



# MARKTOWN UPDATE

A publication of the Marktown Historic District

February 2003

## ***We're in Ripley's - Believe it or Not!***

I think that most common asked question about Marktown is "Are we really in *Ripley's Believe it or Not?*" And the answer is always the same ... "YES we sure are!" Exactly how we got there has never been told but I do have a bit of history in relation to this most unique fact.

The original nationally syndicated sketch appeared in newspapers across this country in the October 16, 1967 and was based upon a photograph. The photo was taken at the intersection of Pine Avenue and Spring Street and depicts much of Spring Street.

The first house on the left is 408 Spring Street while that on the right is the 407 portion of the 405/407 Spring Street Building. In front of 407 Spring Street is John Sirovy's Cadillac. Just which one of his Caddy's this is we may never know but knowing John all of these years he probably still owned it up to the time of the garage fire two years ago.

We know that the original illustration was based upon a photograph. The original photo was first published in Marktown's Golden Jubilee book published in 1967 and was provided to Ripley's by the Marktown Golden Jubilee Committee. Mrs. Henry (Dorothy) Barnett of 407 Prospect Street was the person responsible for the original correspondence and photo for this project.

As you can see, the card reads "*Marktown, a community in Indiana with narrow streets patterned after towns in Switzerland and parks its cars on the sidewalks - and the people walk in the roadways.*"

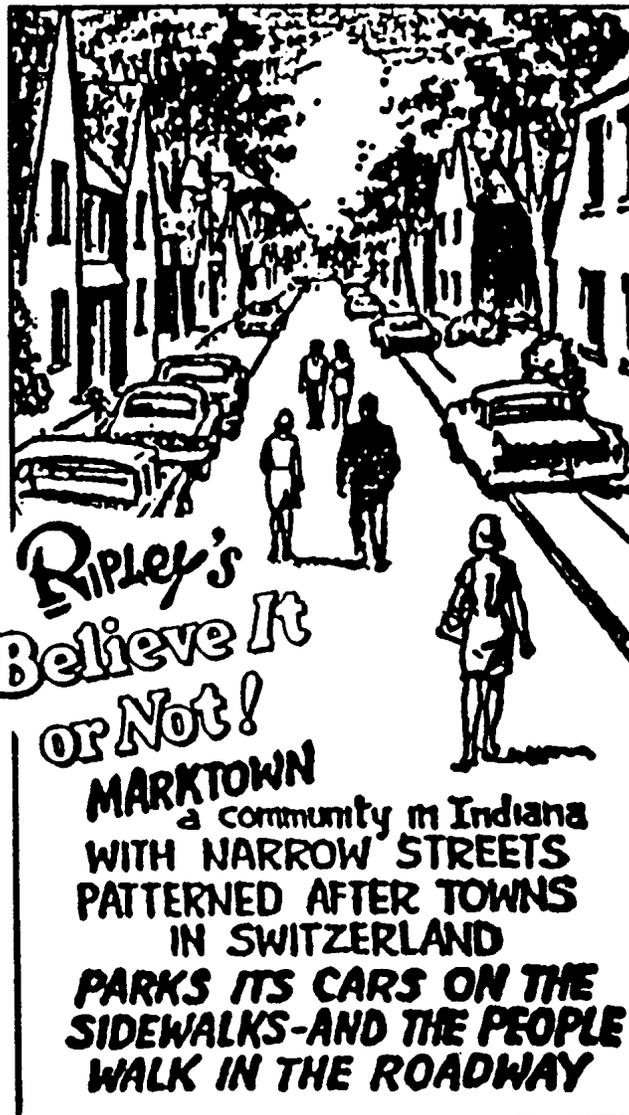
We have never been able to figure out where they got the reference to Switzerland, for Marktown's architect Howard Van Doren Shaw was never known to have visited that country.

What we do know is that Mr. Shaw had studied the city of Port Sunlight and the town of Letchworth, both in England.

Mr. Shaw was very fond of English architectural design and based not only the town plan on the English Garden City Concept but also executed the design of the houses in what is known at Tudor Revival which is as viable today as it was eighty some years ago when the community was built.

While you will probably never see this illustration in the Sunday newspaper, we have obtained permission to reprint the illustration in note card form and in this publication.

