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**Take a load off:
Bench installation
now underway
in Bloomfield**

By Sam Spearing

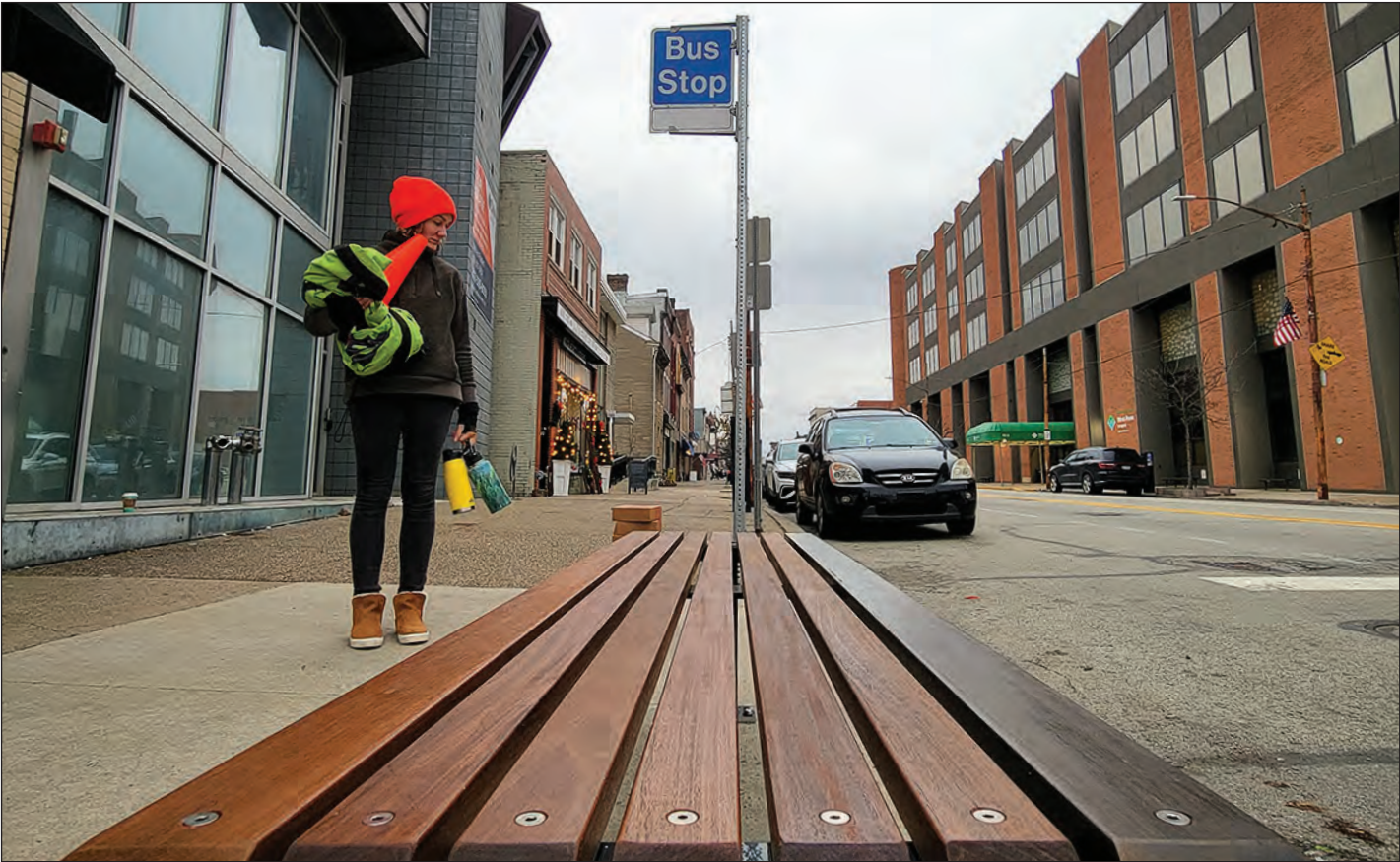
Bloomfield Development Corporation

Bloomfield - The installation of eight new benches throughout the Liberty Avenue business district began in late 2022.

During a robust community engagement process in 2018 - where two types of benches were installed and tested, each for two weeks - Bloomfield Development Corporation (BDC) selected the “Knight Bench” from Glenshaw-based company Forms+Surfaces.

The Knight Bench was heavily favored by the over 1,100 surveyed community members. Survey respondents preferred the Knight Bench for its wood slats that were

See **Bloomfield Benches** | page 2



ABOVE: A new public bench offers respite on Liberty Avenue. Bloomfield Development Corporation relied on community feedback when selecting the ‘Knight Bench’ design to be installed at eight locations along the avenue. Read more at left and on page 2. Photo by Sam Spearing.



ABOVE: Assemble’s Nina Marie Barbuto (left) and BGC Board member Samuel Hoffman (right) help create decorations at the BGC holiday party on Saturday, Dec. 10. See more of the festivities on pages 4 and 12. Photo by Carlee Benhart Kukula.

**Community Development Briefs: Hillcrest St.
home construction awarded \$450K grant**

By Rick Swartz *Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation*

Pittsburgh - The Federal Home Loan Bank of Pittsburgh announced in late December that it was awarding a \$450,000 grant to a three-unit construction project [undertaken jointly by Open Hand Ministries and the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC)] in Garfield.

The new homes, which will be made affordable for buyers whose incomes are less than 80% of the median income for the region, will be built in the 5300 block of Hillcrest Street, near the intersection with N. Aiken Avenue.

The project has been in the planning stages for nearly four years. The architectural firm for the project, Rob Pfaffmann & Associates, has designed three detached homes for three lots that are currently owned by the city’s Urban Redevelopment Authority.

The original intent of the project was to make each house a two-bedroom home for the buyer on the first and second floors of the dwelling, while also creating an apartment on the ground floor for the buyer to lease, if they so choose.

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Bloomfield Benches *continued from page 1*

more comfortable because they offer better resistance to heat and cold than metal benches.

Back in 2018, Bloomfield residents provided ample recommendations for possible locations where they would like to see public seating installed.

For this first round of benches, BDC prioritized Liberty Avenue bus stops with high foot traffic and a lack of seating. At present, bus riders must often stand or lean against buildings, with nowhere to

sit, while waiting for the bus.

On an average weekday, approximately 200 riders board buses at the selected stops [according to Pittsburgh Regional Transit's system map].

Thanks to funding from the city's Urban Redevelopment Authority, BDC was able to purchase the benches and necessary materials in 2022, and will continue installation in 2023 as weather permits. Once all eight benches have been installed, BDC will host a celebration event in early February.

