

# 'Something In Hazelwood's Air'

By MATTIE TRENT

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 substance coating and dripping from trees. They blamed the air...pollution...environmental poison.

"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, 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. Jones said she had made calls to the Environmental Protection Agency and been recommended to the Health Department.

"Heinz's office said mail the complaint in. I believe something is in the air and wheresoever you call, it seems like Hush, Hush Sweet Charlotte...Hush, Hush, Killing People..." Jones opined.

While Rosa Bell and Emma Johnson did not say they believed they were being killed, they did express grave concerns. "I can't sit out because of this...I have a bad throat...I have to stay in. I start coughing as soon as I come out. I think air pollution is more this year. I don't try to plant," said Bell.

Johnson said, "It killed the tree, squash and tomato plants. The okra is stunted and pepper plants are slick like these leaves on Jones's trees. It's like a dew, but not a dew. Okra used to be strong and tough, now it gets twisted and won't grow."

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 undefined condition. "If windows are open when 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 ever. 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."

Jones wants "soil, ground, air" tests made.

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

Did she, too, have 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 crack-down...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 Lincoln 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 only 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, and Oakland, increasingly. GASP is documenting these reports and notifying the proper offices that deal with environmental pollution.

Mark Tomasch, 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.



OMINOUS PRESENCE—Rita Jones, community activist in Hazelwood for about 19 years, is concerned about the pollution which she said is "killing foliage...killing people." (MARK C. SOUTHERS:Photo)