The 3600 block of "Marvelous Marvine" was so transformed it won an award.

Neighbors unite through cleanup, repair effort

By Stephen Salisbury

The Inquirer

It wasn't a bad block in the olden days — more than a couple of months ago. There were no crumbling rowhouse shells, no mountains of trash, no walls tagged with black and silver spray paint. Just an ordinary block in the city, candy wrappers blowing along the sidewalk, blank rowhouse fronts, peeling house paint. Then Lawrence Burgess, who has lived on the 3600 block of North Marvin Street in Hunting Park for nine years, saw his house start to fade, couldn't work, and began to think.

"The day I just looked around and I said, 'I'm tired of living like this,'" he said Sunday afternoon. "I want to come outside to some beauty. I'd come out and there'd be papers flying around. Peeling paint. No one knew anyone else." It was an epiphany for the 46-year-old block captain. He organized a meeting of neighbors about two months ago, and, may be not surprisingly, it touched a chord.

People were ready for change. They were ready to sweep, paint, decorate, plant, repair, and redo the most cow-town rowhouses with the bowed fronts and porches that dominate the block.

And on Friday night, the 2600 block — it calls itself Marvelous Marvin now — won the top prize as the city's best "clean block" at an awards banquet at the Sheet Metal Workers Union Building on Columbus Boulevard.

Sunday, neighbors were out — some cleaning, some chatting, some just enjoying the words of crisp autumn sunlight.

There was Mr. Bill, who's been on Mar- vine since 1960, when he was only the third African American to move in, standing with a broom. Used to be an Irish block.

Block captain Laurence Burgess and his wife, Sharon, sit in the mosaic 'Healing Garden' at the corner of Marvin and Venango.

Block

Continued from B1

he said, "just a plain, ordinary block." Jackie Hargrove tended the "Healing Garden" created by block residents with the aid of CosCom Art at Lurgan, a Manayunk art organization. The gar- den, with its mosaic wall, bench, and pots at the corner of Marvin and Venango Streets, is in part a memorial to Hargrove's mother, Margaret.

"We all did this," she said with great pride and satisfaction. "We bought the tiles from the Home Depot and broke them up."

William Hilton, who lives around the corner on Old York Road, dropped by to see Burgess. Hilton, a fine woodworker, built flower boxes for many of the houses. The first, on Burgess' porch, has a carved red Phillips 'P.' Down the block, another house has a Marvelous Marvine sign carved from wood.

The boxes and decorative wood, Hilton said, were his idea.

"I wanted to help out," he said.

Neighbors started meeting regularly in response to Bur- gess' plea. They decided they needed to paint their house fronts, patch walls, plant flower- bed ends, and decorate, decorate, decorate.

On Sunday, lots of homes had fancy strings of plastic leaves in full color wrapped around porch and step rail- ing. When the season changes, so will the leaves. Christ- mas lights are on the way.

Veronica Bashir, who's lived on the block with her husband, James, for 27 years, said the transformation on Marvin can certainly be seen in the neat and decora-}

Lucille Edwards decorated her North Marvin Street front porch with artificial flowers and a leprechaun.

Jackie Hargrove stands under a portrait of her mother, Margaret, in the neighborhood's "Healing Garden," built in her honor.