**PRIDE SOARS ON THE WEST SIDE ON NEIGHBORHOODS DAY**

**Southwestern High School celebrates 100 years, School supply giveaways, resource fairs**

**By Mary Chapman**

**Special for ARISE Detroit!**

Whether based near the oil refineries off I-75 south, or miles away in the heart of the city’s North End, a variety of community groups marked the 16th Annual ARISE Detroit! Neighborhoods Day on Aug. 6th with events ranging from school supply giveaways to Old School block club gatherings.

Each year, the day is set aside to showcase the spirit of Detroit’s communities -- and residents’ pride in them. The volunteer-driven event, which takes place throughout the city, had more than 150 registered events in 2022, including 90 on the city’s west side. A cumulative total of nearly 3,000 community improvement events have been held since Neighborhoods Day began in 2007.

Here are some events from Detroit’s west side.

**Southwestern High School Centennial Celebration**

It wasn’t yet noon on this sultry Saturday, but the parking lot adjacent to Kemeny Park on Fort Street was already nearly full. The collaborative occasion was Southwestern High School’s centennial celebration, combined with a celebration of the area’s residents and history. Some 2,000 attendees were expected.

The festive affair had a close-knit feel, with lots of hugs and back-slapping as people mulled around canopies, some sporting T-shirts proclaiming their graduation year. The air was filled with music and the smell of barbecue. A newly arrived ice cream truck girded for long lines.

“It’s just a wonderful, positive vibe. People are happy to see each other,” said Otis Mathis, the president and chief executive officer of African Town, one of the organizing groups. The 1973 Southwestern graduate chatted as he busily helped people set up and dug through a box for copies he’d brought of The Telegram, a Black-owned newspaper that has served the Downriver community since 1944. Mathis wanted participants to be able to grab an issue from the year they graduated to see what the issues were.

Under one canopy sat Linda Hart, a 1965 Southwestern graduate who lives a block from the park in the home once owned by her grandparents. At one point, she began singing the Southwestern High School song. “Some of the kids have never heard it,” she said, smiling broadly. “But there’s a lot of positivity in it, and that’s reflected in the positivity that you see here today.”

**Greater St. James Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of The Americas**

Located on 18th Street in a neighborhood dotted with older homes and swatches of infill housing, the effort on this day included area cleanup, free snacks and drinks, fun activities, and free books and bibles.

“This is an opportunity for us to reach out to the community and let them know we’re here,” said Elder Reginald Poellnitz, mopping his brow as he took a quick break from grilling hot dogs “We want to see the area built back up and to spread the Good News to the community.”

Concetta Lewis, who helped coordinate the effort, said that while many older residents have left the Core City area, she’s eager to continue serving those who remain.

“I’m hoping the people here today will come back to our church and bring someone with them,” she said, glancing at the school-age children and parents mingling on the sidewalk next to freshly cut grass. “Somebody needs to know that somebody cares about them, and that we appreciate them still being in the neighborhood. I’m just excited.”

Of the annual ARISE Detroit event, Lewis added: “Everybody knows it’s a great idea, but it takes a lot of work -- and a lot of faith.”

**Ava Jo’s Neighborhood Festival & Backpack Giveaway**

A constant stream of people headed to this blocks-long event that, in addition to free backpacks, featured a health fair, live band, speakers, free food, and an abundance of fun activities for adults and children. In all, some 300 people showed up.

Presented by the Mama Akua Community House and the 15th Street Block Club, and coinciding with Neighborhoods Day, the event has a rich history. It all started with Yusef Bunchy Shakur, executive director of the three-year-old community center, at the home of his mother, “Mama Akua,” who back then cooked all day for all who showed up.

That was 20 years ago. Although Mama Akua died this year, her love of community lives on. “Over the course of the last 16 years, we’ve been adding and expanding, incorporating the history of Black people as part of our push for self-determination,” said Shakur. “People leave with a sense of pride in being Black.”