The organization aims to expand its efforts following this first round of benches, and ultimately install upwards of 30 total benches throughout the neighborhood.

Despite high foot traffic, Bloomfield's Liberty Avenue business district lacks seating that is not reserved for use by businesses and their patrons.

Planter [boxes] - another idea introduced during the community engagement process - could also be added if enough funding is available. In addition to serving transit riders, the benches will also provide neighbors with great places to relax for many years to come. ♦



ABOVE: A Bloomfield resident tries out one of the benches recently installed along Liberty Avenue. Photo by Sam Spearing.

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A colorful illustration for a local business. It features a woman in a yellow shirt and red pants pushing a shopping cart. Above her is a sign that says "SHOP LOCAL" in large, stylized letters. Below that, it says "COMMUNITY-OWNED SINCE 1980". To the right of the woman is a sign for "EAST END FOOD COOP". At the bottom, it says "CONTAINS LOVE FOR PEOPLE & PLANET". On the left side, there is a list of addresses and phone numbers: "7516 MEADE STREET", "PITTSBURGH, PA. 15208", "412-242-3598", and "8AM-8PM". There are also illustrations of a slice of orange, a strawberry, and a banana.

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Congress could help 6 million disabled persons save money w/out losing benefits

By Stacy Garrity *Pennsylvania Treasurer*

Op-Ed/Pennsylvania - This month [Dec. 2022], Congress has the chance to greatly benefit the lives of six million Americans with disabilities, including one million veterans, by passing the ABLE Age Adjustment Act.

This simple, straightforward legislation - which has amazing bipartisan support - will provide financial empowerment and increased independence for millions of Americans with disabilities. I urge Congressional leaders to bring it up for a vote before the current legislative session ends.

Pennsylvania's Senator Bob Casey, who sponsored the original Achieving a Better Life Experience (ABLE) Act of 2014, introduced the ABLE Age Adjustment Act to expand access to this life-changing savings program.

It's co-sponsored by Senator Pat Toomey, and the House version is co-sponsored by 17 of the 18 members in Pennsylvania's delegation. As the inaugural Chair of the ABLE Savings Plan Network, I'm proud that Pennsylvania's representatives in Washington, DC, are so supportive.

Here's why we need this bill to become law: ABLE account owners can save and increase their financial security without impacting their Supplemental Security Income, Medical Assistance and other vital means-tested benefits.

In addition, like 529 plans for education expenses, ABLE accounts offer tax advantages to those saving for qualifying disability-related expenses, including housing, healthcare, financial services, education, and more.

The original ABLE law - which authorized Pennsylvania to create PA ABLE in 2016, with key support from state Senator Lisa Baker and former state Representative Bernie O'Neill - allowed millions of people with disabilities nationwide to save in a way that was previously impossible.

But right now, federal law limits ABLE eligibility to individuals whose qualifying disability was diagnosed before age 26. The ABLE Age Adjustment Act would increase the age limit to 46.

It's a simple change, but the impact will be profound. The ABLE Age Adjustment Act will give an additional six million Americans - including one million veterans - access to these savings accounts to help them build a more secure future for themselves and live more independently.

As a veteran myself, I know firsthand that access to ABLE accounts will be tremendously helpful for our selfless, patriotic heroes who have sacrificed so much for our great country. Many of their disabilities occur after age 26 as a direct result of their dedication to the mission of protecting every one of us, their friends and neighbors.

ABLE empowers people with disabilities and their families. Here in Pennsylvania, more than 7,000 PA ABLE account owners have saved more than \$77 million over the program's first five years. The value of this program is undeniable, and the ABLE Age Adjustment Act would make it even better.

Giving more people the opportunity to save with ABLE is the right thing to do. It's time to make it happen. Learn more at paable.gov. ♦

the Bulletin

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since 1975

with the mission of reporting on issues affecting underserved communities and facilitating local residents' exchange of ideas.

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The opinions expressed herein are not necessarily those of the publisher.

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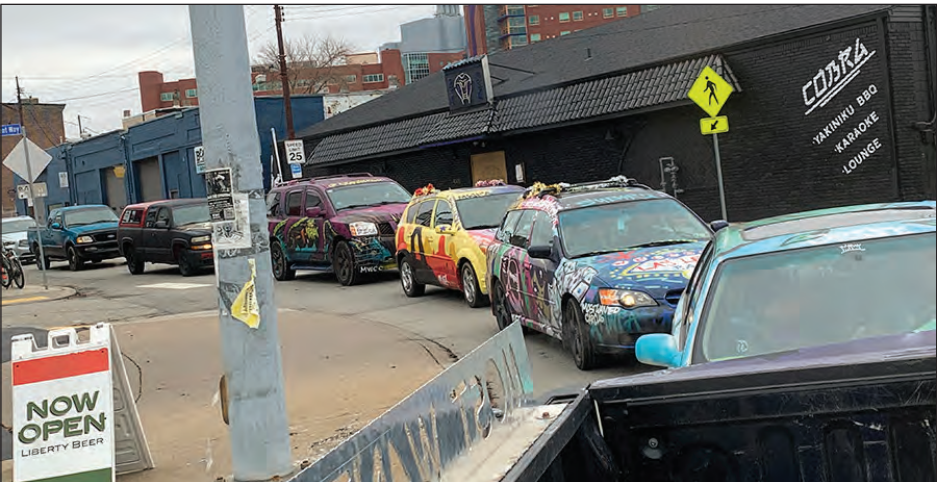
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ABOVE: Most Wanted Fine Art's Jason Sauer leads a parade of art cars (filled with toys for local kids) to the BGC holiday party. Photo by Nina Gibbs.

BELOW: Kids pick up coats and toys, and even enjoy some holiday karaoke, during a Dec. 10 holiday party at the BGC's Community Activity Center (113 N. Pacific Ave.). Photo by Carlee Benhart Kukula.



Greenzone resolutions: tips for a sustainable New Year

By Madeline Weiss Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

Insight/Garfield - New Year's resolutions often provide an opportunity for people to work on self improvement - like getting healthy, cooking more, or working on their hobbies.

Sustainable habits can help you and your community, as well as the generations to come. While tips like these alone are not enough to eliminate the problem of climate change, we can all take steps to help mitigate our environmental burden together.

Reduce meat in your diet: Think of it as adding new foods to your diet. Nearly 15% of greenhouse gases come from livestock used for food production, not to mention the added resources required to raise animals.

While you may not cut it out completely, finding new vegetarian recipes or meals you like and incorporating them into your diet can make a difference in your carbon footprint, and could be a small part to convincing people in your families and communities to join you and make a larger change.

