

SATURDAY, MAY 11, 1996 ■ THE TIMES

PARADE OF NEIGHBORHOODS

THESE OLD HOUSES

Homeowners who have restored dilapidated buildings and reclaimed neighborhoods from the grasp of neglect are in the spotlight. Stop by next weekend and see the fruits of their labor.



Times photo — BOBBY SANCHEZ

Dona Howell works on her bungalow in Kenwood, which will be open for tours May 19. Remodeling has taken her 3 1/2 years, working nights and weekends. "It only takes one to get the ball rolling," she said. "It's to your advantage to make your property increase in value."

Kenwood: Nightmare shack into a dream house



Times photo - BOBBY SANCHEZ

Howell has retained as much as possible of the 1929 house's original features, including the vintage bathtub and plumbing.

By JUDY STARK
Times Homes Editor

When public television does "This Old House — The Neighborhood," they'll probably film it in the Historic Kenwood section of St. Petersburg.

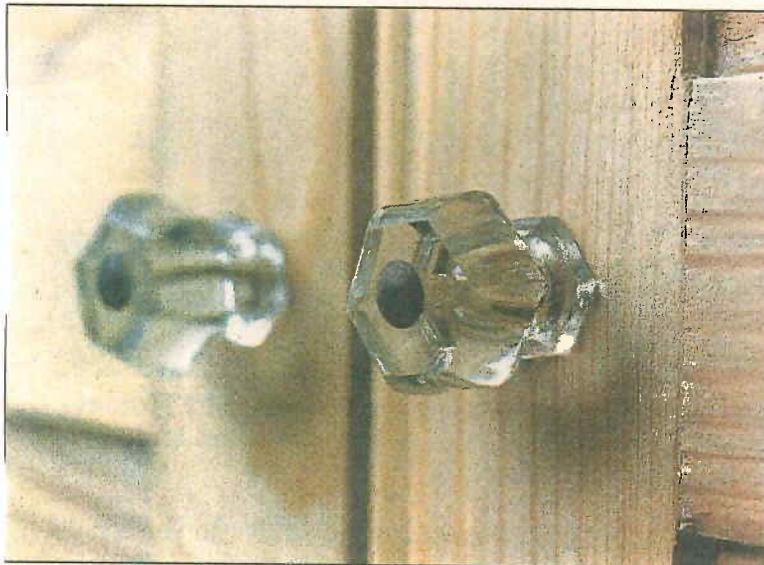
An enthusiastic neighborhood association and energetic rehabbers are putting Kenwood on the map as the city's bungalow district. Freshly painted houses, lovingly restored — many of them once tumbledown wrecks — dot the streets between I-275 and 34th Street and from Central Avenue to Ninth Avenue N. Attractive street signs hang on the corners. And the neighborhood association meetings sound like a remodelers' trade show as residents share tips and offer suggestions.

About 15 homes are expected to be on view May 19 for the Parade of Neighborhoods.

Dona Howell, 44, has been working long hours the last two weeks on the 1929 bungalow she has been restoring nights and weekends for the last 3½ years at 2511 Third Ave. N. By next weekend, when she'll open it for tours, the kitchen should be done; the wallpaper hung; the newly stripped and refinished woodwork back in place. The original glass knobs will be reinstalled on the built-in pantry. She'll still have some work to do; Howell estimates she's two months away from the final touches.

Still, the progress is remarkable. Where ceilings had collapsed and plaster fallen away from walls, solid new material is in place. Where termites gnawed away

Please see **KENWOOD 5D**



Times photo — BOBBY SANCHEZ

The original glass knobs have been reinstalled on a built-in pantry in the dining room of Dona Howell's home.

Kenwood from 1D

the living-room floor, wood from a bedroom has been seamlessly patched in.

Once this house was a neighborhood eyesore, a falling-down wreck the city boarded up. "It was easily the worst house in the neighborhood," said Bob Jeffrey, a senior planner with the city, a member of its Neighborhood Partnership Team and a former president of the Historic Kenwood Neighborhood Association. Howell bought it for \$10,400 in back taxes.

When she ripped off the boards and saw what she'd purchased, "I thought, 'Oh, my gosh, it's Nightmare on Third Avenue,'" she recalled a few days ago, seated on her front porch, as she turned the pages of a photo album, displaying "before" pictures. The roof was in terrible shape; there was major water damage; one small room simply collapsed; "and the place was full of termites. The little varmints were everywhere."

"It's fun to look at this album now," Howell said. "I can see how much I've done."

Shortly after she bought the house, Howell discovered there was about \$15,000 in liens against the

house for city maintenance. With help from Jeffrey and from city council member Leslie Curran, she worked with the city to do some immediate clean-up, in exchange for which the liens were forgiven. "If I hadn't had those two, I don't know what I would have done," she said gratefully.

Howell is a full-time maintenance worker at Bethany Towers, a senior high-rise, and recently took on a part-time job at Lutheran Apartments to earn more money to finish the work on this house. She used the skills she learned on the job to remodel the bungalow, where her mother, Shirley, will live. She hired out the electrical, vinyl-siding, roofing and flooring work, but everything else, she's done herself.

Heaving that first sheet of drywall almost killed her, she remembered, but now she can lift one without thinking twice. She recalled the first time a friend brought over a table saw. "I said, 'Oh, my gosh, I'm not sure I can do this,' but I got it the first time," she said proudly. "You've got to get your fear out of the way and just go for it."

In a neighborhood where house after house is undergoing renovation, "we steal ideas from each other," Howell said. She replaced the broken sash cords on her double-hung windows with rope; then a neighbor suggested using chain, which won't break.

"This is how you learn," Howell said, and before she reinstalls the trim on her front windows, the cord will be replaced with chain. When she saw an unusual plaque on a nearby home indicating the date when that house was built, she learned it was made by another neighbor. Now a similar plaque adorns the front of Howell's house.

"It only takes one to get the ball rolling," she said. "It's to your advantage to make your property increase in value." She estimated she has put \$15,000 to \$20,000 into the bungalow, "and I could ask \$70,000 and get it. I know the value's there."

One weekend four people stopped while she was at work to ask if the house was for sale or for rent. "I told them no! I've earned it. I want to enjoy it."

Once this job is finished, Howell will turn to her own home across the street, where she has lived the last 12 years. Emboldened by her new skills, she plans to do major remodeling of the kitchen and bath, work she once would have been afraid to approach on her own.

"Everyone in the neighborhood is starting to fix up their home," she said. "This is a family-oriented neighborhood. We go chit-chat from door to door. The kids all get along. Our area has grown together as a community."