"Something In Hazelwood's Air"

By MATTIE TREN'T

Before seasonal changes were affecting foliage, the residents of the upper part of Chatsworth Avenue in Hazelwood were facing dying, bare tree limbs, dying flowers and unexplainable substances coating and dripping from trees. They blamed air pollution.

"I look at the food—tomatoes and other vegetables—from my garden, and we have to eat them, but I fear what they might do to me, my husband, my grandchildren," said Rita Jones, a long-time community activist, who has been trying to draw official attention to the situation. She said of the vegetables, "Everything that looks beautiful is not good...if you eat, you're playing roulette."

By her own diagnosis and laymen's intuition, Mrs. Jones blames her eye problems on this pollution which permeates the neighborhood. Others agree, and they have signed a petition to be presented to the proper authorities.

Lillian Payne, Democratic Committeewoman in the area, said, "It chokes you, you can hardly breathe." She too described the way plants, trees and flowers were affected by this undetermined condition, "Now, we're worried about what you go to bed at night, you really choke," explained Payne.

Crystal Hill, a young adult, said, "Morning and night it affects your breathing. It's more than that." Lorraine Godfrey is "convinced something is in the air...there is something around...there's a sugary glaze on the trees...I notice the pollution through my nose." She was afraid for her family's health.

The thought that this pollution is worse was expressed again last week by Mrs. Alfreda Shelton, Director of the Hazelwood, Glen Hazel Council. She had prepared the petitions last in the summer for Jones to submit to the Environmental Protection Agency, with signatures of the residents.

"LTV Steel," she said, "has complaints?" "Oh yes, I have a number of complaints. It seems that around 5:30 p.m. and weekends it is worse...it is getting worse.

"The LTV Steel Co. (formerly J&L Steel Corporation) is in the area. Only trees and streets separate it from Chatsworth Avenue residents who are complaining the most. As people talk about the problem, the operation's name surfaces.

Shelton said when attention was directed toward environmental pollution by concerned citizens such as those involved in the Group Against Smog and Pollution (GASP), conditions were better. She recalled how it was 34 years ago, when she moved into Hazelwood and how "terrible it was" with pollutants and offensive odor.

"It was like sulfur...rotten eggs, and at times you could hardly see. It got better after the crackdown...now it is worse; the same kind of problem," said Shelton.

Both Jones and Shelton state that many residents are hesitant to complain because of economic conditions and dwindling employment. Some feel the jobs are more important than the complaints.

Alex Bodnar, president of the Chamber of Commerce of the 15th Ward encompassing Hazelwood, Greenfield, Glen Hazel and Lawrence Place, noted that "less than 1 percent of the community" is working in Hazelwood and the seriousness of the pollution problem outweighs employment and economic fears...even if more were employed there."

Bodnar noted that a "lot of people have worked there in the steel industry, some are retired, some still live there, and they feel this is their source of survival, income, jobs. It becomes a big evil paradox. They are in a beholding pattern and not providing for youth or others."

Bodnar is looking forward to the time the steel industry and its relics of the past in outdated buildings and machinery will be removed from the community along with the pollution, and Hazelwood can be redeveloped to the potential he foresees, using its natural resources as a foundation.

GASP said that many complaints such as those voiced and defined by the people of Hazelwood's Chatsworth Avenue—burning eyes, nose/throat problems—are being received from other residents of Hazelwood, Squirrel Hill, Shady Side. It is, interestingly, GASP is documenting these reports and notifying the proper officials that deal with environmental pollution.

Mark Tomash, Director, Public Relations in LTV Steel Company, Cleveland office, was informed of the complaints, and said he would telephone a response. He had not responded when this story was completed, nor did he return another telephone call made to him.