

SPOTLIGHT on West End

by Clint Hamblin



Welcome to the West End

Take me to the West End, please. West End? Is that in Boston? Do you know where the West End of Boston is? It's that neighborhood next to Beacon Hill with the great park and a haunting history from the late 1950s when, in the name of urban development, the City of Boston eradicated all residents from this 50-acre piece of land. The decision to wipe out the West End infuriated a multi-ethnic melting pot of nationalities when their entire community was replaced with a game board style of high-rise rental apartments not many of the original residents could afford.

But local businesses and residents of this forgotten neighborhood are demanding attention. They're making great efforts to reestablish the West End and put it back on the map as one of Boston's great communities. One of the first "to dos" on the list was to get what every other neighborhood had: a welcome to the neighborhood sign from the mayor.

Welcome to the West End, City of Boston, Mayor Thomas M. Menino. That's what the new sign says as you enter the neighborhood. Additional brightly colored West End flags now fly high on several streets, festivals are happening in the park and, with the help of the West End Civic Association and a group of businesses and neighbors, the recharged West End is slowly becoming a strong neighborhood of concerned and involved citizens. Now, how about a neighborhood festival?

Children's Festival. Last August, the neighborhood children joined forces with the West End Civic Association and put together the First Annual West End Children's Festival. It was a huge hit, and the second festival held last weekend was even bigger, attracting more than 1,000 visitors to Thoreau Path for fun and frivolities. The community enjoyed free food, music and entertainment, including a shiny red fire truck from the Boston Fire Department. These generous firefighters spent the day placing kids in the driver's seat and patiently explaining how it all works.

Local businesses supported the event, contributing food, games and volunteers to help manage the affair. Singles, couples and families from several Boston neighborhoods enjoyed the clowns, singers, dancers, games and activities on Thoreau Path.

"We're hoping to get the City of Boston to recognize the West End as a valid Boston neighborhood," said Erin Brazil, director of the



Tilly Lilly the clown with Hairietta



Boston fireman gives kids a ride

West End Civic Association. Brazil and her organization have been pressing the city to allocate basic neighborhood benefits available to all other Boston communities. A recent success includes the establishment of West End resident permit parking, something that nearly every Boston neighborhood has. "We also need more trash barrels, better lighting and more participation from the city and we'd love to see the mayor visit our next festival," Brazil said.

The West End continues to grow. Not unlike other Boston neighborhoods, The West End community continues to expand with the addition of five new buildings over the next few months. According to Rich Lucas, regional manager of Equity Residential Properties, these new buildings will "showcase the beginning of an exciting new community with a vibrant mix of residential, retail and commercial that will eventually rival Boston's other great neighborhoods."

"We love living in the West End," said former Newton residents Bill and Joanne Cooper, who have been West End residents for nearly six years. "It's a real community of all ages," Joanne Cooper said. The Coopers are typical "empty-nesters" and part of a wider demographic that includes couples, families with children and single professionals who want access to the city. "Our granddaughter loves the festival, and besides being great for the kids, the festival adds a wonderful sense of community here," she said.

The West End Museum. If you ever wondered what life was once like in the area, visit the West End Museum located at 150 Staniford Street. Excellent historic pictures represent the people, theaters, shops and lifestyle of the West End circa 1880 to 1958.

The next Children's Festival may be held in June, and we're all looking forward to both the continued recognition of the West End neighborhood and next year's festival.

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