

the
Bulletin

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**Garfield Highlands:
delays hit leasing
of new homes**

By Joe Reuben *Bulletin contributor*

Garfield - Construction of 25 new rental homes in the neighborhood wrapped up at the end of January.

According to officials involved with the Garfield Highlands project, the process of approving households to move into these homes is now underway.

But filling the units is going to take much more time, from all accounts, than what had been previously envisioned by the limited partnership that owns the development.

“We thought our headaches were pretty much over once we got through the construction phase,” confided one individual with the ownership group [who asked to remain anonymous because he was not authorized to speak on behalf of the own-

See **Garfield Highlands** | page 2



ABOVE: Artist Darian Johnson is hard at work on his new Pittsburgh series at VaultArt Studio (5100 Penn Ave.). The Garfield art studio is a project of Achieva, which supports and empowers people with disabilities & their families. Photo courtesy of VaultArt Studio.



ABOVE: Onsite manager Linda Fulmer (right) embraces Courtney Christian, a new tenant of the Garfield Highlands development. Christian moved into her Rosetta Street home last month. See the full story above. Photo courtesy of Joe Reuben.

**Attorneys consult with City, try to salvage
plans for 248-unit ‘Bloomfield Square’**

By Alan Guenther *Bulletin contributor, BGC Board Member*

Bloomfield - On Feb. 5, attorneys for Echo Realty, whose Bloomfield Square - a proposed six-story, 248-apartment development - could be built at the foot of the Bloomfield Bridge, appeared in court to discuss timelines for future legal actions.

Back in November, the project was rejected by the City’s Zoning Board because it failed to adhere to the site’s current zoning standards. Constructing six stories, instead of the three, was not permitted.

The Board said it lacked the legal authority to approve the project. Attorneys representing Echo Realty disagreed and filed

a challenge to the zoning board ruling at Common Pleas Court.

Judge Mary McGinley set Mar. 21 as a deadline for all relevant documents to be produced, and she set May 6 as a deadline for attorneys to file legal briefs.

It is uncertain what fate awaits the project. During the Feb. 5 hearing, City attorney Kevin Freyder said the City would submit its arguments unless the parties involved reach an agreement and settle the case out of court, which indicates that negoti-

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Garfield Highlands *continued from page 1*

ers]. “We’re now learning that some applicants are waiting as long as 120 days to find out if they’re approved.”

“Part of this is due to the stringent regulations put forward by the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) because of the use of federal tax credits to finance the project,” this official went on to say in a recent interview. “We can’t have anyone earning more than what the threshold allows for eligible tenants. If we go over that threshold with any applicant, the penalties levied by the IRS could cause great financial upheaval to the development.”

Household income on the part of applicants is limited to no more than \$60,240 for a family of four, and \$54,240 for a family of three [based on guidelines issued by the PA Housing Finance Agency]. But income is not the only hurdle applicants must face.

“Assuming they clear the income bar, there are still credit and criminal background checks that need to be done,” the same official said. “The rental management company is even asking tenants to produce banking records that could extend as far back as two years, and to account for any deposit of funds into a checking or savings account that appear on those statements. Frankly, it becomes a fairly torturous process that can start to look like a beatdown of the applicant.”

Rick Swartz, whose organization, the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), is a partner in the project, said he is disappointed by the delays.

“We thought that we’d have most, if not all, of the units under lease by March 31st. I think we’ll be lucky to even have 15 leased by that deadline,” he said. “Part of me wants to blame the rental management company [NDC] that was hired, but when we question them as to why it’s taking so long to approve people, they put

the blame on the mass of federal and state regulations that govern affordable housing programs.”

As of mid-February, only three of the 25 homes were occupied. “That means the limited partnership is carrying the financial burden of all the carrying costs on the other 22 that are empty,” Swartz noted.

The official [who requested anonymity] with the ownership group said the leasing process is not the only area bogged down in bureaucratic red tape.