Shop sustainably: Avoid "fast fashion," like Shein, which negatively impacts the environment with carbon emissions from its global shipping, and pollution created by the mass production of garments. Most of these clothes end up in landfills. Instead, shop for higher quality items that you will need to replace less often, or make a habit of thrifting in an effort to recycle and reuse clothes.

Buy in bulk: With reusable containers, you can cut down on your plastic consumption and waste, and even take less trips out to the dumpster to dispose of your household waste. Some stores let you buy items like rice, nuts, flour, cereal, beans, coffee, and more in bulk with your own containers. Reusable produce bags can cut down on plastic consumption, too.

Energy audit: Duquesne Light and other utility providers offer free energy audits, which can show where your home experiences excessive energy consumption. As cost of living continues to soar, solving identified problems can reduce your monthly bills while easing the burden on our utility supplies. ♦

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Discount fare program supports Pittsburgh Regional Transit riders

By Dan Yablonsky *Pittsburghers for Public Transit*

Pittsburgh - Enrollment is open for a new 12-month pilot program that tracks how free and discounted transit fares could improve the health & well-being of low-income riders using Pittsburgh Regional Transit (PRT, formerly Port Authority of Allegheny County).

Any Allegheny County resident who was receiving EBT/SNAP benefits in September of 2022, or someone who is the guardian of a child who has been receiving benefits, can enroll their entire household in the program. Riders may visit discountedfares.allegheycounty.us to enroll in the program - and visit discountedfares.allegheycounty.us/support to find a list organizations that can help them enroll by phone or in person.

Enrollment will continue until the county reaches its target number of 14,000 participating households, which it is hoping to do by early 2023.

The program is being administered by the Allegheny County Department of Human Services. It comes after years of advocacy and organizing from transit riders - together with organizations like the Pittsburgh Food Policy Council, Just Harvest, UrbanKind, and Pittsburghers for Public Transit - to help make costly fares more affordable for those who rely on public transit the most.

Who qualifies for the Allegheny County Discounted Fares Pilot Program?

Eligible participants:

- Currently reside in Allegheny County, and were already receiving SNAP benefits in Sept. 2022, or are the parent of a child who was already receiving benefits.
- Are between the ages of 18 and 64, or are 65+ years old, and have household members below age 65.
- Do not have another household member ages 18 through 64 who is already participating in this pilot.

Why is it a pilot rather than a permanent program?

A pilot program is a trial run. Participant experience in this pilot will influence the design of the permanent program.

The Allegheny County Dept. of Human Services will use this pilot to understand how local residents may benefit from making public transit more affordable. It will measure the impact on ridership and whether lower fares increase access to jobs, services, and other things residents need.



ABOVE: Josh Malloy, an organizer with Pittsburghers for Public Transit, leads a rally to kick off the #FairFares campaign in February of 2019. Photo courtesy of Dan Yablonsky.

How does the pilot work?

Participation in the pilot program is voluntary, but it requires participants to share info about their household and transit use. All participants will have the opportunity to receive additional compensation for participating in occasional surveys. Eligible participants will be randomly assigned to one of three groups:

1. Free fares: This group will receive unlimited free fares on all PRT trips for 12 months.
2. 50% discount: This group will receive a ConnectCard that reduces the cost of all PRT trips by half for 12 months, and is pre-loaded with \$10.
3. No discount: This group will receive a ConnectCard pre-loaded with \$10, but will not receive a fare discount.

Anyone interested in enrolling in the pilot or learning more should visit discountedfares.allegheycounty.us. ♦

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Community Briefs *continued from page 1*

This type of apartment, known as an “accessory dwelling unit” (ADU), was permitted under a special zoning overlay for Garfield that ran for two years, but expired in 2020. The BGC has advocated for more new housing to incorporate a second unit in order to make ownership of a traditional, single-family home affordable for a working-class family.

Whether the ADU can still be a feature of these homes will depend on the terms of the financing that is still needed for the \$1.3 million development. The BGC has pledged \$150,000 in foundation funds that it raised back in 2019 to the project.

This will be the first project for Open Hand Ministries - an East Liberty-based nonprofit - that involves new housing construction, as opposed to the renovation of existing homes. Open Hand Ministries offers a counseling program that prepares low-income families for the challenge of becoming first-time homeowners.

City says ‘No’ to conservatorship of its properties, Judge might say otherwise

In a Dec. 14 hearing before Common Pleas Court Judge John McVay, the city solicitor’s office argued that vacant lots and houses in the city’s possession should be exempt from the state’s conservatorship law.

Under this law, a state court can appoint a private or nonprofit party as the conservator, or caretaker, for badly-neglected properties - provided they meet certain legal requirements. The conservator can then take steps to clean up the property and secure it from further damage or unlawful entry.

If the negligent owner still fails to assume responsibility for conditions at the property within a limited period of time, the conservator can return to the court and ask that the property be sold by the court to the conservator for a fair-market price. A sales price is then established through a court-ordered appraisal.

“We thought we’d reached an agreement in principle with the solicitor’s office - that using conservatorship would be a more efficient way to move properties away from the city’s control and into a position where they could be salvaged by nonprofit entities, in partnership with neighborhood interests,” said Kendall Pelling, executive director of Rising Tide Partners, Inc. [RTP, a nonprofit that has been working with the BGC to target 21 city-owned vacant houses and lots in Garfield for conservatorship]. “The city’s about-face comes as something of a surprise,” he explained, “because up until the hearing, we had thought the city was willing to enter into a consent decree that would permit conservatorship to be another tool in revitalizing blighted properties.”

After hearing arguments in his chambers from both attorney Wayne Cobb, representing RTP and East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI), and John DeMarco, an assistant city solicitor, Judge McVay returned to the courtroom. He said that, while both sides had compelling arguments to make, in looking at the conservatorship law, he did not see a provision within it that exempted municipalities like Pittsburgh from accountability. The judge said he would issue a ruling within 30 days of the hearing.

According to the judge, the city was contending in closed chambers that the Commonwealth’s Treasurer’s Sale Act took precedence over the conservatorship law. Judge McVay told those in the courtroom that he expects an appeal will be filed by whichever party is unhappy with his decision.

Cobb, a Monaca-based attorney, has been working with several local groups, including RTP and the BGC, to formulate the language for a consent decree that the city could conceivably have executed; the decree would permit abandoned, city-owned properties to be targeted for conservatorship by nonprofit community groups or their development partners. Cobb has been representing ELDI and RTP as they have pursued acquisition of privately-owned properties in Larimer and Garfield, respectively, that the court agrees have been abandoned and neglected.

