

Oral History breakfast brings out memories of North End

By Gloria Russell
The Sun Staff

WESTERLY — A dozen North End residents met Saturday to discuss a project geared to protect and preserve the culture of the enclave — and with them, brought memories and memorabilia from the distant past.

The North End Oral History Project, to be completed with a grant from the Rhode Island Foundation, is part of the mission of the North End Crime Watch and Community Development. Over the next few months, interviews will be conducted with persons having information about the area between 1930 and 1990.

One of the first to arrive at the Community Building offices shared by Crime Watch officials and Westerly Police was John Restelli, a lifelong resident whose parents, Edmond and Mary Restelli, opened a small store on Pleasant Street at the height of



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Carla White and her husband Chris, left, listen to **John Restelli** talk about a photo of his family's old North End store.

the Great Depression.

"Most of [the neighborhood stores] were almost the same, but the owners were always watching out for one another. There were always a lot of stories about the good times and the bad times, but they were good to one another and helped one another," John Restelli said. "They may have been competitors but they were friends."

He remembered the penny candy his mother sold, the joy of children choosing from the large assortment she had, and the people who always came in to buy the Italian grating cheese.

John came across a book of charge accounts his parents used during those grim days and remarked, "Some people charged and paid, and some people didn't."

He mentioned his sister Edith, who worked at Town Hall and was so well liked. She was called "the whistler" because she habitually whistled while walking along the street. His other sister, Jean Olsen, lives in Waterford. It was on South Joseph Street (known by most people as Central Park) where he and his wife Karen raised their four children.

John has been encouraged by the ongoing rehabilitation project along the streets he knows so well. He was so disturbed by the deterioration of once well-cared for properties in the North End that he was prompted to acquire several of them to keep them from falling into disrepair.

His career as television repairman was interrupted briefly when he was sent to Korea by the military in 1953; the same year his neighbor Joseph Rizzo went into the service and was sent to Korea. Rizzo lived all his life at 4 South Joseph St. — the home his father bought in



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Frank Terranova looks at a photo he brought of the Italo-American Cittadini Social Club in the 1940s. John Restelli brought a photo, left, of the Restelli store on the corner of Pleasant and Pierce Street in the 1940s.



1925. That's where he and his wife Jean, married over 40 years, raised their two daughters.

Rizzo remembers going to the High Street School when there were no buses, and the long walk to the Central Theater in Pawcatuck to see a movie. He worked at the Barbone Service Company, a heating and plumbing com-

pany, before assuming duties at General Dynamics Electric Boat Division. "I had roughly 30 years there," he said.

Rizzo recalls that it was World War II that finally brought mail delivery to Central Park and the streets that were developing around it.

"Before that we used to get General Delivery at the post

office," he said. "So many people were in the military, they had to have house to house delivery."

Former Pierce Street resident **Frank Terranova**, the son of Frank and Immaculata Terranova, was born and raised in their home at 4 1/2 Pierce St.

"I was right in the middle of all the action, good and bad," he chuckled.

He brought with him a picture of the seven charter members of the Italo-American Cittadini Social

Club that included his father, Jimmie Masucci, Louis Giuliano, Roland Longolucco, Joseph Cozzolino, Jimmie Sposato and Santo Sposato.

"It was first located where the North End Social Club is now. We used to look forward as kids to Christmastime when they held a party for us," Terranova said.

"Folklore has it that next to the Social Club, there was a brick building where there was a small room about 15 by 30 that had formerly been Gallo's Barber Shop. It had one table where the men played cards and drank homemade wine and beer. It was on a side facing the present North End Social Club building, and when [club members] had the opportunity to do so, they moved into that building. It wasn't until after WW II when materials became available that the new Italo-American Club was constructed on Pond Street."

Terranova married Roberta Radicioni while serving a two-year hitch in the Army. He and his wife became the parents of eight children. He went to work for General Dynamics as a pipefitter, became financial secretary-treasurer to the union local, then business manager, and finally special representative of the United Association of Pipefitters, a post he held for 14 years prior to retirement.

Adrian (Pete) Pelchat, one of the driving forces of the North End Neighborhood Crime Watch, moved to the area at an early age when his family rented a house at 95 Pierce St. He later bought the home and lives there with his wife Anna. Now retired from the Operating Engineers Union, Pelchat helped his father with his small trucking business before working in the construction field.

When the neighborhood began to deteriorate after falling prey to absentee landlords, Pelchat and the Rev. Joshua McClure of the Pleasant Street Baptist Church met with local police, and as a result formed the Crime Watch. The rehabilitation project for the North End soon followed. Pelchat credits the cooperation of town officials, state agencies and non-profit groups along with the availability of grants for getting the revitalization project off the ground. Now he hopes the Oral History Project will be the tie that binds each endeavor.

Carla White, manager of the Crime Watch office, is arranging interviews for those who wish to participate in the program. She can be reached at (401) 596-1674 on Mondays and Fridays, from 9 to 1. David Panciera, project director, may be reached at (401) 596-7352.