

METRO

THE PLAIN DEALER

Spiffing up city's CanalWay could pay

Groups, volunteers sought to help make byway easy on eyes

TOM BRECKENRIDGE
Plain Dealer Reporter

In Tim Donovan's grand vision, a scenic byway that overlays two of the city's grittiest arteries can be an engine of change for hardscrabble neighborhoods.

But first, Donovan wants to pick up the trash and paint a few fences along West 25th Street/Pearl Road and Broadway.

Both routes are part of the CanalWay Ohio Scenic Byway, where motorists can find their way by following distinctive red, white and blue signs.

The byway is a federally designated, 110-mile route stretching from Cleveland to Dover/New Philadelphia in Tuscarawas County.

The route runs near remnants of the Ohio & Erie Canal, the trade-and-transportation waterway that helped build Ohio in the 19th century.

A swath of the canal is now a National Heritage Corridor. The byway, with its web of state and local routes, carries tourists to the corridor's cultural, historic and entertainment attractions.

To the south, eye-pleasing sites include historic Hale Farm and Village in Bath Township and the Cuyahoga Valley National Park.

Farther north, up the Cuyahoga River valley, the byway runs through less scenic landscapes. Weedy lots, vacant storefronts and run-down homes dot the routes along Broadway and West 25th Street, on the way to such attractions as the West Side Market and the Warehouse District.

The CanalWay byway is among only 96 routes nationwide recognized by the U.S. Department of Transportation for their historic and scenic value.

But there's no federal money to maintain the byway, leaving Donovan, director of the Ohio Canal Corridor, and neighborhood development groups to drum up the cash and volunteers to try to maintain the urban streets.

Ohio Canal Corridor works with the nonprofit Court Community Service, which supplies eight-person crews every Sunday during the spring and summer.

The crews — lawbreakers working off community-service sentences — pick up litter, paint rusting cyclone fences and tidy up Broadway and West 25th Street, an effort that Donovan dubbed the "Byway Blitz."

The crews fill 300 garbage bags a month.

Local businesses allow workers to use their dumpsters, and some businesses have begun their own cleaning efforts.

To build on the momentum, Donovan will shortly send postcards to hundreds of businesses along the byway.

SEE CANAL | B5

CANAL

FROM B1

Spiffing byway up just might pay off

He wants to explain the byway's significance and invite business owners to three public meetings in October, where Donovan will pitch a more concentrated cleaning and neighborhood-development effort.

In a recent news release, the Ohio Canal Corridor described the weekend cleanups as a "small step in a long journey" to transform two historic arteries into roads that deserve the "scenic" label.

The transformation includes restoring the tired homes and businesses that flank the byway.

Four years ago, the Ohio Canal Corridor joined community development groups and the Urban Design Center of Northeast Ohio to craft bold redevelopment plans for the neighborhoods. The plans are replete with new housing, parks, trails to the Cuyahoga valley and pedestrian-friendly streets.

The approach is exemplified in Old Brooklyn, where the

110-year-old Krather Building on Pearl Road is scheduled for a \$1.8 million makeover, including street-level retail and 18 market-rate apartments.

The developer was intrigued by the byway and by historic tax credits available for the renovation, said Tom Collins, commercial properties manager for Old Brooklyn Community Development Corp.

Collins hopes the byway will attract more investors as it is packaged with other neighborhood amenities, such as the Cleveland Metroparks Zoo and CanalWay Ohio's Towpath Trail, which will push through the Cuyahoga industrial valley in the coming years.

In Slavic Village, the byway designation helped fuel a push for stronger design standards along Broadway, said Marie Kittredge, executive director of Slavic Village Development.

"We need to preserve the function and the role Broadway has always played in this neighborhood," Kittredge said.

To view a map of the CanalWay Ohio Scenic Byway, go to www.canalwayohio.com.

To reach this Plain Dealer reporter: tbreckenridge@plaind.com, 216-999-4695