



ANC organizers Sandra Albertson and Lorraine Alarie flank volunteers Trudi Jones and Linda Bruins.

New year, new opportunities for Simpson-Ogden area

By KATHRYN LYZUN *tb source*

On Saturday, residents of the Simpson-Ogden neighbourhood should expect some visitors dropping by with important news.

Action for Neighbourhood Change, an organization determined to restore safety and dignity to the troubled area, will be sending volunteers door to door asking for input on the neighbourhood's future.

"We will be going to people who live here in the area and providing them with more information about the project, and inviting them to come to our Visioning and Planning session (on Jan. 14)," said ANC community development facilitator Sandra Albertson.

"I think people need to understand that this project has to be driven by the neighbourhood and by the residents themselves."

The ANC has been working in the area for about a year, but Albertson said their distributed newsletters weren't getting enough attention. They decided that to really make some progress, they needed to be face-to-face with those who should be concerned.

Simpson-Ogden, once a thriving business community, is

now littered with dilapidated houses and boarded up shops. It hosts a number of seedy bars that attract rough crowds and add to the neighbourhood's unfavourable reputation.

But there are also about 5,000 people living there, many of whom have been there all their lives. Linda Bruins has lived in her character home for 31 years, and said she was ready to stand up for her neighbourhood.

"I just have to remember that when people (speak negatively) about this area, that they don't know what they're talking about," she said. "We receive a lot of negative publicity, you know we have the bars in the area, and it's usually the ones coming into the area looking for parties that cause the problems. It gives us a bad look."

Bruins said she had heard negative things before moving there with a young family herself, but instantly fell in love with it.

"I know all my neighbours, and they're good people," she said. "We're like family."

Bruins had been actively involved in the community policing program before volunteering with the ANC, and said she hoped for a good turnout

on Jan. 14 because there are some big concerns that need to be addressed.

"Number one will be safety. I'm not afraid to walk my street at night, but there are areas that you need to watch," she said. "The second biggest complaint I hear is about dilapidated houses with absentee landlords. I would like to see better building codes so we're not left with these empty eyesores."

Albertson agreed that poverty, abuse and safety are issues that need to be addressed, but that they need to find ways to start working on these huge areas. That, she said, is why it is important for the community to talk together.

"We're very optimistic," she said. "There are some that are skeptical, they think, 'what can we do?' But most of them love this area. They grew up here, their families are here, and hopefully their future generations can live here."

Volunteers are hitting the streets Jan. 7, with the Visioning and Planning event happening Jan. 14 at the ANC centre on Simpson St. Interested people can call 626-1765 to find out how to get involved.