“We also are trying to draw down part of a \$590,000 grant for the project awarded by the Federal Home Loan Bank (FHLB) of Pittsburgh. That has proven to be a complete nightmare all unto itself,” he confided. “The funds are needed to pay our general contractor, Mistick Construction, and the paperwork they’ve requested from us is never-ending. The units are done, the occupancy permits have been issued by the City, and yet we still can’t seem to access those funds.”

He is referring to the FHLB’s Affordable Housing Program, which uses millions in contributions - paid into the FHLB annually by member banks - to provide the grants for eligible projects.

“The irony is that these funds come from the bank - in this case, Dollar Bank,” the official explained. “They are not the taxpayer’s monies. And yet even the bank has no control over the approval of a draw-down request by the FHLB. We are now in the fourth month of seeking that approval for our project, if one can believe it.”

The Bulletin reached out to the FHLB for comment on these criticisms; as of press time, there was no response.

Swartz said that seeing the first tenants moving into their units has been gratifying - and that it helps ease the pain, and ineptitude, that derives from public and private agencies getting involved.

“At some point, we’ll get the homes filled with people who will benefit from all the waiting they’ve had to do - and nobody will have to bear witness to all of this silliness,” he opined. “For the general public, this should be a cautionary tale of how even the best-intended housing developments - and that is what Garfield Highlands is - can end up in the crosshairs of timid people, in various places, hiding behind their computer screens.” ♦

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BELOW: Kahyll Holyfield (@Holyfieldcolors) displays his work outside Garfield’s VaultArt Studio (5100 Penn Ave.). ‘Snoop Dogg is one of the best rappers of all time,’ he said. ‘I love all his songs, movies, and clothing. I can’t wait to try his cereal.’ Photo courtesy of VaultArt.



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Community development briefs: East End projects aplenty

A Message from the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation

• While the construction of additional affordable [for-sale] housing is planned for Garfield in 2024 and 2025, the prospect of more market-rate housing is also in the offing. On the for-sale side, three developments have zoning approval: the 5100 block of Rosetta Street, the 400 block of Wicklow Street, and the 500 block of N. Aiken Avenue. With interest rates still above 7% for construction loans, it may explain why the Wicklow and N. Aiken projects have yet to break ground.

• The Mellon's Orchard North project in the 300 block of N. Negley Avenue has been stalled for over a year while the developer and the City have been negotiating a new zoning overlay for the site. The developer, who still intends to build a 264-unit apartment complex, has told community members that the City set a 20% affordability standard as its condition for supporting such a change. Whether the neighborhood around the site decides to support it remains to be seen, according to Rick Swartz, Executive Director of the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC). John Axtell [of Friendship Community Group] said that, under the circumstances, a use variance is going to be a "very heavy lift" unless the zoning for the site is amended.

• Dennis Steigerwalt, a developer from Oakmont, has broken ground on a three-story rental house in the 200 block of N. Aiken Avenue. His "Picket Fence" is a duplex intended to maximize use of its interior space. The duplex has 2 market-rate units: one 1-bedroom and one 3-bedroom. Swartz said Steigerwalt has plans to build more units on several other parcels he controls in Garfield. He would like to make at least the 1-bedroom unit affordable, but the URA has no way of helping reduce his construction costs to make it more economically feasible for him to do so.

• The future of Garfield's Fort Pitt Park, which sits above the 4800-5100 blocks of Rosetta Street and surrounds the ballfield and playground on top of the hill, remains up in the air. The City has invested virtually nothing in its maintenance and upkeep. The site could make for an excellent second walking trail, but the BGC has made very little progress in that regard. Jan Raether, from the Mayor's office, has said he will be the point-of-contact on anything that involves a commitment from the City. Swartz said that planning a long-term improvement program for the park may have to wait until new funding is secured for the BGC's GreenZone coordinator position.

• The City wants to do a comprehensive review of the zoning for all Pittsburgh neighborhoods in 2024 and 2025. The question, though, is how long it will take to roll out this initiative. In the meantime, City Councilman Bobby Wilson (District 1) is proposing a change to the R-1 classification that would make it easier to build attached townhomes in districts which currently do not permit them. And the concept of allowing single-family homes with accessory dwelling units, by right, in R-1 districts also appears to be gaining traction at City Council. Most of Garfield falls under two R-1 categories.

