

LEWIS PLACE (54)

LOCATION

Lewis Place is defined by Martin Luther King Drive on the North, Delmar Boulevard on the South, Newstead Avenue on the East, and Walton on the West.

HISTORY

The Lewis Place neighborhood owes its name to the oldest African-American private street in St. Louis. Laid out in 1890 by the family of William J. Lewis, Lewis Place is a two-block street with a center parkway lined on both sides with homes built between 1890 and 1928.

Lewis Place residents played an active part in fighting racial discrimination during the 1940s by defeating the use of racial covenants to keep blacks from buying homes in Lewis Place. This helped lead to the famous *Shelley vs. Kraemer* case that, although based in St. Louis, struck down restrictive covenants across the entire nation.



Lewis Place was placed on the National Register of Historic Landmarks on September 15, 1980. It is also recognized as a City Historic District.

CHARACTERISTICS

The Lewis Place neighborhood is a mix of one- and two-story houses. Likewise, it is a mix of vibrant, well-kept housing and boarded-up, deteriorating houses.

The primary recreational facilities in the neighborhood are Beckett Playground and Beckett Park Recreational Center. Although there is commercial activity spread out intermittently along Dr. Martin Luther King Drive, the intersection at Walton Avenue forms a niche in the northeast corner of the neighborhood where most of the businesses that still operate are located. The largest employer in the neighborhood, Raskas Foods Inc., is located on the eastern edge of the neighborhood at the Page and Newstead intersection.

The Lewis Place neighborhood has been plagued by a drug problem in which both drug usage and buying and selling have been major obstacles to building a healthy community. The neighborhood has been very strong in its conviction to fight the drug problem by peacefully demonstrating in drug marches through the streets of their neighborhoods in the past couple of years.

INSTITUTIONS AND ORGANIZATIONS

Youth attend nearby schools situated just outside the Lewis Place neighborhood. Some of these include John Marshall Elementary, West Side Christian Academy, Euclid-Washington Montessori, and Turner Middle School. An incredible asset to the neighborhood is Ranken Technical College, which is located along the eastern edge of the neighborhood.

Ranken Community Development Corporation was incorporated in 1994 as a nonprofit venture between Ranken Technical College and the St. Louis Association of Community Organizations (SLACO). RCDC's mission is to build and sell single-family homes to individuals and to families meeting low- to moderate-income guidelines. It is committed over the long term to building houses in the city's Lewis Place and Vandeventer neighborhoods.



Religious institutions in Lewis Place are many, including Hopewell Baptist Church, Oasis of Life Church, Lane Tabernacle, New White Stone M.B. Church, and Pleasant Green M.B. Church. The area's Catholic church, St. Ann's Shrine, provides many social services for community members, such as medical/personal care, recreational activities, and transportation. St. Elizabeth's Senior Day Care Center is operated by the Daughters of Charity; it offers nutritional meals, arts and crafts, and a quality, caring supervised recreational program for mature adults.

Also located in the neighborhood is the headquarters for the Weed and Seed program. The Human Development Corporation operates its Northside Center in the Lewis Place neighborhood as well.

Firefighters Institute for Racial Equality (F.I.R.E.) is a group of active and retired firefighters. They purchased and refurbished the F.I.R.E. building at 1020 North Taylor to house meeting, recreational, educational, and instructional programs for their families and the community.

PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

The unique partnership of educational training and community-directed development helps position the Ranken Community Development Corporation (RCDC) as a key player in the ongoing revitalization of the Lewis Place and Vandeventer neighborhoods. RCDC works closely with the 18th Ward Alderman and various city agencies. The City administers the Federal Community Development Block Grant (CDBG) funds that serve as the construction subsidy. In Lewis Place, RCDC has recently finished building new homes on both the north and the south sides of the 4500 block of Newberry Terrace.