

The Kenmore Bulletin

Volume 1, Issue 1

Spring, 1999

An Interview with Arlene Harrison, President of the Gramercy Park Block Association

If there's one person in Gramercy Park that every resident should get to know, it's Arlene Harrison. Harrison is, in many ways, the eyes, ears, and voice of the community. She is a tireless crusader for her neighborhood and a friend to anyone working to make Gramercy Park a better place to live and work.

Harrison is the founder and President of the Gramercy Park Block Association, a grassroots group of community residents that is dedicated to crime prevention and quality of life issues. Working in close partnership with the officers of the Thirteenth Precinct, the Association provides safety programs for the community, as well as acting as a voice of advocacy for neighborhood interests. Arlene's particular interest in crime prevention makes her especially attentive to the improvements taking place at the Kenmore, improvements that she believes will make the Kenmore a community asset. "I am thrilled and excited about HSI coming in and rehabilitating the Kenmore," says Harrison, who has been a friend and advisor to HSI as a member of the Community Advisory Board and the community resident who organized neighborhood support for the project.

A neighborhood resident for over 25 years, Arlene witnessed the deterioration of the Kenmore. "As the Kenmore went from modest respectability to complete squalor," Arlene says, "people went out of their way to avoid the building. It was a blight on the community. No one wanted to walk down that block because the Kenmore was a magnet for crime." Harrison remembers that despite the dedication of the officers of the Thirteenth Precinct to clean up the Kenmore, the building remained drug- and crime-ridden. Now, after three years of rehabilitation, Arlene feels that the building has improved dramatically. Since 1996, Harrison says, "HSI, under Claire Haaga's direction, has really turned the Kenmore around. The change of direction has been monumental, and we look forward to the continued progress of this important project in our community."