Objector to city’s sale of vacant lot drops claim in exchange for \$5K

After months of delay sparked by claims from an out-of-town objector, the city is finally able to move forward with sale of a vacant lot to the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC). The organization needs this lot for a new rental housing development that it is planning.

The sale of the lot, which the BGC requested from the city in 2016, has been tied up at Common Pleas Court for over nine months while the objector contested that the city is not the rightful owner of the property. The city originally took the property via Treasurer’s Sale back in 1985 for unpaid real estate taxes. With the court’s legal process slow to unwind, the community group and its partner, Gatesburg Road Development, decided on their own to approach the attorney representing the objector with an offer to settle her claim for \$5,000. She accepted the offer in late November.

With the settlement in place, Judge John McVay was able to issue an order of court last month, clearing the title to the lot so that the city could sell it, free and clear, to the BGC. The lot, which is situated at the corner of N. Aiken Avenue and Rosetta Street, is among more than 30 vacant lots or houses that are being folded into the “Garfield Highlands” development. The project will now likely break ground this spring to create 25 single-family, rental homes available to households whose incomes are at 60% or less of median income for the Pittsburgh region. ♦

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Remembering Ms. Loretta, 'the Bible of Lawrenceville'

By Dave Breingan *Lawrenceville United*

Tribute/Lawrenceville - We're sad to share that Loretta Millender, who was known as the "Bible of Lawrenceville," passed away at home on Tuesday, Dec. 6, after battling cancer for many months.

A longtime Lawrenceville resident, Ms. Loretta helped found Lawrenceville United (LU) in 2001 and stayed involved through our 20+ years as an organization.

She was a true community builder: an incredible champion for Lawrenceville, a longtime civil rights activist across many causes, a cornerstone of her Trinity Baptist Church in the 6th Ward, a keeper of neighborhood history - and a devoted and loving family member, friend, and neighbor to so many.

Throughout her many decades in Lawrenceville, she was always bringing people together, finding ways to make the neighborhood a better place, and jumping quickly into action whenever injustice presented itself.

She organized with other residents for home repairs and sanitary housing conditions, helped create a new playground for children, exposed and challenged housing discrimination against Black residents,

and addressed local incidents of police brutality.

Loretta also shut down 40th Street [at the Butler Street intersection] with a number of moms to demand safer conditions and a

crossing guard for the students at Arsenal, among many other causes.

Even in her older years, she continued to serve on the LU Board, spoke up at City Council for affordable housing, and helped

distribute food to neighbors who needed it. She always had a kind word - "Hey babes!" was her classic greeting - and a hug for everyone.

Local magazine *Steel This Magazine* published a regular series across issues 5-11 called "Ms. Loretta's Corner," through which she shared many stories of growing up in Lawrenceville and the causes she championed as a happy warrior.

You can find those issues of the magazine online at issuu.com/steelthismagazine/docs. They are worth reading in full!

Loretta's obituary can be viewed online at dalessandrold.com/obit.../Loretta-Millender.

Please join us in sending care to her beloved husband, Darrell, and the rest of their family, children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren during this time.

And belated gratitude to Ms. Loretta for her many years of service to this community, and for the joy and generosity she shared with everyone.

May her memory and spirit be an inspiration to us in continuing her example and legacy for many generations! ♦



ABOVE: Ms. Loretta Millender was known for her welcoming spirit. Graphic courtesy of LU.

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Neighborhood FOCUS

‘Bloomfield Square’ would bring 200 apts. Could it also spur higher rents?

By Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor*

Perspective/Bloomfield – Change can be hard, especially for a neighborhood as steeped in tradition as Pittsburgh’s Little Italy.

But change is also inevitable. While some business owners and residents say they are alarmed at how a proposed 200-unit, four-story apartment complex could possibly help drive up rents across the board, others hope modern, new apartments will bring well-heeled customers to the stores and businesses that line Liberty Avenue at the foot of the Bloomfield Bridge.

During recent interviews with area residents and business owners, *The Bulletin* found that people are not necessarily up in arms about “Bloomfield Square,” a project being developed by ECHO Realty, whose senior vice president, Philip Bishop, did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

Bloomfield Square is back in the news because the city planning commission recently approved “The Meridian,” a similar ECHO project on Shakespeare Street in East Liberty/Shadyside. With The Meridian approved, the long-delayed Bloomfield Square project is likely to be next on ECHO’s to-do list.

When interviewed by *The Bulletin*, Bloomfield residents discussed the changing culture of their neighborhood. Most were alarmed at what they thought to be rapidly rising costs, but some were also open to the possibilities that the new project could bring.

At Yinz Coffee, about two blocks from the site, baristas and artists like Melissa Ciccocioppo, 34, make a living selling coffee, muffins, and art objects [like ravioli earrings]. Dressed in a playful, homemade skunk hat, she said she did not want to be a “negative Nancy” about the Bloomfield Square project, where shops would

supposedly line the first floor of the complex. Ciccocioppo said she hoped one of the restaurants would provide a venue where local musicians could perform.

In recent years, the area known as Little Italy along Liberty Avenue has evolved into what some might call “a working-class hipster’s paradise” for people who don’t want to spend the money to live in Shadyside or Squirrel Hill. New flavors have moved into the neighborhood as its population diversifies. Portuguese food is on the menu at the Azorean Café. Wai Wai serves spicy Chinese food, Ginza serves Japanese, and two Thai restaurants augment the local cuisine scene - even though Donatelli’s Italian Food Center, a fixture for 90 years, closed last summer.

Zack Shell, 40, owner of the Baby Loves Tacos shop a block away from the Bloomfield Square site, said that new residents are creating “a lot of new commerce opportunities.”

“But I think one of the major issues that most people are aware of in this neighborhood is the rising cost of housing,” Shell said. “I think putting in 200 units is going to naturally inflate the prices in the area.”

Rental costs are an issue because two-thirds of Bloomfielders are renters, according to the U.S. Census Bureau’s 2020 American Communities Survey. Other new apartment complexes nearby are charging upwards of \$2,000 a month for a one-bedroom apartment. If that trend continues with Bloomfield Square, renters interviewed by *The Bulletin* are worried that landlords might be inspired to raise their rents as well.

