

NORTHWEST REAL ESTATE

Local artist turns the spotlight on Tenley

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Current Correspondent

Before there was Wilson, before there was Deal and before there was the park at Fort Reno, there was Reno City.

In the decades after the Civil

War, a bustling neighborhood of homes, shops and three churches occupied the land surrounding the old military fort in Tenleytown. The residents were primarily freed slaves and working-class whites. But by the late 1930s, the neighborhood was gone. The government had acquired the land for a park and public schools, causing the displacement of most black Tenleytown residents.

The story of "Reno City" is one of the local tales told in "A Cultural History of My

Neighborhood," artist Gail Rebhan's new photo-collage tribute to her Tenleytown neighborhood, which documents historic changes to the area.

Four mural-size collages, including the panel about Fort Reno, are on view through May 15 in the windows at 4600

Wisconsin Ave., the former site of Babe's Billiards. Smaller versions of these four panels, plus eight additional collages, are on view at American University's Katzen Arts Center.

"A Cultural History of My Neighborhood" is a collaboration between

the artist, Iona Senior Services and the American University Museum.

"My art has been autobiographical, and it's about time and how things change over time," explained Rebhan, a photography professor at Northern Virginia

Community College who has lived in American University Park since 1981.

Two past projects documented the growth of her sons and provided an intimate look at the life of her aging mother.

"My past books have been about changes in my family over time, and time and change is certainly an element of this work. I've just expanded from my family to my neighborhood," she said.

The panels juxtapose old and new photographs and memorabilia like phone-book pages and newspaper articles. Layering these items together with some of her own writing, she shows "how today's city is built upon the past," according to a description of the exhibit.

In the panels, she visits a dozen key neighborhood spots, including the Friendship Terrace Retirement Community, former site of the Washington Home for Foundlings; the block of Brandywine and Wisconsin, the very site of the collage installation; and the block across the street, where The Dancing Crab now sits.

"The collage lists the types of businesses that were on that block," says Rebhan. "In the



Artist Gail Rebhan puts local history in her photo collages of the Tenleytown neighborhood.

1930s and 1940s, there were two shoe repairs, and today there are none. I think that speaks to our society and how things are now considered more disposable."

Rebhan also discovered several laundries on that block, one of which was designated a "colored" laundry — the only solid evidence of segregation that she found.

"Local historians may already know these stories," said Rebhan. "Judith Helm wrote a well-regarded book on the topic. But I hope to bring this history to a broader audience."

There are two upcoming community events related to this project. On May 1 at 3:30 p.m., visi-

tors can meet the artist and view the photo collages at the Wisconsin Avenue site. This will be immediately followed by a free concert at 4 p.m. at The City Church, 4100 River Road, sponsored by Iona Senior Services. Iona's facility at 4125 Albemarle St. will also host a reception after the concert.

From May 16 through 28, Rebhan will be collecting oral histories, photographs and memorabilia related to Tenleytown at Iona Senior Services. This raw material will form the basis of new photo collages.

For more information, visit gailrebhan.com.