



Tribune photograph by ALLYN DIVITO

Richard Hebert bought the neglect Spanish-style home at 2900 Seventh Ave. N. because he wanted to live in a real neighbor-

hood. He bought the house for \$180,000 and spent \$100,000 on renovations, which he did almost all by himself.

Polishing up the gems

Richard Hebert's 66-year-old Spanish style house is an architectural gem among many in Kenwood. Hebert and his neighbors are refurbishing neglected homes as part of the effort to resurrect the area

By JOHN STEBBINS
Tribune Staff Writer

They may never hold a tag day for Richard Hebert, a successful businessman and local antique dealer.

But his neighbors in the Historic Kenwood area

ST. PETERSBURG

did something better.

They gave him an award for all the time, money and effort he has put in to rehabilitate the large, Spanish-style house that dominates the heart of the neighborhood and has sparked others to follow suit.

"It has been a lot of work and effort," Hebert admits, "but I love the Kenwood neighborhood. Where else could I get a house like this?"

Hebert and scores of others in Kenwood, located near the Central Plaza shopping district, are working to reclaim the charming but neglected area. The neighborhood is part of the city's Great Neighborhood Partnership program to resurrect faltering areas of the city.

Hebert's architectural gem is a symbol of the area's renaissance.

Jerry Notaro, a founder of the Kenwood

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Neighborhood Association, said Hebert and other neighbors in the middle class community are working with the city to achieve their goals.

About five years ago, Hebert lived in a condominium on exclusive Tierra Verde, but he longed for a real house in a real neighborhood.

"I told my real estate agent that I wanted to buy a Spanish-style house," Hebert said. "But most of the ones he showed me were in the Old Northeast or Pink Streets area and were too much money."

One day the agent called and said a handyman special, Spanish-style house had gone on the market and was available immediately.

"I saw it. I loved it. I bought it," said Hebert, 55.

Hebert bought the 4,200-square-

foot house in 1987 for \$180,000. Over the years, he estimates, he has spent an additional \$100,000 to turn the tattered relic into one of the city's showcase residences.

But Hebert didn't hire a bunch of people to do the work. He did most of the back-breaking labor himself.

For instance, the roof was covered only in tar paper. Hebert imported red roofing tiles from Guatemala and then took them up and put them on himself.

"I read a book and it became clear to me what needed to be done," Hebert said.

To the casual eye, the house appears to be in about as perfect shape as any 66-year-old house

could be. But Hebert said there are still many things that need to be done to keep him occupied.

Call it pride of ownership.

If this house were next to the water or in the Old Northeast, it would be worth \$600,000 to \$700,000, Hebert said. As it is, the house may be the most expensive one in the neighborhood at about \$400,000 to \$500,000.

His next-door neighbor's house is a modest cinder block bungalow. One block down is a newly-renovated, shingle-style house that is easily worth \$250,000.

"There are a lot of hidden gems out in the neighborhoods," Notaro said. "You just got to look for them and be willing to work."