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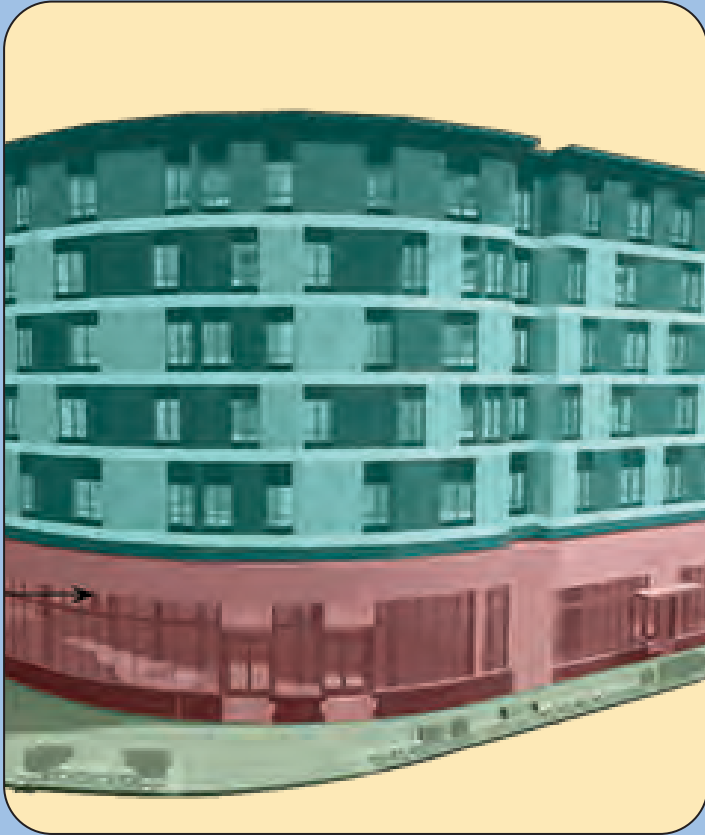


ABOVE: Bloomfield resident Melissa Ciccocioppo hopes the project includes a venue for local music. Photo by Alan Guenther.

BELOW: Bob Zacharias thinks Bloomfield Square might create traffic problems in his neighborhood. Photo by Alan Guenther.



BELOW: Could this be the new 'Bloomfield Square' design, borrowing elements from 'The Meridian' apartment complex that Echo Realty is bringing to East Liberty? Graphic courtesy of Alan Guenther.



- continued from previous page -

One of those renters, Bob Zacharias, 55, who lives three blocks away from the site, had serious misgivings about the project. "Sometimes change hurts people," he said.

Zacharias predicted that traffic from the new apartment complex will overwhelm the narrow Gangwish, Ella, and Howley streets, which ring the two-acre plot of land where Bloomfield Square would be built.

Currently, a Community Market and an abandoned, graffiti-covered VFW building occupy the site. ECHO Realty has not yet released the results of a traffic study, which will be required before the project can be approved by the city.

Maria Merante, whose shop at 4723 Liberty Avenue features homemade Italian food, strongly favors the Bloomfield Square project. She said she thinks the neighborhood is evolving, "and change is a good thing."

"The older, typical impression of Bloomfield as 'Little Italy,' with cute little Italian ladies walking down the street, unfortunately is no longer," she said. "Now we have lots of new people in the neighborhood – a younger, more professional working type of population."

If higher-income people, who can afford to pay higher rents, move into Bloomfield Square, Merante said she believes they would patronize her store, which she's operated for 30 years.

Financial details and preliminary plans

ECHO Realty paid \$5.78 million for the two-acre site in February 2020. Preliminary plans for Bloomfield Square were made available during a public Zoom meeting in November 2021. (tinyurl.com/BloomfieldSquare)

As part of its rezoning application, ECHO promised that 10% of the Bloomfield project would meet affordable housing requirements. But that was before the Builders Association of Metropolitan Pittsburgh filed suit against the city to overturn legislation [passed by City Council in 2021] that created an "inclusionary zoning

"The older, typical impression of Bloomfield as 'Little Italy,' with cute little Italian ladies walking down the street, unfortunately is no longer."

- Maria Merante, owner, Merante's Bloomfield

district" in Bloomfield and put those requirements in place.

In an email, *The Bulletin* asked ECHO if it will keep its promise to build affordable housing at the Bloomfield site if the courts throw out the inclusionary zoning law. Bishop, ECHO's senior vice president, did not respond.

The site has been the source of controversy before, when a different developer tried to build luxury condominiums. About four years ago, more than 400 concerned Bloomfield residents attended a public meeting [held at the West Penn School of Nursing] to protest plans by Milhaus, an Indiana-based real estate company. Milhaus tried to push through a plan that would have closed the grocery store and didn't include any affordable housing. Soon after the meeting, Milhaus withdrew from the project.

Although ECHO Realty owns the land where Bloomfield Square would be built, it has not yet filed a formal application with the city's planning commission. Once construction starts, it could take between 12 and 18 months to complete, ECHO officials said during the November 2021 community meeting. While ECHO has not revealed its most recent design ideas for Bloomfield Square, it did release the design for The Meridian, a similar project ECHO is building two miles away on Shakespeare Street.

ECHO wants to build a Giant Eagle and 200 apartments in Bloomfield, with shops and stores on the ground level. It is building a larger Giant Eagle and 231 apartments at The Meridian, which is also designed to have shops and stores on the ground level. The Meridian project was approved by the city planning commission on Nov. 29.

At The Meridian site, ECHO promised that 15% of the units would meet afford-

- continued on page 14 -



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BOOM Concepts artist profile: poet, writer, and librettist Jessica Lanay

Interview by DS Kinsel & Lee Owens *BOOM Concepts*

East Liberty - Our first “BOOM Universe at Alloy Studios” resident artist of the 2022-2023 season is poet, art writer, and librettist Jessica Lanay. One way to describe Lanay is: abundant. Lanay’s work is overflowing - it fills places that were empty before. During her residency, Lanay participated in BOOM Concepts’ Black Power Storytime, where she filled the entire courtyard at The Carnegie Museum of Art with stories compiled by Virginia Hamilton.

We quickly realized that the well from which Jessica Lanay draws is deep, and at times it feels infinite. She demands an immersion of both readers and subjects. Her debut hybrid poetry collection, “am•phib•ian,” won the 2020 Naomi Long Madgett Poetry Prize (judged by Toi Derricotte from Broadside Lotus Press).

Her poetry can be found in *Indiana Review*, *Prairie Schooner*, *Poet Lore*, *Poiesis*, and others. Lanay’s writing is currently featured in BOMB Magazine, where she has interviewed an array of artists across disciplines to foster a very engaging dialogue. Needless to say, we were excited to have Lanay kick off our Summer BOOM Universe residency program. On the back side of the residency experience, our team crafted a few questions for Lanay, reviewing some points of origin for her work and residency experience. Thankfully, she shared a lot.