• There is no news to report on The Children's Home of Pittsburgh's parcels at Penn, N. Atlantic Ave., and Broad St., where the St. Lawrence O'Toole Church building once stood. According to Children's Home CEO Pamela Keen, who will retire later this year [see page 5], no real progress has been made on a site plan. Likewise, there has been no movement with the former McCabe Bros. Funeral Home, which closed last March.

• Garfield Community Land, Inc. (GCL), the land trust group, finally submitted its application to the IRS to be designated a true charity [or 501 (c) (3) organization]. Once approved, GCL will be able to solicit grants and private donations.

• Despite problems with its conservatorship petitions - filed against City-owned properties in Garfield - Rising Tide Partners managed to acquire two properties that will be turned over to Open Hand Ministries, or other nonprofits, to develop as affordable housing in 2024. The semi-detached homes are located at 5362 & 5449 Rosetta St. ♦

the Bulletin

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Board Meetings are held by the Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation at 6:30 p.m. on the second Monday of each month; these monthly meetings are open to the public. For more details, email Pam@Bloomfield-Garfield.org.

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Bloomfield Square

continued from page 1

ations between the City and Echo Realty might be ongoing.

As proposed, Bloomfield Square would include a Giant Eagle grocery store and retail space.

The existing, abandoned VFW building [adjacent to Gangwish St.] would be replaced, and the Community Market that currently serves the neighborhood would be closed during the approximately two-year period that Bloomfield Square would be built.

Echo Realty has said that it would help provide grocery delivery services during construction.

Under the existing law, Echo is required to set aside 10%, or 25 apartments, as affordable housing.

Echo Realty is also building the Meridian housing project on Shakespeare Street, in East Liberty. For that project, Echo has agreed to set aside 15% of the apartments as affordable housing units, following negotiations with housing advocates.

If Echo met the same benchmark at 15% of Bloomfield Square, an additional 12 units, or a total of 37 affordable housing apartments, would be built.

A traffic engineer hired by Echo Realty testified during a zoning board hearing in August 2023 that the project would have little to no impact on local traffic.

To prevent Bloomfield Square renters from competing with area residents for the on-street parking permits, Echo Realty said [during a public hearing held last summer] that any of its tenants moving into the new development would not be allowed to purchase these permits from the City.

However, no explanation was provided as to how Echo would prevent new renters from buying them.

The Bloomfield Development Corporation has endorsed the project [see page 8].

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



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Friendship Community Group planning for robust 2024

By Nancy Cohen *Friendship Community Group*

Friendship - During its annual retreat on Jan. 20, the Friendship Community Group (FCG) elected new officers, selected committee chairs & members, and set dates for its sponsored events. The first major event on the organization’s schedule is the Friendship Flower & Folk Festival (F4) on Saturday, May 11.

F4 takes place at Baum Grove, a FCG-owned parklet and scenic enclave. Two rows of large Ginkgo biloba trees greet visitors beneath an ivy-covered wall, which hems its greenspace with public gardens, benches, and paths. FCG maintains this space as a resource for local residents.

Every Mother’s Day weekend, on Saturday, FCG provides neighbors with free music [and food, available for purchase at a nominal cost] at Baum Grove, which also serves as a pickup spot for FCG’s online plant sale.


Prior to the festival, on May 5, FCG will host its “Inspiration Station” to support Pittsburgh Marathon participants. Volunteers are welcome to lend a hand for F4, and for the Inspiration Station.

On a July evening, FCG will host a summer picnic at Baum Grove from 6-9 p.m.; the exact date has yet to be determined. FCG provides a main dish and drinks while picnic-goers provide the sides. This event helps neighbors catch up and enjoy each other’s company. FCG will also facilitate a celebration of National Night Out on Aug. 6.