Thanks goes to Robert Ripley for having included us in his column. Note cards are available from the Marktown Preservation Society and an original is being prepared for display in our new community.



# **What's Going on in Marktown?** by Paul A. Myers

This past year our Democratic Precinct Committeeperson, Barbara Perez invited Mayor Pastrick and several of his key staff personnel to meet with the residents of Marktown. The public meetings were held on May 30th and June 13, 2002 at the Community Center here in town. As a direct result of these meetings a list of projects was agreed upon by the residents present and the city administration. We thought that it is time to bring everyone up to speed in relation to the status of the various projects.

**Our current Community Center.** The area has been relandscaped and sod was laid in mid summer. The sod took well and should prevent the usual mud puddles this spring. The exterior lighting on the building as well as the decorative lamp poles behind the center have also been replaced or repaired. A new water faucet has been installed on the rear of the building which will aid in the maintenance of the grass and flower beds. Weeds around the building were removed and the overall appearance of the Community Building was greatly improved. As we will probably be able to utilize this building until the completion of the new center in mid 2004, the improvements are well appreciated.

**Our new Community Center.** As we reported in the December issue of UPDATE, a new center is on the drawing board. Marktown currently has the oldest and smallest community center in all of East Chicago. We have obviously outgrown the building and the new facility will be a welcomed addition to our neighborhood.

**Park Improvements.** Marktown is blessed by having over thirteen acres of public parks in our neighborhood. The new playground equipment adjacent to Pine Avenue between Grove and Park Street is being excellently maintained. The Park Department is currently looking into either repairing or replacing the 1980 sprinkler system. We hope to have an answer as to when the system will be functional early this spring.

The basketball court at Pine Avenue and Broad Street is scheduled to be resurfaced and the drain replaced. New back boards and nets will hopefully be installed early this spring. The lighting on both the basketball and tennis courts have been restored and are once again functioning on a timer system. Tennis nets are to be installed this year and once again we hope to have a tennis camp this summer for the children of our neighborhood who are interested.

The final item for the parks is that of fertilizer and weed killer. The Park Department is look-

ing into pricing for either having this service done for all of the city parks, or purchasing the equipment and supplies and having our city workers do it for us.

**Signage in our Community.** The city has ordered new street signs for all of East Chicago. The new signs have white letters on a red background. Several of the missing signs in our neighborhood have been replaced with the new signs and I am sure that the rest will be done early this year. We have also asked for additional signs to be posted near the parks. The signs are to read:

*No Cars in Park*

*No Alcoholic Beverages*

*No Unleashed Dogs*

*Caution - Children at Play*

**Street Repairs.** In 1990 the City of East Chicago began to replace the streets, sidewalks and lighting in our community. All but Oak and Spruce Avenues have been completed. The city will be bidding at least Oak Avenue in February so that it can be completed before fall of this year. Spruce Avenue will probably wait until the new community center is completed. This will permit the new street to blend harmoniously with the new community center and the off street parking that is planned into that project.

**Softball and Baseball Fields.** Early last summer the Park Department did some major repairs on the original softball field at Broad Street and 129th Street. We are still trying to figure out where to put an additional field for the children of our community. When that decision is made we are sure that the Park Department will move forward with that part of the project.

**Sewer Main Cleaning.** The Utilities Division has agreed to clean the sewer mains on a quarterly basis or as needed. They have been out working on that project several times this past year. The only time that we have experienced a problem is when the pumps kicked off due to mechanical problems. The mechanical problems have been fully resolved and all is working well at this time.

**What's Next for Marktown?** Well, that's up to you, the residents of the Marktown Historic District. Mayor Pastrick, Councilman Santos, Committeeperson Perez and many of your fellow residents have worked hard to obtain the funding for the new Community Center and the other projects mentioned herein. We need everyone's participation to make Marktown a better, cleaner and safer place to live and to raise a family. Get involved! Get active! Help make a difference!

# Getting to Know your Neighbors

Rafael Bejar is usually a quiet person who looks after his children and goes about his business without a great deal of notoriety. This past month when he was interviewed by The Times was probably one of the few times that he has spoken publicly about the neighborhood he has called home for the past eight years.

In talking to Rafael this past week he noted: "Right after I was married, we needed a place to raise our children. When we moved in here I was just looking for affordable housing and wasn't much interested in anything beyond that. I bought the house from Mrs. Alma Smith who had lived in Marktown her entire married life, some sixty plus years. While the house was in fairly good condition, it was in need of a good deal of plaster work to bring it up to a more livable condition.

