on the perimeter and architecture that matches the older style of the neighborhood. While each home is self-sufficient, the urban cohousing community was designed for social interaction.

"We have community meals and parties, spontaneous coffee and happy hours, and the Newberry kids play together. We manage the community ourselves, including most maintenance tasks and chores."

A group of Belknap Lookout residents is actively working to landscape, add new benches, bike paths and more at Coit Avenue and Hastings Street, a gateway to the neighborhood, said Angel Gonzalez. His Artesian Group, a residential development company, has plans to construct a mixed-use building on the corner, including a restaurant.

"We are a destination neighborhood, not a pass-through neighborhood," he said. "I often hear first-time visitors to Belknap begin their description with 'Wow, I had no idea.'" **GR**



Residents of Newberry Place, an urban cohousing community of 20 homes on Livingston Avenue, gather for a community meal.

Project X



IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD:

> Between Belknap Park and Lookout Park is the

X EARTHWORKS

SCULPTURE created by Robert Morris in 1973. The large X carved into the side of the hill with earth, asphalt and natural grass serves as a path from the top of the hill to the baseball fields, tennis courts and Griff's Ice House below.

> The subsidized **CRESTON PLAZA APARTMENTS** on Lafayette just south of Leonard Street, built in 1968, will be torn down and rebuilt within the next year. The 100 units are in an area prone to flooding, and two units were vacated last year due to flood water. The project is part of a federal program called Rental Assistance Demonstration.

> **LEMKIN HOUSE**, 817 Livingston NE, provides a home for refugees who are seeking asylum in the U.S., including people from the Czech Republic, Congo, Rwanda, Pakistan and India.