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Sunday, August 29, 2010

Stone Soup block party Kitchen burned in March 2009



Volunteer Anthony Shivers grills hamburgers and hot dogs yesterday at the annual King Street block party. (T&G Staff/MARK C. IDE)

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WORCESTER — The windows are still covered with plywood and the singed exterior is flecked with soot-black streaks, reminders of a March 2009 fire at 4 King St. The heavily damaged building remains the once and future home of the Stone Soup Community Center, however. At least that was the view expressed by many neighborhood residents and center supporters at a block party on King Street yesterday.

The event drew a crowd to the heart of the city's Main South section and fanned hopes that Stone Soup would rise from the ashes and open its doors to the community once more. "This is an event that brings neighborhoods and different organizations together," said Lucelia DeJesus, a Stone Soup member. "It brings lots of people together that sometimes just don't get together."

The Stone Soup building housed programs such as Worcester Earn-A-Bike, which taught children to build their own bicycle from used parts; Toxic Soil Busters/Worcester Roots Project, which works to remove lead from soil; Ex-Prisoners and Prisoners Organizing for Community Advancement; after-school, summer and vacation programs for children.

The community center is missed by many in the neighborhood, but especially the kids, Ms. DeJesus said. "It was a place where young people could come in and use the computers or the library," she said. "About 80 percent of the kids who had bikes in the neighborhood got them through the Earn-A-Bike program."

The rebuilding process has faced challenges, including insurance issues, Clifford Reiss, a community center member, said. "It's been an uphill battle but it's going well. We're doing the work that's necessary to get a settlement and start the rebuilding process."

For now, the services once housed at Stone Soup are scattered around the city, but the spirit of the center remains intact, Ms. DeJesus said.

"Stone Soup is not a building," she said. "Stone Soup is a collective of activists and artists in the community that got together because of a common vision, who wanted to be conscious of things that are not right and work together to make it right. These are groups that are really committed to community, to organizing and to just being good neighbors."

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