"My first year or two here I parked a car in the yard and really didn't care much about what other people thought about it. Over the next few years I met some of the neighbors and older residents of the community. I learned about the architect, Howard Shaw, and the original design of this most unique community.

"After awhile I realized I didn't just buy affordable housing, I bought a remarkable piece of history. I watched tour busses come and go and I have taken the time to speak with some of the people who have toured our neighborhood. I have come to realize that Marktown doesn't just offer affordable housing, it offers an opportunity for reinvestment and revitalization that is unequalled anywhere in the Midwest.

"I grew up in Chicago, where my family knew everyone in the neighborhood, and everyone knew us. I see that same type of involvement here in Marktown, and I am glad to

be a part of the community. About a year ago I purchased a four room end unit of a Marktown quad on Spring Street. My idea wasn't to just get it ready to be rented. I wanted to see just what it would take to fully restore the property to like new, or better than new condition. I found out.

"Yes, it takes a fair amount of financial reinvestment, but more importantly it takes a commitment of man hours and inspiration to make it work. I am almost done with the inside of the property. I have rented it to a family who is really looking forward to living in Marktown



and the house that I have restored. Next on my agenda will be the restoration of the exterior of the building and a bit of new landscaping. While it's a lot of work, it's well worth it in the long run.

"Marktown is a good place to live, but it can be a great place to raise a family. What we need to do is to work together as a community and put an end to some of the social problems that confront us each day. I've noticed a great deal of positive change these past eight years and from the looks of things, a good number of other residents are working in the same direction as me.

"If we all address the problems together and quit the bickering and petty politics I think we can turn this neighborhood around in pretty short order. We can all do something to make this a better neighborhood. Let's start by cleaning up this spring and keep going on from there."



***Rafael Bejar shown here in the working on the kitchen cabinets at the recently restored interior of 408 Spring Street. Rafael is a cabinet maker by trade and has spent much of the past year restoring the property. The exterior is next!***

# PEELING PAINT AND MARKTOWN STUCCO

Between 1917 and 1942, all of the homes in the Marktown Historic District were maintained by "the Company." Once the homes were sold to the public the individuals who purchased them used a variety of paints and other products to attempt to gentrify their properties. One of the problems that has occurred from this is peeling paint on the stucco.

While not nearly all of the homes have this problem. In some cases only one half of the building has peeling paint while the remaining half is fine.

To begin with, the stucco was never intended to be painted. The original plans called for a pastel tint to be applied in the stucco materials. Evidence of this has been found on a number of properties.

About thirty to forty years ago there were a number of products on the market designed to

entire section of the building be power washed. A 2000 psi power washer was used. Extreme care was given not to damage the stucco surface. It took approximately fifteen to twenty hours to complete the power washing. It took an additional half a day to clean up all of the paint chips in the yard and on the public sidewalk and street.

The next step was the prime coat. The Glidden representative suggested mixing a special additive to the finish paint of the house and using this as the prime coat. The additive is called Bond-Prep and is mixed one part of additive to four parts of paint. The paint went on very well and bonded instantly to the cleaned stucco. The next step this spring will be to apply a finish coat and to trim out the house. If you have questions on the process, please give Paul Myers a call.



*Before: This photo does not do justice to the problem of peeling paint. Like one giant blister, the end unit of the Marktown quad has had a paint problem for nearly twenty years.*

be used with stucco. Several of these were masonry based. In most cases where the newer latex paint is peeling off we find that the problem is due to one of the masonry products used in the past.

This past year a home owner had this problem on Prospect Street. He obtained the services of the Glidden (ICI Delux Paint) factory representative for Northwest Indiana.

The first recommendation was that the



*After: While this is only the prime coat, it is obvious that the problem has been solved. As soon as the weather warms I am sure that the home owner will be back at work on the final coat of paint.*

While nearly all of the homes in the Marktown Historic District have been painted, it is nice to see that a number of homes with the original unpainted stucco finish still exist. The six room duplex at 418/420 Prospect Street and the four room duplex at 413/415 Spring Street are but two of a handful of homes that have been able to retain their original historically correct finish. The original stucco is relatively maintenance free.