

## In Near Northside, branding campaign focuses on identity

New logo features a train and is part of Near Northside neighborhood's pride, history

By Erin Mulvaney | May 6, 2015 | Updated: May 7, 2015 1:20pm



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Photo: Avenue CDC



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A logo by Near Northside resident Jesus Prieto was chosen by residents as the new branding image for the neighborhood. The branding campaign by Avenue CDC launched to help maintain the cultural identity of the ... [more](#)

A new logo unveiled this week to promote the Near Northside includes familiar neighborhood images - a mariachi band, a family holding hands, the skyline view - but something new as well.

Prominent among the colorfully painted bungalows and shops is the steel-gray and black light-rail train that now courses through from downtown.

The friendly design is part of a branding effort for the historically working-class, largely Hispanic community that sits just east of the Woodland Heights and Interstate 45, with I-10 and Loop 610 as two other major boundaries. The changes ahead are due in part to that location and to the new Metro Red Line.

"The unveiling of the new logo for the Near Northside is emblematic of what is going on in the community itself - it has always been a great place to eat, to live and to recreate and now the residents are taking it to a new level

and announcing themselves to Greater Houston," said Councilman Ed Gonzalez, who represents the area.

Avenue CDC, which focuses on economic development projects in the community, commissioned a contest for the new brand identity. The group wanted to show that the neighborhood has "always been a desirable place to live, bursting with vibrant culture and community pride," according to a statement.

Neighborhood leaders see the branding effort as part of the effort to retain their culture as the pace of change quickens.

Avenue CDC received a \$10,000 grant from NeighborWorks for the project. Neighbors voted for their favorite logo during the annual Sabor del Northside festival, which draws about 3,000 residents.

The winning logo, by local artist Jesus Prieto, was approved by 75 percent of voters. It was unveiled Tuesday at a community ceremony at the Red Ox Bar and Grill.

Once part of the Fifth Ward, the Near Northside initially drew people of Italian and German descent during the era when most of the homes there were built, between 1900 and 1940. For seven decades now, the population has been predominantly Hispanic.

While surrounding areas such as the First Ward, Woodland Heights and East Downtown have boomed, the Near Northside has been relatively slow to develop. Observers say it's now ripe for gentrification.

A retail study commissioned by Avenue CDC identified several barriers to the area attracting more retail. The deterrents include blight, a homeless problem and even the design of the light-rail line, with its lack of left-turn options along Main Street.

But the study also found opportunity for redevelopment and ultimately change.

Economic development leaders hope the character of the community can survive those changes and that existing residents are not pushed out.

"The Near Northside has a rich history and a bright future," Avenue CDC executive director Mary Lawler said. "And we are thrilled that residents and business owners have come together to create a neighborhood logo and marketing plan to let the rest of Houston know about all of the great things the community has to offer."



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