

A community rediscovers spirit

Cleveland-Holloway neighborhood reaches out to all its members

By Anita Rao
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When 31-year-old Natalie Spring moved into a small house in the Cleveland-Holloway neighborhood in 2002, her friends, family and neighbors all thought she was crazy.

“People thought I was a naive white girl who had gotten into something she didn’t understand,” Spring said.

Looking back on it now, Spring agrees that she didn’t really know what she was getting into. When she moved into the neighborhood, many of the streets in the area were lined with boarded-up houses that had been vacant for many years.

In the early 1900s, when the textile industry in downtown Durham was active, the neighborhood was more vibrant, said 29-year-old Cleveland-Holloway resident Matt Dudek. In the 1940s, however, older families started to move out, industries shut down and many houses were deserted.

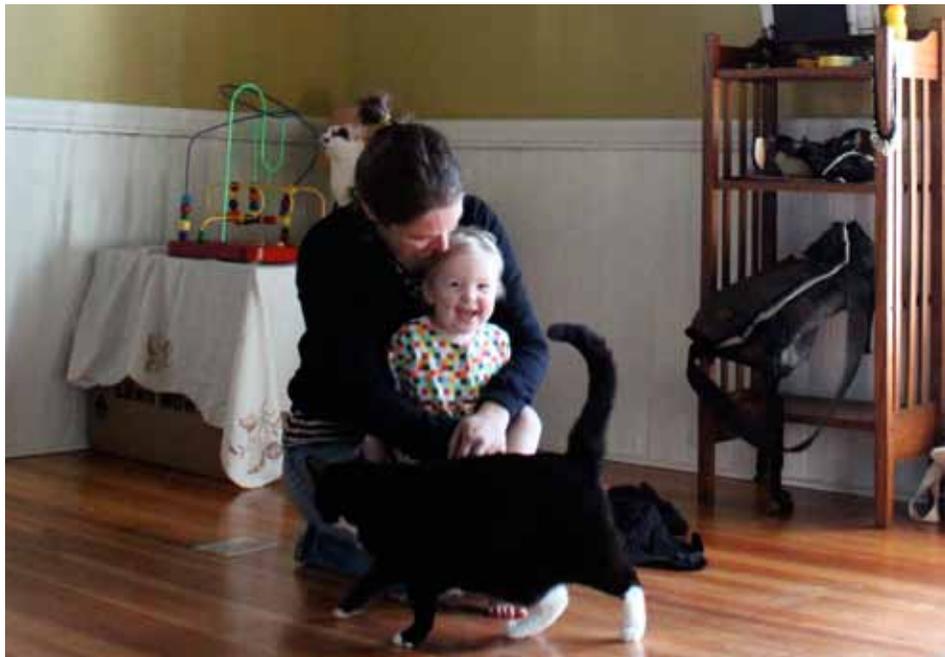
From the 1970s to 1990s, slumlords and investors bought up many local properties, said Spring. Slumlords rented out individual rooms for exorbitant prices, and investors would buy and sell large amounts of property to each other solely to make a profit.

“Properties would get traded like trading cards,” Dudek said.

So, when Spring moved into Cleveland-Holloway, there was not much community activity or positive street life.

With many vacant houses, it was easy for street crime and drug trading to continue out in the open, Spring said, especially because police rarely came through the neighborhood. However, things have been changing slowly in the 8½ years that she has lived there.

Spring said she and her neighbors noticed that though Cleveland-Holloway is close to downtown and bordered by two historic districts, it



Staff photo by Anita Rao
Natalie Spring cuddles with her two-year-old daughter, Madeline, in the front room of her Cleveland-Holloway home.

was left out of a lot of local conversation. So, in 2007, neighbors came together to create the Cleveland-Holloway neighborhood group to speak up for the area.

“Most of the people that have been around here for two or three decades probably wouldn’t call this neighborhood anything,” Spring said. “But now instead of being this forgotten area by the library, we decided to call ourselves Cleveland-Holloway.”

Since the inception of the neighborhood group, there has been a slow influx of new residents to the area. Spring said that in the past three years the percentage of vacant homes has decreased from 65 percent to 30 percent.

As more people buy and fix up abandoned properties, the area will become a more costly place to live. Spring said that there is still a wide range of price options available, but new homeowners are also taking steps to counteract the negative effects of their restorations. They want to make sure the neighborhood stays true to its motto of “live, rent, own,” which encourages all types of residents to be a part of this community.

Renter and three-year Cleveland-

Holloway resident Estella Bell said that the neighborhood is ethnically diverse but very connected.

“People are learning how to network with each other to help the area grow,” Bell said.

According to Dudek, by figuring out what skills and interests different members of the neighborhood have, neighbors try to connect each other to jobs and training opportunities.

But Irene Mason, who has been living in the neighborhood for more than 20 years, said the biggest change she has noticed is that the neighborhood looks nicer.

“I don’t have anything too bad to say about the neighborhood now,” Mason said. “Four or five years ago I did, but it has been cleaned up pretty well.”

With people coming together to invest their time and labor in the upkeep of their local community, Dudek said the city of Durham has also taken notice, helping sponsor park cleanups and tree planting.

“There is nothing that one individual can do to change the whole neighborhood,” Spring said. “But everyone can and must make sure that the whole community feels comfortable and included here.”