

No 'Ghost Town'

Parkland merchants fight area's 'tough' image

By MIKE WINES
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More than two years ago, after the disorders that struck the western end of Louisville in the early summer of 1968, heavy metal grills went up across the doors and windows of the stores in the predominantly Negro Parkland shopping area around 28th and Dumesnil.

Yesterday may be remembered as the day they began to come down. Parkland merchants, fed up with the area's image as a "tough neighborhood" and a "ghost town," have decided to try to draw back the customers they have been losing since the 1968 disorders.

Clarence Leslie, manager of Leslie & Associates, an advertising and sales promotion firm, says the "tough" image is unjustified. "He's the man the Parkland

Business Association hired to find ways to stop the steady drain of customers from the area.

Leslie drew up a plan of action for the Parkland merchants. Phase 1, begun yesterday, calls for a clean-up and painting of neighborhood stores as a means of dispelling Parkland's "tough" image.

Yesterday the 28th and Dumesnil area was swarming with window washers, painters, sweepers and belated spring cleaners, all making a common effort to make Parkland's shopping area bright, clean, and attractive.

Twenty-eighth Street sported a refreshment center in front of the Elmore Shoe Parlor. While volunteers stood guard over the hot dogs and soft drinks donated by local storeowners for the cleanup, Mrs. Saule Mae Elmore, the Elmore store's

owner, took time out to talk to reporters. "We want this area to be just as beautiful as Guthrie Green downtown," she said. "We feel that with the mayor we have, we can make it that way."

As president of the Parkland Business Association ("it used to be 'Businessman's,' but too many women started coming in and owning businesses," she said), Mrs. Elmore has helped Parkland's shopping district gain new muscle in the past year as businesses began moving in and renovating buildings.

Mrs. Elmore and Leslie, who is also a Parkland resident, think progress has been made in the neighborhood's rejuvenation. But they agree that much remains to be done.

A number of storeowners have retired or quit recently and more gaps have

appeared in the row of storefronts along 28th Street. Many storeowners still think Parkland is an area which "just can't get off the ground," as one merchant put it.

But Mrs. Elmore points proudly to the new, air-conditioned restaurant at 28th and Dumesnil and to the wig shop that just opened across the street as evidence that Parkland is not only off the ground, but flying higher all the time.

Farther down 28th is a newly remodeled clothing store, where the owner says business is "better than ever." The A&P food store near 28th and Virginia is about to undergo a renovation in order to attract more customers.

Mrs. Elmore and Leslie have more plans for the area. In addition to more cleanups, they will ask the city government for help in acquiring shrubbery, street lights, sidewalk repairs, new litter baskets and a portable street cleaner for the neighborhood.

"The biggest problem is a bad image—and it's an unjustified one," said Leslie. "The neighborhood people won't come to shop here any more. They've been told Parkland is a bad area, and now they believe it."

The only image Parkland's shopping district projected yesterday was one of spotlessness. Every storefront window was clean. The streets were free of litter. Even the weeds in the cracks in the sidewalks were gasping their last, thanks to some weed killer donated by a grocery store.

In the midst of what was a decaying area a year ago, a bright red professional office building has sprung up. Across the street from it, a hardware and variety store is receiving its first shipment of Christmas toys today.

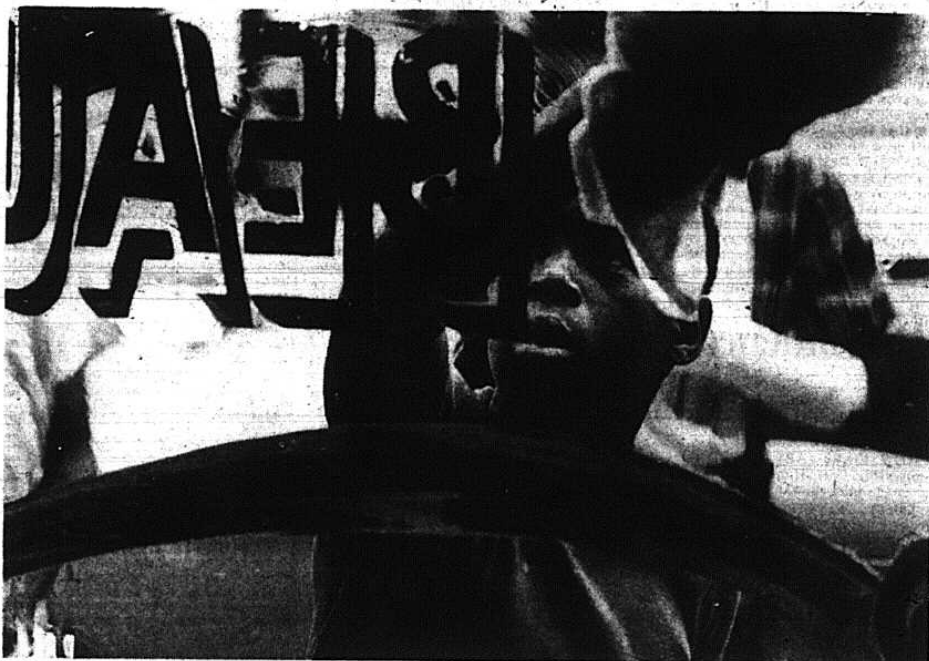
Mrs. Frances Friel, co-owner of the store, is a vocal booster of Parkland.

"I wish the papers wouldn't print that we are a ghost town down here, because we're not," she said proudly. "If it were as bad as the papers say it is, do you think I'd let my little child play right out on the street?"

Frank Habich, who walks a city patrolman's beat in Parkland by day, came up from his Fern Creek home with his 16-year-old son, Frank Jr., to lend a hand in the cleanup. He has an optimistic view of the neighborhood that is typical of the merchants he serves.

"My beat is quiet," he says. "It's just as safe down here as anywhere."

After two years, the metal grills across Parkland doors may finally be coming down.



Staff Photo by Thomas Mitchell

LIONEL HAMILTON, 14, HELPS CLEAN UP BY SCRUBBING A BEAUTY SHOP WINDOW