BOOM: *You have this quote on your site: ‘In everything that I write, I am trying to scrape the film of that inexplicable emotion off the end of my tongue.’ Tell us about this ‘inexplicable emotion’ and how writing became an outlet.*

Lanay: “The short answer is that I need to update my website. The hassle and struggle of doing that is real. The long answer is that sometimes emotion overtakes us. Those emotions are often particular to different events, especially when they are new and unfamiliar. Not every emotion has a word yet, and that is exciting...Etymology is fascinating to me. I once had an artist residency with the Physics & Astronomy department at the University of Pittsburgh. I made a short video where I showed the appearance of new words with relation to astronomical events visible from the earth. We wiggle in language in both pain and ecstasy...Growing up in Key West, Florida, my great grandmother took me to the

Monroe County Library for literacy classes, as she had trouble with reading and writing. I got to learn twice - at school and with her. We did our homework together. I started there and I never stopped. I will not stop. We need all the words forever.”

BOOM: *The character ‘Alice’ makes several appearances in your work ‘am•phib•ian.’ Who is Alice, and what does this character represent?*

Lanay: “Like a lot of children, I loved *Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland*...But I related to the ‘unmadness’ of Alice in the book - her unfurling, and subsequent reconstitution... Alice is the act of falling apart; falling down the hole of oneself; ‘going quantum,’ I have heard people say. Alice is the mixed horror and joy of not knowing, and understanding how important that is to creativity. Alice is able to transform and adapt to new realities, like an amphibian.”

BOOM: *How did the BOOM Universe Residency support your practice?*

Lanay: “Residencies and fellowships sometimes have a rubric of participation that just does not feed every artist involved. You can’t really pick your own adventure and unless you are in a space specific to your identity, you can run into very compromising situations with other participants and attendees. Even in spaces specific to your identity, a sense of tradition or legacy can directly interrupt your creativity...Residency simply wanted me to create and create I did. I have the bones for my second book with some new additions to edit in coming months. It really was a caring and supportive experience, and when I say supportive, Thomas and DS aren’t running a hotel, you know? You are an adult and you can figure out stuff on your own; if you live in a disordered way in your home, then your experience at this residency will be disordered; it depends on the artist. The space was clean, beautiful, and there was a full kitchen, so I cooked. The bed was comfortable, and of course when you respect your space, it will respect you back. The space is supportive, respectful, caring, and non-exploitative. As an artist, I could not really ask for more.”

[Read the full interview at boomuniverse.co] ♦

BELOW: BOOM Concepts resident artist Jessica Lanay explores the power of words with her work. Photo courtesy of BOOM Concepts.



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The Midwife Center builds on 40-year legacy of service

By Alicia Vervain & Katie Phillips *The Midwife Center*

Perspective/Pittsburgh - In 1982, midwives, nurses, families, and physicians worked together to open BirthPlace - the city's first licensed, free-standing birth center. Now known as The Midwife Center (TMC), TMC recently celebrated 40 years of exceptional, client-centered care by introducing new, expanded services.

One of just three licensed birth facilities in Pittsburgh, TMC is still the only independent birth center in Western PA. Residents from all over the region visit the center

(2831 Penn Ave.) in the Strip District for primary gynecological, prenatal, birthing, and postpartum care led by midwives, nurses, and other providers.

Clinical Director Emily McGahey, DM, MSN, CNM, FACNM stated: "We are thrilled to be able to add and expand our services using the midwifery model that focuses on individualized care and education to support people as they expand their families, while also keeping them healthy as individuals."

Among these are a weekly walk-in program, "Wellness Walk-In" Fridays, for preventative gynecological care, including contraception and STI testing. TMC added family-building services for those who are not experiencing infertility, but desire pregnancy. These include counseling visits for fertility-tracking and intrauterine insemination or intracervical insemination.

Recently, TMC began convening a weekly "Early Pregnancy" Zoom class - free for both clients and non-clients - that focuses on common concerns and helpful information for early pregnancy health.

TMC now offers more lactation consultations with certified experts; the monthly "Milk Makers" support group is a safe space for clients to connect about the joys and challenges of lactation.

At TMC's 40th anniversary celebration this past fall, Mayor Ed Gainey pointed to racial health disparities in Pittsburgh - including a staggering Black maternal mortality rate, worse than 97% of similarly-sized cities - as detailed in the City of Pittsburgh's 2019

Gender Equity Commission report.

"Everybody wants to make somebody a statistic," he said. "What we should be doing is looking at each other and creating pathways to reduce [disparities]."

The midwifery model of care offered at TMC is but one of many pathways for individuals and families residing in the greater Pittsburgh area. Birth centers utilizing client-centered, individualized care consistently experience better maternal and infant health outcomes than national averages, and are demonstrated to reduce racial disparities.

"Their model of care," TMC client Jennifer Tomon said, "should be the standard for all healthcare."

The Midwife Center is dedicated to serving the people of Pittsburgh through gold-standard midwifery, community engagement, comprehensive sexual health education, behavioral health & wellness, and more.

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Promising poetry: CCRP student Madina Mada

A Message from BGC Youth Programs

Pittsburgh - Madina Mada is a senior at Perry High School, where she is on track to serve as the valedictorian of her class.

She aspires to go to nursing school and become an oncology nurse. Madina is the fifth Mada cousin to participate in the BGC's College & Career Readiness Program (CCRP).

In her free time, she practices makeup artistry and creates Henna tattoo designs. Madina also writes poetry; read one of her works below.

The melanin that shine with degree

It's the African in me
It's not about you it's about we
We have melanin that shines with degree
Hips that swing to every beat
This that African culture that you can't defeat
Gold like rain, rich in texture
Oh yes is Africans we straight pressure
With hips that curve and patterns that shine
We might be reason why the colors of
The rainbow look so beautiful in the sky
We made your eyes woke
We spit so much wisdom try to take it all you'll choke
So this I'ma say and this I'ma shout
Until you get into your head what being Africans about
So it's not about you it's about we
Cause we got this melanin that shines with degree
My Black is blue print

My Black is blue print
My Black is fine print
My black is roofless

My black is courageous
My black is the bravest
The trend that's the greatest
My black commits

My black 's cute
My black was mute in the past now it's the future
My black has reboot

Black that shines high through the skies
Black with black truth that they swept under tides
My black is empowered
By the motherland throne
My black built towers
That people may now call their homes
My black is history and future ♦



ABOVE: Madina Mada is a promising CCRP student. Photo courtesy of Judy Lubarski.