This year’s Friendship Yard Sale, organized by the FCG, goes down on Aug. 10, from 8 a.m. to 2 p.m. The FCG is planning a “Friendship History Walking Tour” for September, and will participate in the city’s Garbage Olympics event on Sept. 21, from 9-11 a.m.

The annual “Pumpkin Stroll” takes place at 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 31. November marks the beginning of the FCG’s online wreath sale; all profits go to the maintenance of Baum Grove. Sale items will be available for pickup on Nov. 30.


For event details and volunteer info, visit friendship-pgh.org, where Board meeting minutes are posted. ♦



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Children's Home CEO Pamela Keen retiring after 30 years of service

A Message from The Children's Home of Pittsburgh & Lemieux Family Center



ABOVE: Pamela Keen, CEO of The Children's Home, prepares to retire this year after three decades of strong leadership. Photo courtesy of Bethany Bartilson.

Friendship - On Monday, Feb. 5, The Children's Home of Pittsburgh & Lemieux Family Center (5324 Penn Ave.), a non-profit organization serving the SWPA region and beyond, announced that Pamela Keen is retiring from her position as Chief Executive Officer (CEO), effective Oct. 1.

Concurrently, as part of a planned succession, The Children's Home Board of Directors has approved the promotion of Stacy Schesler, Chief Operating Officer (COO), to CEO [effective Jul. 1].

The Board of Directors recently expressed its thanks for Keen's vision and her valuable contributions to The Children's Home for the past 30 years

Keen's steadfast leadership has been crucial to building unique programs including: 30-bed Pediatric Specialty Hospital, Child's Way daycare for medically fragile

children, Pediatric VIEW, therapy services, and counseling & permanency services.

Over the last 11 years, Keen and Schesler have partnered closely on strategy and business decisions.

"The Board is thrilled to appoint Stacy to succeed Pamela as The Children's Home's CEO. Stacy is a highly experienced executive and knows, firsthand, what is needed to continue growing the organization's programs and services, while providing quality care to patients, families, and employees," said Theresa Heck, President of the Children's Home Board of Directors.

"The last 11 years at The Children's Home have been the highlight of my professional career," Schesler said. "It has been a privilege to have worked with Pamela and witness the passion, dedication, vision, and

tremendous business acumen that she has shared with me and our management team."

During Keen's tenure, The Children's Home experienced tremendous growth, moving to its Penn Avenue facility in 2007.

She expanded the Pediatric Specialty Hospital from six to 30 beds, built a \$21 million replacement facility and \$8 million expansion; implemented the first ventilator transitional services; led the organization through strategic planning; and created the state's first Pediatric Extended Care Center, Child's Way, which is the only alternative to in-home care for medically fragile children.

Keen maintained high regulatory standards for all programs, and most recently brought an in-patient and outpatient therapy service to The Children's Home.

"Working alongside Stacy and our incredible leadership team to build an organization that compassionately serves children and families in our region and beyond has been a privilege," Keen said. "The Children's Home has a bright future as Stacy builds upon our shared vision. I look forward to supporting The Children's Home through a continued role on our Board of Directors."

ward to supporting The Children's Home through a continued role on our Board of Directors."

Schesler aims to expand on the strong foundation that has been established over the last three decades. Drawing from her experience in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, she will rely on expertise in human resource management, and an advanced knowledge of business administration, to help lead The Children's Home for many years to come. ♦

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Assemble youth camps open for enrollment

By Yuhan Yan *Assemble*

Garfield - Staff members at Assemble (4824 Penn Ave.) - a community space for learning, creativity, and innovation - are excited to announce the details of their upcoming Spring Break and summer camps.

This year, Assemble will provide enriching experiences with a diverse range of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Art, & Math) activities designed to spark curiosity, foster creativity, and encourage learning. The camps provide an immersive environment where young minds can explore new interests, develop skills, and make lasting friendships.

