

# Real Estate

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## Rebuilding a sense of community



JEFFREY PHELPS / STAFF PHOTOGRAPHER

**Pam Karstens, Will Allen, Larry Adams and Oliver Lee** work in the backyard of a home in the 2200 block of N. 17th St.. They are among many committed to making Walnut Way, a condensed version of the former Walnut Street neighborhood, as beautiful as its forbear was before freeway construction and drug dealing ravaged it.

# Residents unite to rehab once-thriving neighborhood one house, one heart at a time

By FELICIA THOMAS-LYNN  
of the Journal Sentinel staff

Residents who live in the newly formed Walnut Way neighborhood are rekindling a spirit that once thrived there in a bygone era.

In this once devastated part of the central city, century-old homes now stand alongside newly built ones, the sign of a synergy that is sweeping the area one rehabbed home at a time.

In its heyday, the neighborhood was called Walnut Street, the cultural and economic center of the black community.

It was the Cream City's version of the great African-American entertainment and business districts that once thrived in the nation's largest cities.

That community, though, was largely torn away

in the late 1950s to make way for a new freeway system. For decades the area spiraled into deep despair, preyed on by crime, open drug deals and illegal dumping.

Now, all of that is changing.

A fraction of its former self, Walnut Way — bordered by W. Walnut St., N. 12th St., W. Fond du Lac Ave. and W. North Ave. — is evoking painful memories of a small community with a big heart.

"It conjures up what was once good," said Sharon Adams, a neighborhood organizer. "Walnut Street was more than a place, it was an attitude and a network. I hear people who move into the neighborhood now say they feel embraced. They care about each other."

Please see **NEIGHBORHOOD,**



Through hard work, residents are gradually transforming time-worn homes such as these on N. 17th St. into beautiful abodes.

## NEIGHBORHOOD WALNUT WAY



