

# Looking for rebirth and building a better Slavic Village

BY [RYAN GRZYBOWSKI](#) • [CIVIC ENGAGEMENT](#), [COMMUNITY JOURNALISM](#), [DEVELOPMENT](#), [ECONOMY](#) • SEPTEMBER 4, 2024



*Slavic Village light up sign on Fleet Ave. near the 77 exit. [Photo by Ryan Grzybowski]*  
Slavic Village was devastated by the 2008 housing crisis and continues to struggle against stigmas and negative reputations. But community leaders and residents alike want to change those stigmas and return the neighborhood to its former glory of the 20th century. Since its peak in population from the 1930s to the 1950s, the neighborhood saw a decline in residents and businesses that [continued through the 2000s](#).

“We’re not trying to be the next Ohio City or Tremont, we are trying to build a better Slavic Village,” said Ward 12 Councilperson Rebecca Maurer. The village has seen a steady fluctuation of businesses entering and leaving the historic commercial district which served as a lesson to the community on how to improve Fleet Ave.

But one thing was clear to Maurer. “We can’t just rely on one business to hold up a full commercial corridor,” she said. Instead, the key is a density of business surrounding one another to build that sense of community back, she added.

Community members who stayed in Slavic Village through the decades do their best to make the neighborhood the best they can.

“I pay the bills and most of everything I make goes back into the community,” said Anthony Andreoli of Andreoli Restoration. As a general contractor he has been active in the village since 2005. Andreoli and his wife have renovated over two dozen houses in the neighborhood over the last decade while living and working in Slavic Village and raising their kids at the same time.

With the help of Slavic Village Development (SVD), the organization has selected houses and financial programs through Third Federal Savings & Loan that help home buyers come to the neighborhood. The “Slavic Village ReDiscovered” program completes major renovations to give home buyers the resources they need to get affordable homes they can live in. “Our strategies to stabilize the Slavic Village community include renovating and marketing housing,” SVD stated in its 2023 annual report.

SVD’s help extends beyond residents. They also support businesses by finding office space and other assistance.

Creatives are also coming into the community and have found their forever home. Mock Tuna is a commercial photography studio owned by Emily Metzger and Cassie Wolf. Mock Tuna has worked with clients like Nike, Spotify and Uber Eats, completing photography for ad campaigns and lifestyle shoots. “We work with people that need a headshot or small businesses... all the way to national brands” said Metzger.

Their studio is near the Broadway commercial corridor. “We were welcomed with open arms by the Slavic Village Development group,” Metzger said.

The business partners opened up the studio in 2022 on Union Ave. shortly after the pandemic began, with the aim for their location to be their studio and event space. “We are in it for the long haul here” said Wolf.

There have been businesses that have stuck it out through more than six decades. Down 63rd St. sits Janka Pierogies. The family-owned business has been at its current location on Heisley Ave. location since 1955. “We were a general convenience store back in the 50s up until the late 90s,” said Johnny Krusinski, the second-generation owner. Once, the store also sold fresh meats and other goods, their storefront now sells pierogies to customers. With eight part-time employees, Krusinski and his small storefront “keep it low key.”



Johnny

*Krusinski poses for a portrait inside his store on the corner of 63rd and Heisley Ave. on Wednesday August 7, 2024. [Photo by Ryan Grzybowski]*

“When I got here [the neighborhood] looked kind of rough, but that was just a misconception,” Krusinski said. “They were all little neighborhoods, and this was the Polish one here and they called it *Warszawa*.” Slavic Village was a predominantly Polish neighborhood after WWII when old world European tradition came to this part of Cleveland. In 1977, attorney Teddy Sliwinski coined the term Slavic Village as a way to revitalize the neighborhood and bring it back to life again.





*Krystal Sierra stands in the Morgana Bluffs trail in Slavic Village near Broadway Ave. [Photo by Ryan Grzybowski]*

Homes and businesses aren't the only thing the Village is looking to improve. Krystal Sierra, the director of neighborhood sustainability for Slavic Village Development, works to improve parks and even trees.

"My work involves increasing the tree canopy but also caring for that," said Sierra.

She has been cataloging trees and, with the help of a team of residents, engaging and reaching out in the neighborhood to further for a plan for reforestation in the urban canopy.

With recent additions of parks to the neighborhood, the city of Cleveland renovated the Forest City Park with new playground equipment. SVD has "pocket parks" along neighborhood streets that supply space for residents to visit and recreate.

With all that Slavic Village has to offer, it has seen ups and downs. It has overcome a lot and the area's leaders hope it will again give way to a slow rebirth of the neighborhood.



*Cars pass on Fleet Ave. in front of a mural created by Kelle Schwab located next to Vie's Floral. [Photo by Ryan Grzybowski]*

<https://thelandcle.org/stories/looking-for-rebirth-and-building-a-better-slavic-village-photos/>