

# ON THE WEST SIDE

THE UNIVERSITY  
CITY HISTORICAL  
SOCIETY



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<http://www.uchs.net>

Mike Hardy, Editor

## PRESERVING THE HISTORIC DETAILS

This fall and winter have seen another rash of thefts of historic architectural details in **University City**. At least four of the break-ins and thefts of decorative windows and mantels have occurred in vacant properties, either under renovation or up for sale or both. And, in each case, two properties on the same block were entered. So far, none have recovered the historic interior details taken.



While we can and do suggest to those who experience such losses begin checking out local renovation material supply houses and antique venues like **Adamstown, PA** to look for replacements or a possible discovery of the stolen pieces, there is little more we can suggest after the losses have occurred.

But others who may be contemplating extensive renovations or leaving their properties unoccupied for any length of time do have options and should be taking extra precautions now to prevent the damage such architectural thefts have on your property and your quality of life.

First, if your property is going to be vacant or undergo work by contractors, make certain there

are extra deterrents to thieves entering the property and removing historic details. Having a barking guard dog is one such deterrent as are noise-making electronic devices and motion sensors. And, of course, double-check the security of windows and doors, including those into the basement.



Be sure also to let your neighbors know and indicate to them whether you are contemplating any work that would involve removing historic details from the premises. If no such work is contemplated but they see it occurring, ask them to immediately try to intervene and call the police for help. Passing on the same information and request to the **University City District** (215-234-0555) and its security ambassadors to aid in the lookout is also recommended.



Frequently, such crimes occur on weekends or at the end of the regular workday and may seem like an ordinary departure of workmen and their tools and materials from the worksite. Adding these additional informed eyes on the street to prevent looting will supplement the extra efforts you have made to make your property less vulnerable to antiques thieves.

But, even if you are not planning on vacating your property temporarily, remember that such architectural thefts, both interior and exterior, can take place at any time. Now is the time to check that historic details, including exterior metalwork, be made as secure as possible, with grillwork receiving additional security fasteners and exterior door knobs attached with irreversible screws to prevent them and the face plates from being easily removed.



And, in all cases, arranging now to take digital pictures of all these historic details and storing them in a secure place will insure that if they are taken, you have something to show in their recovery or replacement like the photos included in this newsletter. For, if by chance you do locate your lost items, the only proof that they belong to your house is that photographic record.

So, if you are taking photos of those seasonal holiday decorations this time of the year, give you and your property a special gift and take some more shots of those architectural details in and on your house that give it that unique and irreplaceable character.

Remember, there are thieves out there who see real value in these historic materials and you need to take extra steps to prevent their removal.

## GREEN ADDITIONS TO THE STREETScape

Sue Pringle, UC Green Executive Director

UC Green held its annual large fall tree planting on Saturday, November 21, 2009. 240 volunteers came out throughout our neighborhood to help plant 145 bare root trees along the streets of our neighborhoods. All of these were in the ground by noon within a six square mile area of **West Philadelphia** and are helping to introduce new patches of green to blocks and areas long bereft of trees. They bring the benefits trees provide in energy savings, stormwater management, increased community cohesion and improved real estate values along with other important additions to our quality of life.



Given the extent of the planting area, this year's voluntary street tree planting was a complicated affair requiring months of careful planning and preparation by a hard working team from our **UC Green Advisory Board**. As in past plantings, the day's activities operated out of a central gathering point, in this case the **Kingsessing Recreation Center**, surrounded by over 150 maturing trees planted over 4 years ago by UC Green. But new this year were additional teams with their own special logistical support services delivering trees, volunteers and tools to far-flung locations throughout **University City** and **West Philadelphia**. At least four blocks in the area were expecting ten or more new trees for their streetscapes and other locations were scattered throughout the six square mile area.

Borrowed and rented vehicles were enlisted to deliver trees, volunteers and their tools to these sites. They augmented the multiple pre-planting deliveries of mulch to all these planting sites by the **University City District**, always a valued partner of UC Green in these operations.

Bare root trees are large-sized dormant trees that are planted easily by volunteers in either late fall or early spring since their roots are bare of soil and coated with a solution of water and hydrogel, a highly absorbent polymer, which keeps



the roots moist within a large plastic bag as they are delivered from the nursery. They are, therefore, not heavy and are easily transported. In addition to being light-weight and less expensive than trees delivered as balled and burlapped wrapped or container-grown trees, they have the added benefit of having been dug to preserve much larger root structures which increases their survival rate.

For a number of years UC Green has been supported by **Tree Vitalize**, a state run initiative that provides free trees and concrete cuts for homeowners who request tree planting through volunteer groups operating throughout the city like UC Green. The trees planted this fall in West Philadelphia were part of 1000 planted by over 30 groups on the same weekend, and was matched by a similar number in the preceding spring.

Planning for an equally ambitious large-scale planting in early spring, 2010 has already begun. The process is a lengthy one, but certainly worth the effort.

For more information about this city-wide effort, contact the **Pennsylvania Horticultural Society** at 215.988.8844. To learn more about volunteer opportunities or about requesting trees from UC Green, call 215.573.4684 or check our web-site at [www.ucgreen.org](http://www.ucgreen.org). The gift of trees to the city will keep on giving for years in the future.

## LOOKING FOR COMPLIMENTS

to extend to those whose properties in University City have this year been looking better than ever because of historically sensitive improvements, including multicolored paint schemes, to their facades or gardening and greening improvements to their landscapes?

Here is your chance to let **UCHS** know their addresses before January 15, 2010 so that they can be sent letters commending them for their **“Gifts to the Streets.”** They will also, as **UCHS** members, be invited to join us at our next **UCHS Valentine’s Awards Tea** on Sunday, February 14, 2010.

Just email or phone us with the addresses you would like to recommend and we will take it from there.

These same recommendations will be considered by a 2010 awards panel looking for those owners and contractors to receive **Outstanding Preservation Awards** from **UCHS**.

Look for your special members’ invitation to the awards tea in the mail next month, but mark your calendar now and get those “thanks” in to **UCHS** to make sure that those who made these exterior streetscape improvements which benefit us all are duly noted and complimented.



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## **AND SPECIAL THANKS TO**

those who recently renewed their UCHS dues, in particular, to those who made additional contributions as **Sustainers of UCHS - Ellyn C. Sapper;** or **Friends of UCHS – Anne Pomeroy & Peter Amato, Jonathan Cass & Jackie Caridad, Marja & Jan Hoek; Dan Liberatoscioli, The Restaurant School; Bruce & Sharon McCullough; Chris Tadeo & Wayne Marquardt; Martha Dooley & Kathleen Murray; Paul Steege and Associates, Architects and Scott Stevens & Erin Whitney.**

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