

Karen Murdock, Prospect Park resident

Interviewed by Laurie Stern in Prospect Park June 3, 2011

Q Start by describing what's going on behind you (at the annual Pratt Ice Cream Social)?

A This is the once a year Pratt Ice Cream Social, whose origins are lost in the mist of time. Now it's quarter of 5 and this isn't supposed to start until 5:30, but this has been an anthill of activity for the last two hours – of people bringing things in, donating things, setting things up. It's called the Pratt Ice Cream Social because it takes place here at Pratt School, but it's the neighborhood get together. It always takes place at this same time – Friday after Memorial Day weekend, so that can vary a little bit from the end of May to the beginning of June. And everyone comes.

Q What does Pratt School have to do with the neighborhood?

A It's the center – geographically and emotionally – of this neighborhood. People have lined up to testify to keep Pratt open that have never gone to Pratt, have never had kids there. It's the center of our neighborhood.

Q Say more about the neighborhood.

A It's a much beloved neighborhood. It's a stable neighborhood. There are many people who have been here 25, 30, 35, 40 years. There are many examples of kids who have grown up in this neighborhood who now have kids of their own – second or third generation. It's to some degree an isolated neighborhood because it's cut off on the east by St. Paul and on the north by University Avenue and the railroad tracks, and on the west by the river and by the U of M. So we really are the...in southeast Minneapolis it's hard to connect to the other neighborhoods, which you'll see if you climb the tower.

Q So for you personally, what do you have to do with this neighborhood?

A I've lived here almost 30 years and I spent the first ten or more of those not active in the neighborhood. And I've been – for the last 20 years, 15, 20 years – very active in the neighborhood. And it's something I can do for future generations. I can help to preserve this neighborhood.

Q Why does it matter?

A Because it's a wonderful place to live.

Q What's the relationship between this neighborhood and University Avenue?

A University Avenue, of course, goes through the whole neighborhood. We end...our western border is Oak Street, and it's the main artery of the neighborhood and, of course, the main commercial area of the neighborhood. And it's also what people who have never been in the neighborhood know of Prospect Park. If you say you live near the witch's hat tower, they know what you're talking about because millions of people have gone to the University or have driven through this neighborhood on I-94, on University Avenue, have noticed the tower, but have never gotten off that main drag and

actually come through the neighborhood. Which is understandable because it's not that easy of a neighborhood to find your way through. It took me years. The streets are curvy, they double back on one another sometimes. It's hilly topography, you can't see around curves, things aren't numbered. So it's a little bit intimidating for people to drive through if they've never been in the neighborhood.

Q How do you think light rail is going to affect it?

A Well, it's going to be a terrible mess for the next three years, that's for sure. It already is. I don't think it will affect the people in the neighborhood, particularly, but I think it will affect the businesses along University Avenue. I think it's going to be a disaster for them. Many of the businesses here are family owned, they're not part of a chain. They can't get along for three years with the business as down as it's going to be. It'll be like having another three-year recession on top of the recession we've already had. So I fear for many of the businesses along University Avenue.

Q And what do you think about the future of this neighborhood?

A It'll still be here. It'll still be loved. The ice cream social will still be going on, on the Friday after Memorial Day weekend. This is a neighborhood that's in it for the long haul.