The “Afrofuturistic Astronaut” Spring Break Camp, scheduled for Mar. 25-29 and geared towards kids in grades 3-6, is a dream come true for young space enthusiasts. Camp activities will feature a special focus on space, planets, and astronauts, including an exciting field trip to Pittsburgh’s newly opened Moonshot Museum.

Promising a week of interstellar exploration and discovery, this camp is an opportunity for kids to engage with real-world space exploration efforts and witness cutting-edge technology. Participants will also learn about hidden figures like mathematician Katherine Johnson, as well as modern-day figures like Ruth Carter, who designed costumes for the *Black Panther* films.

Running from June through August, Assemble’s summer camps will offer varied, weekly themes that cater to diverse interests. The “Film Crew” camp invites movie-loving kids [in grades 5-9] to learn about the film industry from local experts in hair, makeup, and set design. At the “Eco Explorers” camp, children become stewards of the planet, learning about sustainability and how to care for the environment through fun, yet impactful projects – and by creating artwork with reusable & recycled materials.

The “Passport around the World” camps are for kids [in grades 1-5] who are curious about the world and different traditions, fostering global awareness and appreciation through creating artwork inspired by different cultures. The animation camps encourage aspiring animators [in grades 1-5] to learn how to draw cartoons, make comic books, and create characters using a variety of tools.



ABOVE: Cheerful kids and instructors celebrate another fantastic Assemble summer camp adventure at 4824 Penn Ave. in Garfield. Photo courtesy of Assemble.

Last but not least, there will be a first-ever “Cosplay” camp for youths [in grades 5-9] who are interested in costume design. Guided by experienced instructors, each participant will have the opportunity to finish their unique costumes over the course of the camp.

Assemble is committed to making these camps accessible to everyone; all camps are free for Garfield residents, with additional scholarship tickets available. Camps run from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. daily, with optional pre- and post- care available from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m., and include complimentary lunch and snacks for all participants.

To learn more, and to register for any of these Assemble camps, please visit assemblephgh.org. Feel free to reach out to camp coordinator Leah Lavrinc at (412) 661-6111 or leah@assemblephgh.org. ♦

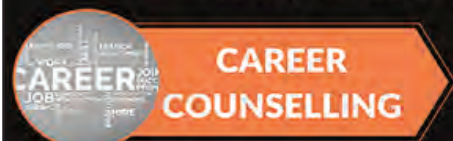
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Neighborhood FOCUS

Zoning appeal ongoing: BDC files to intervene at former ShurSave site

A Message from Bloomfield Development Corporation

Perspective/Bloomfield - In early February, Bloomfield Development Corporation (BDC) intervened in an appeal - before the Allegheny County Court of Common Pleas - concerning the denial of variances [by the City's Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA)] for the proposed redevelopment of 4401 Liberty Avenue.

Echo Realty, which owns the site [formerly home to ShurSave, and now a "Community Market" grocery store], filed its appeal of the ZBA decision late last year. BDC's intervention in the appeal ensures that Bloomfield residents' shared interest in new affordable housing, and the inclusion of a grocery store, will be firmly represented by the community organization as the case proceeds.

Since 2018, we here at BDC have engaged with residents and community members extensively about the future of this central neighborhood site.

In 2019, during the Bloomfield Central Gateway Guidelines process, our neighbors' consensus of opinion was established around two potential uses: a grocery store, and affordable housing units.

These priorities were reaffirmed when more than 700 community members signed our petition after Echo Realty acquired the site in 2020. Since then, further engagement has only continued to reiterate the same suggestions, as many local residents

want to see a plan that incorporates grocery access as a core element of the site's redevelopment.

Redevelopment of this site also presents an opportunity for Bloomfield to add income-restricted, affordable housing units for the first time since 2016. This comes at a time when "naturally occurring" affordable units are increasing in price because higher-income households are moving to Bloomfield.

The City of Pittsburgh's 2022 Housing Needs Assessment noted the need for multifamily housing options, stating, "Pittsburgh is projected to add 9,700 households

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BELOW: The once-and-future king of Bloomfield's grocery life, this gateway site (4401 Liberty Ave.) is now subject to Echo Realty's appeal of a decision rendered by the City's Zoning Board. Graphic courtesy of BDC.



