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Tuesday, May 25, 2004

Dudley made impact in year

College Hill leader steps down tonight

By Kevin Aldridge
The Cincinnati Enquirer

COLLEGE HILL - Growing up as the youngest child of a single parent, Karen F. Dudley never gave a thought to what she couldn't accomplish in life.

"Everything was always geared around what I should or could do," said Dudley, 35. "I never thought that I was limited in any way."

Some College Hill residents say Dudley's "sky-is-the-limit" attitude is part of what makes her such a dynamic community leader. In just one year as president of the College Hill Forum - the neighborhood's community council - Dudley has built an impressive resume of activism while working to improve the neighborhood of more than 15,000.

Dudley will be handing over the reins of leadership to fellow resident Elizabeth Sherwood, a lawyer, at tonight's community council meeting. Dudley said Monday that she's taking a back seat to pursue personal and business interests, and possibly make a run for Cincinnati City Council in 2005.

"I'm excited that I've had the opportunity to serve the community in which I live," Dudley said. "I don't believe anyone else could have led this community better than me because I'm someone who has been there and knows the needs of the community and the people."

Dudley has kept issues important to College Hill residents in front of City Hall. The result has been an investment of \$2.83 million in city funds toward development in College Hill and thousands of dollars in grants to keep the neighborhood safe and clean.

"It was kind of as though the city forgot College Hill existed until Karen came," said Phyllis Schoenberger, a longtime resident and co-founder of the College Hill Gardeners.

Dudley also helped push Kroger, which owns a vacant store at the corner of Hamilton Avenue and North Bend Road, and National City Bank to chip in more than \$20,000 each for a marketing feasibility study. The study, to be completed in early June, is designed to find business uses for the struggling intersection, which has three of four corners vacant.

Schoenberger said Dudley will be missed, but the future remains bright for College Hill under Sherwood's leadership. "I don't

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expect us to miss a beat," Schoenberger said. "The one thing about College Hill is that the community is bigger than any one person."

Dudley's work in College Hill was so impressive that she made Mayor Charlie Luken's list of most effective community leaders.

Dudley said she has aspirations of one day being a leader on the city, county or state level.

Her grandmother was a longtime city employee, said City Hall was almost like a second home.

"I grew up in the halls of City Hall," Dudley said, recalling that she played on chairs in the office of then-city manager Sylvester Murray as a little girl. "So I'm very comfortable there. It would be very desirable to return."

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