The block club, which has been around for about eight years, had been tasked with lining up representatives from the health care industry, Wayne State University, and elsewhere. The vendors set up along the sidewalk, part of it painted in blocks of red, black, and green – Afrocentric colors.

“We had clothes that people could pick from,” Shakur added. “We give out hot dogs and burgers and midway through we have a full-course meal that’s part of our tradition. This year we have collard greens, black beans, and grilled chicken.”

He said Neighborhoods Day is important because it’s positive and inspirational. “There’s a lot of significant organizing going on in the neighborhoods. The day provides a good platform because it puts a voice to the voiceless and a face to the faceless.”

**Blessed Ground International Ministries Resource Fair**

Further west on Fenkell, Blessed Ground International Ministries filled a parking lot with health and wellness resources involving eye care, vaccinations, developmental disabilities, and the Gleaners Community Food Bank, plus a mobile healthcare unit from Wayne State University.

“This is how we show the love of God,” said Shawn Pewitt, who helped to organize the three-year-old event. “Maybe people can’t go get their blood pressure checked or have the transportation to see about their vision, but they can do that here.”

There were also games, activities, and a school supply giveaway. An inflated “bounce house” for kids anchored a corner.

“We’re here and if we help just one person get the help or information they need, it’s a great day,” she said. “And we’ve already accomplished that.”

**Shrine of the Black Madonna**

The venerable Detroit church, located on Linwood near LaSalle, presented an event that included neighborhood cleanup and food and clothing giveaways. All told, the Shrine gave out 40 bags of canned and dry goods, 40 bags of hand sanitizers and clean wipes, 40 bags of collared greens, and 26 bags of nectarines.

“This event is a carryover of what we already do, but it’s a special opportunity to give back and to network and interface with the community, beyond what we do with our twice a month food pantry,” said Michael Jones, widely known as Adisa. He’s been with the Shrine for more than 40 years.

“Neighborhoods Day is good for the city in that it gives us hope,” he added. “In Detroit, a large portion of Black residents are hopeless, and that’s evident in a lot of ways, including low voter turnouts and the way some neighborhoods look. ARISE Detroit! rebuilds hope and helps to sustain hope for those who try to hold on and maintain that hope. It does that because it gets people involved even beyond Neighborhoods Day."

**King Street Block Club**

Phillis Judkins spent the last five months putting together this Neighborhoods Day event for the street on which she’s lived since 1988. The community celebration was worth every minute, she said.

“It’s an opportunity for us to all get together, and I mean the whole neighborhood – not just people on King,” explained Judkins, who has been president of the block club for the last three years. “And the people who don’t know each other can meet each other.”

Indeed, the neighborhood get-together had a throwback vibe, with at least one person toting a boom box and others just laughing and enjoying each other. Some sat in lawn chairs under trees, and there was an inflatable playscape for youngsters.

There was also an hourly raffle, free hot dogs and pop, and a table filled with free items: chalk, pencils, crayons, coloring books, water bottles, and information about the North End, for example.

It’s a labor of love for Judkins and other area residents.

“I did street patrol around here for 15 years,” she said. “I got rid of a lot of drugs in this area, took people to their bus stop, and patrolled the schools, too. When people see that, they start helping, too. And now we have a lot of volunteers.”

**Revive – Arise Opportunity Fair**

Held on Plymouth and presented by the Revive Detroit Community Development Corporation: A Cody Rouge Partnership, the fair was aimed at providing the community with information regarding home ownership, entrepreneurship, and City of Detroit skilled trades training, which is free to residents. There was also free food and prize giveaways.

“Basically, we’re helping people with housing, employment, and economic development,” said corporation board member Angy Webb, who was stationed at one of the tables along the sidewalk. “So far, a lot of people have been interested in housing.”

She said the event was a good way to get people information that can help them progress in life.

“We’re here to serve the community with resources that they may not know is available she said. “ARISE Detroi!t is a big part of that.”