Redevelopment of this site also presents an opportunity for Bloomfield to add income-restricted, affordable housing units for the first time since 2016.

- continued from previous page -

over the next 10 years, with almost [75%] as renters. In total, about half of all new Pittsburgh households will be looking to rent multifamily, placing additional price pressure on this housing type.”

By intervening in the appeal, BDC aims to independently represent the neighborhood's stated priorities for the redevelopment.

The Bloomfield Bridge gateway is simultaneously being considered for further transformation, as the City has made an investment in the adjacent intersection.

With more than \$2 million budgeted in the 2024 Capital Budget to improve the Bloomfield Bridge intersection, we now have an opportunity to fully reimagine the gateway entrance to our neighborhood.

Late last year, the Department of Mobility & Infrastructure (DOMI) secured the majority of this funding from the state's Multimodal Transportation Fund; DOMI officials indicated that they intend to begin planning and engineering efforts this year.

Under the current schedule for the appeal issued by the Court, all parties to the case have until May 6 to file their appellate briefs. ♦

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Counting on community: mental health support for all families

By Takeela Washington *Sensory Super Powers PGH*

Insight/Pittsburgh - According to the U.S Centers for Disease Control & Prevention, nearly 6 out of 10 children between the ages of 3-17 years old have been diagnosed with a mental health disorder. Those numbers get increasingly worse for children living below 100% of the federal poverty level. What feels even more disheartening is that these statistics vary based on race and gender.

For example, male children between 2-8 years old were more likely than female children in the same age range to have a mental, behavioral, or developmental disorder. In our current social climate, the pandemic has driven these numbers higher as families are feeling increased levels of stress.

So, what's the solution? How can we, as a community, support our children through mental health challenges?

Our kids' mental health

As a caregiver, it can be scary when you suspect that your child may be dealing with some emotional or mental health struggles. Consider the following suggestions to help navigate these daunting situations:

1) Keep a log of challenging behaviors before seeking support. Remember that you are your child's biggest advocate; you know what is, and what's not, characteristic of their



ABOVE: Community support comes in many shapes and forms, including play spaces that help children engage with their surroundings. Photo by Takeela Washington.

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normal behavior. A simple outline will help you find the best supports for your family.

2) Talk to your child. Create a safe space for you both to have open dialogue about any challenges they might be facing. Kids are more likely to talk when they feel safe and included in the conversation.

3) Exercise self-care. It's important that you find support for yourself while you're supporting your child. We cannot pour from an empty cup.

Emotional learning at school

How children interact with their peers influences their entire learning experience. A school curriculum that promotes social & emotional wellness will inspire students' positive self-awareness. Studies have shown that children who are given tools to respectfully express their emotional needs will develop a more positive view of themselves.

These tools can also help cultivate social awareness, healthy relationship skills, and responsible decision-making. This helps kids forge a more positive connection and commitment to their school, as well as a new sense of purpose and less emotional distress. Does the school in your community include this sort of instructional learning? If it doesn't, reach out and encourage them to adopt a curriculum that supports students' mental and social wellbeing.

Community resources for mental health

At Sensory Super Powers PGH, we aim to help families develop self-regulation skills to enhance their mental well-being. This year, we're bringing sensory spaces to Garfield Community Farm. These sensory spaces, to be installed early this summer, will be accessible to families and individuals from Garfield and the surrounding communities.

Engaging with these spaces by taking "sensory breaks" can help children and families de-escalate from environments that might create sensory overload. These breaks can be soothing to the nervous system, promoting decreased cortisol levels in the body. We believe that once children learn to creatively express their emotions, as a family member and community member, they are better prepared to achieve success wherever life takes them. ♦

MONTHLY BLOOD DRIVE IN BLOOMFIELD

Bloomfield Development Corporation invites local residents to participate in its monthly blood drive - held every third Thursday, from 2-7 p.m. - behind the WPH Nursing School (4921 Mend Way). Visit vitalant.org or call 412-209-7000 to make an appointment.