BELOW: Volunteers from Most Wanted Fine Art bring toys and gift cards to local families outside the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation's holiday party on Saturday, Dec. 10. Photo by Nina Gibbs.



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LOCAL REAL ESTATE BLOTTER

- Bloomfield, Friendship, Garfield, East Liberty, Lawrenceville, & Stanton Heights -

Real Estate Sales for the month of October 2022

Compiled by Lillian Denhardt, Residential Realtor

Bloomfield

Benjamin D Friedman to Michael R Garcia at 213 S. Evaline St. for \$687,500.

Clinton Conley to Seth A & Natalie S Egnot at 360 S. Evaline St. for \$612,000.

Joseph H & Laverne M Manes to Christopher H Wehs at 336 S. Evaline St. for \$308,000.

Jozef T Vasil to Pro Deo Familia Et Patria Trust at 506 Edmond St. for \$1.

Megan K Higgins to Samia Khalaf at 5223 Coral St. for \$395,000.

Peggy A McGarry to Felipe Palomo at 235 S. Pacific Ave. for \$575,000.

Stephen N Didiano to James & Christa M Panigall 2020 Family Trust at 325 Ella St. for \$255,000.

Sue Ann Bliss to Nicholas Lee & Amanda Lee O'Loughlin at 437 Sapphire Way for \$1.

Friendship

No sales to report.

Garfield

East Liberty Development, Inc. to Derek Darwin at 5521 Broad St. for \$185,000.

Linda Gee-Stephens to Lillian Denhardt & Justin George at 116 N. Pacific Ave. for \$0.

East Liberty

405 Betty LLC to Anum Saeed at 409 N. Beatty St. for \$625,000.

East Liberty Development, Inc. to Deon Goodlow at 476 Enright Ct. for \$184,900.

East Liberty Development, Inc. to Patricia C Souza at 511 N. Saint Clair St. for \$725,000.

Jessica L Brooks to John Lehr at 628 Collins

Ave. for \$515,000.

Patrick J Solomon to Ze Xin Koh at 775 Mellon St. for \$325,000.

William Connor Hassan to April Y Brust at 763 Mellon St. for \$330,000.

Lawrenceville

5515 Butler Street Development LP to Lawrenceville Investment Company LLC at 0 Harrison St. for \$15,000.

Adam Longshore to Ryan Dunne Ewing at 3600 Smallman St. for \$925,000.

Adrian & Danielle Redman to Nasha LP at 4380 Coleridge St. for \$120,000.

Alison K Babusci to Courtney Roberts at 4217 Post St. for \$242,500.

Ayanna Lyles to Tyler Borza at 5213 Stanton Ave. for \$435,000.

Azadeh Pourmir to Estrada Trust at 264 44th St. for \$450,000.

Chieu Nguyen to Grand Old Properties LLC at 165 45th St. for \$152,500.

Christopher M Ban to D Lange Marc at 5161 Stanton Ave. for \$495,000.

David R & Lori B Silvester to John Cameron Muir Stockman at 4817 Blackberry Way for \$267,500.

Davis Payne to Jacob Panikulam at 339 Main St. for \$415,000.

Erica Shumener to Mark-Andrew William & Claire at 5222 Holmes St. for \$494,000.

Erin Andrzejewski to Yien Hao Lock at 4206 Post St. for \$311,000.

Goon Nation Ent LLC to Evren Karabacak at 4125 Butler St. for \$125,000.

Jacqueline A Benzino to Jennifer L Blodgett at 5235 Dresden Way for \$325,000.

Judith Surmacy to Daniel J Tobin at 3926 Woolslayer Way for \$1.

Lien Doan to Phuc Duy Le at 4257 Stanton Ave. for \$0.

Maria Camila Aponte to Parker Throw at 216 Main St. for \$550,000.

Marigrace Ambrosia to Hardin A Melanie at 5231 Carnegie St. for \$299,000.

Mark & Cynthia Mcquaide to Chechak Enterprises LLC at 4301 Main St. for \$450,000.

Mark A Mcquaide to Chechak Enterprises LLC at 4225 Main St. for \$450,000.

Mary Lou Bayer to Bearland Realty LLC at 4902 Plum Way for \$80,000.

Michelle M Jackson to Intent Realty LLC at 5270 Wickliff St. for \$90,000.

Paul K Stockman to Johannah J & Gary S

Hutchison at 268 Fisk St. for \$799,000.

Pittsburgh Residential Solutions LLC to David Mariani at 260 Fisk St. for \$878,000.

Randal D Cevera to Jena M Skelton at 5119 Duncan St. for \$365,000.

Richard V & Esther D Lipinski to Deal-makers001 LLC at 5167 Carnegie St. for \$168,000.

Robert J & Nancy L Haddad to Shawn David & Carolyn H Allen at 144 43rd St. for \$770,000.

Rowlen Kyd & Associates LP to Bosphorus Properties LLC at 5302 Butler St. for \$307,000.

Stanton Heights

Benjamin Michael Voytko to Yigal & Meirav Attali at 970 Oranmore St. for \$399,000.

Elek LLC to Bridgeconnect Investments LLC at 1553 Hawthorne St. for \$160,000.

Philip C Chapman III to Stephen A Lee at 1528 Hawthorne St. for \$298,000.

Terence O'Leary to Nasha LP at 1168 Woodbine St. for \$120,000.

This column, which uses data from Allegheny County's online portal, contains occasional errors. If something looks off, let us know.

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Bloomfield Square

continued from page 9

able housing requirements. The approved plans for The Meridian project can be accessed at tinyurl.com/MeridianDetails.

The plans show The Meridian will be six stories tall, with five gray rows of apartments capped with a brown, wood-colored top floor. Planning Commissioner Becky Mingo, before voting to approve the project, complained that it looked like “highway motel architecture” that could be found anywhere in the country.

Andrew McKeon, who now serves as editor of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation’s monthly newspaper, *The Bulletin*, called The Meridian design “American homogeneous,” and noted that if the Bloomfield project looks the same, it could detract from the neighborhood’s long-established identity as the city’s “Little Italy.”

For 10 years, McKeon worked at a tiny DVD-rental shop called “Dreaming Ant” (tinyurl.com/DreamingAnt) on Liberty Avenue; he also lived down the street for 16 years. Now 40 years old, he described Dreaming Ant, squirreled away in the back of what is now the Yinz coffee shop, as a place where you could “sit and loaf, read, write, draw, and paint.”

People in the neighborhood lived “meal to meal, beer to beer,” but could also “take a walk and enjoy the fresh air because you didn’t have to work so hard to earn a pile of cash just to pay the rent.” When he first moved there, he said, Bloomfield had “some of the cheapest rents I’d seen in the city.”

