

MAKING LAWRENCE SHINE



Gretchen Ertl/Eagle-Tribune

Maggie Super, associate director of the Green and Clean Program, and the Rev. Nelson Gonzalez install a temporary sign acknowledging Gonzalez's church, the Iglesia Evangelica Hispana, which "adopted" the intersection of Hancock, Bodwell and Margin streets.

Neighbors bring back beauty

◆ Lower Tower Hill is the first neighborhood targeted by a new program that aims to beautify the city.

By Shawn Regan
Eagle-Tribune Writer

LAWRENCE — Marta Rentas of Lower Tower Hill used to live in one of the city's most unattractive and garbage-strewn areas.

The sidewalks and empty lots running through her densely populated neighborhood were littered with trash and overgrown with weeds, and nobody seemed to care, she said. Rentas, who lives on Hancock Street, has recently improved her surroundings, however. But not by moving.

Encouraged by Groundwork Lawrence and Our United Neighborhood Clean Up Inc., Rentas and dozens of her neighbors have embarked on a

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mission to improve Lower Tower Hill. Recent weekends have been spent cleaning yards, sidewalks, abandoned properties and, finally, the so-called Five Corners Rotary (the intersection of Margin, Hancock and Bodwell

streets) and nearby Regan Square. Cement, weeds and litter have been replaced by manicured bushes, lilies and grass seedlings.

“We went banging on locked doors telling people to come out and help,” she said. “And you wouldn't believe how many people came out and did something. We had crowds out working — picking up garbage and weeding. People would drive by and yell ‘thanks’ and say that it's about time the city did something about the rotary and the square. Some people even stopped to help.”

Yesterday, under a gray sky and a steady drizzle, about two dozen people gathered in an empty lot next to Regan Square to inspect the fruits of their labor — a freshly planted flower garden and a new sign commemorating

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the square as the first project in Groundwork Lawrence's Clean and Green Program. The square is named for Lawrence resident Augustine Regan, who was killed overseas while serving in the U.S. military during World War II.

The Clean and Green Program is designed to encourage neighborhood involvement in the cleanup and beautification of the city, said Director Marianne Paley. Once an area is identified for improvements, businesses, service organizations and community institutions are sought to pay for and maintain the improvements, she explained.

The Regan Square improvements were sponsored by the nearby Iglesia Evangelica Hispana.

“I have always thought there was a lot of potential to do something nice at the square,” said parishioner and Lower Tower Hill resident Annery Brea. “As a neighborhood church, it's very appropriate for us to do this. We are helping to make an area beautiful and show the neighbors that Lawrence doesn't have to be an ugly place to live. We can make it beautiful and be proud of our city.”

Jennelle Graziano, of Our United Neighborhood Clean Up Inc., pledged to make the area one of the city's most attractive neighborhoods within two years.

“We're not stopping now,” she said. “We're going to totally transform this neighborhood. It bothers me that the city is so dirty. But if we can turn this problem area into a beautiful place, that will show it can be done anywhere. We want this to become contagious all over the city.”

Additional rotaries and traffic areas have already been targeted for trees, shrubs and flowers, Paley said.

On May 2, the Lawrence Rotary will adopt the rotary at Bellevue Cemetery. And Lawrence Grass-roots is looking for more areas to beautify. Anyone with suggestions for areas to be cleaned should call Paley at (978) 974-0770 or Graziano at (978) 557-1108.