During an interview, McKeon considered whether the low-cost bohemian lifestyle he loved in Little Italy still exists, or if he was merely feeling nostalgic for an era that has already passed.

“That may be,” he said. “Certainly, there are still people playing music, enjoying the bar scene, eating pasta and tacos, and thriving in Little Italy.”

When he married and had a child, McKeon said he had to give up looking for a home in Bloomfield and the East End area. “We did some window shopping, but our hopes were dashed pretty quickly,” he explained. “It was a little bit heartbreaking because I thought I was going to be an East Ender for the rest of my life. But homes in the area were just too expensive.”

Jared Sadowski, however, who lives less than a block away from the proposed Bloomfield Square project, said he protected himself from rising prices by buying his home 11 years ago. “I’m never moving,” he said.

Sadowski, 42, said he had “neutral” feelings about Bloomfield Square. He likes the fact that the project will provide a new Giant Eagle for the neighborhood which will be the same size as the existing Community Market.

“I know that everyone’s going to have mixed emotions about it,” said Sadowski. If rents continue to rise, he said he hopes that landlords will be considerate of the older people who have rented in the neighborhood for many years. On the other hand, he said, Bloomfield Square could “also bring more businesses to Liberty Avenue, which could be great.”

[Bulletin contributor Alan Guenther lives two blocks from the proposed Bloomfield Square project. He can be reached at guenthera30@gmail.com.] ♦



ABOVE: Zack Shell, owner of Baby Loves Tacos (4508 Liberty Ave.). Photo by Alan Guenther.

BELOW: Maria Merante, owner of Merante’s Bloomfield (4723 Liberty Ave.). Photo by Alan Guenther.



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Dream come true: Garfield resident Derek Darwin's homeownership journey

By Elizabeth Sensky East Liberty Development, Inc.

Insight/East Liberty - Homeownership might seem like a lofty goal, something meant for one day down the road, or maybe for someone else. But when life circumstances push you in the right direction, you must seize the moment.

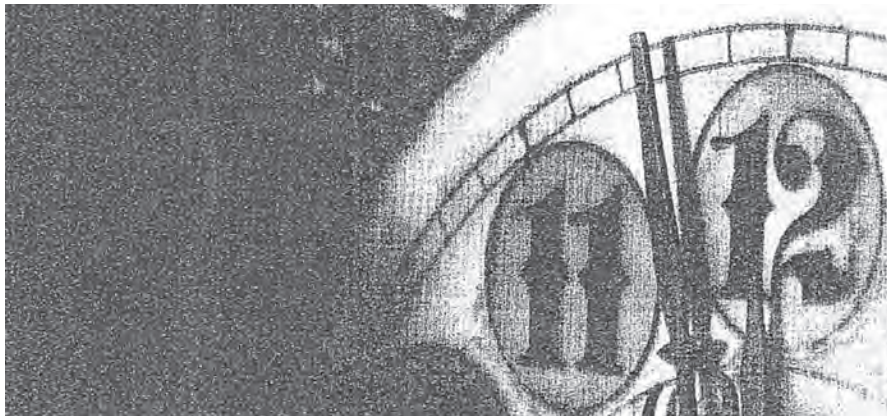
This is how things transpired for 44-year-old Derek Darwin, who works as a hydrant specialist for the Pittsburgh Water & Sewer Authority. The longtime Garfield resident is also a volunteer football coach for the Garfield Gators.

When his landlord refused to renew the lease last December, Darwin knew it was the right time to pursue his dream of homeownership. After searching on his own, to no avail, Darwin got in touch with ELDI's affordable homeownership specialist [and founder of LifeVenture Real Estate Solutions], Mary Hester.

She showed him a Broad Street home that East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) was remodeling in Garfield - as a part of the Garfield Affordable Homeownership Project - and connected him to financial support. On Oct. 14, Darwin closed on his home, achieving his goal of creating equity and generational wealth for his family. Find out how Darwin made it happen in the following Q&A.



AT LEFT: Mary Hester, left, of East Liberty Development, Inc. (ELDI) meets with Derek Darwin at the new Garfield home he purchased from ELDI. After being displaced by his landlord - in what Darwin now sees as a blessing in disguise - he began pursuing homeownership. Darwin and his two children are now happily settling into their new home in Garfield. Photo courtesy of Elizabeth Sensky.



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ELDI: When did you start thinking about pursuing homeownership?

Darwin: "I've been wanting to own my own home, but when my landlord sold the house I was renting, it stepped up the process. So, in January, I started looking anywhere and everywhere. I was desperate. I was going to move out of Pittsburgh. Then, around February, I called Rick Swartz [executive director of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation], and he led me to Mary Hester. At the time, two of my children and I were displaced. I had to move out of my rental, and I was staying with my brother. From the first phone call with Mary, she got the ball rolling."

ELDI: What were the first steps in the process once you were connected?

Darwin: "Mary showed me this place on Broad Street maybe a week later, but it was still getting worked on. She showed me another place too, but this one was closer to my work and where I coach in Garfield. It's fully remodeled and has enough space for me and my children, so it was perfect. After that, we just kept in touch. I was getting a little depressed because of my living situation, but she kept my spirits up until the house was finished. And when it was finished, we put the gas on the process."

ELDI: What did you do to help prepare for homeownership?

Darwin: "My savings account was already in pretty good shape, and my credit, though it wasn't excellent, was good enough that I didn't really have to work on it. However, I did take some online homeownership training, which taught me about the responsibilities of being a homeowner and saving."

ELDI: Did you receive any down payment or closing costs assistance?

Darwin: "Yes, the Urban Redevelopment Authority of Pittsburgh helped me out a lot - with a loan of \$30,000, and around \$7,500 for my closing costs."

ELDI: Were you aware of those available supports before connecting with Mary?

Darwin: "No, I wasn't. Mary was great. She did all of the legwork. I didn't know anything about homeownership. As I said, my landlord gave me a month's notice that he was selling the house, and I just didn't want to get into that process again of leaving on someone else's terms. I was at that house for 10 years. He told me in December, so I went from celebrating Christmas to leaving my house on Jan. 1. It was a blessing in disguise, I guess. I'd probably still be there, not owning a home, but I didn't know it at the time."

ELDI: What was the most challenging, and the most rewarding, part of the process?

Darwin: "The most challenging part of the process was the wait, knowing my situation, that I didn't have a place for me and my kids. I drove past the house a lot, and just seeing it, you know, that was the hard part. The closing was the best part. The reward was getting the keys." ♦



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