Fringe Festival expands local footprint

By Xela Batchelder *Pittsburgh Fringe Festival*

East End - The Pittsburgh Fringe Festival is coming back to town for its eleventh year. This year, Fringe is expanding its schedule - from four to 10 days - of daring performances in venues throughout the Bloomfield and Garfield neighborhoods.

This is undoubtedly an “anything-including-the-kitchen-sink” festival, and it features a wide variety of artistic genres. While primarily concentrating on theatre, it has also hosted circus, comedy, dance, music, puppetry, virtual, storytelling, and visual acts.

The festival receives applications from around the world, and often hosts shows that tour the national and international Fringe circuit, affording local audiences the rare chance to see these shows in their own backyard.

Over the years, Pittsburgh Fringe has helped many launch local shows that have gone on tour around the world; one local show created by Torrey Shine started as a five-minute skit at the festival's Yinzer Variety Show and then went on to become a full-length show called “Don't Stop Believing: A Theatrical Remix of the 1980s.”

The show has now toured to sellout crowds at the Edinburgh Fringe in Scotland, the Tucson Fringe in Arizona (where she won

“Best Musical or Show Featuring Music”), and the Austin Fringe in Texas. Next up will be a run in New York City at the New York Fringe Festival, then back to where it all started with Pittsburgh Fringe, before continuing on to the Orlando and Rochester Fringe festivals.

Pittsburgh Fringe provides the ideal platform for short performance pieces, anything with a runtime too small to be a freestanding show. The festival offers multiple options to enjoy short pieces: the Yinzer Variety Show and the Fringe StorySlam.

The Yinzer Variety Show is a late night offering that allows anyone to perform a short piece of any genre. The StorySlam gives storytelling artists, or those who want to try their hand at the genre, a chance to take the stage and tell a short story on a pre-selected theme [this year's theme is “And It Could Be Dangerous...”].

If performing onstage is not an option, there are also group shows for visual artists and, of course, volunteer opportunities to pursue.

The Pittsburgh Fringe Festival runs from Apr. 18 to 27. To learn more about the festival, please visit pittsburghfringe.org or email info@pittsburghfringe.org. ♦

City's 'Adopt-a-Lot' program helps residents reclaim vacant plots

By Andrew McKeon *The Bulletin*

Pittsburgh - The City of Pittsburgh's “Adopt-a-Lot” program helps residents beautify city neighborhoods through land stewardship.

Neighbors may turn City-owned, vacant lots - eyesores burdened by overgrowth - into productive spaces that grow flowers and food. Applicants are also more than welcome to install rain or sensory gardens [see page 10] in adopted lots.

This program is free to city residents, who may participate by filling out a short application. The City created Adopt-a-Lot in an effort to streamline the process for residents to access City-owned vacant land and beautify their communities.

To date, almost 200 lots have been adopted in Pittsburgh.

This program aims to accomplish three goals: fostering neighborhood interaction; reimagining the potential of vacant lots; and encouraging environmental awareness.

To learn more about this program, and how to become a local “land steward,” visit the City's website (pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/toolkit). If you already have a plot of land in mind, begin the Adopt-a-Lot process by filling out the program's simple intake form (pittsburghpa.gov/dcp/form).

Curious about adopting a lot? Please direct your questions to oss@pittsburghpa.gov. ♦

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Difficult housing market: local groups work to level playing field

By Elizabeth Sensky *East Liberty Development, Inc.*

Pittsburgh – It is no secret that buying a home is not as easy as it used to be.

A recent *Pittsburgh City Paper* article put the current struggle into context by breaking down recent findings from the real estate company Redfin.

The data shows that Pittsburgh is the city with the highest percentage [32%] of large houses (more than two bedrooms) owned by boomers without children living at home; 13% of the city's large houses are owned by millennials with children.

According to the Redfin report, at the national level, empty-nest boomers own 28% of large homes compared to 14% by millennials with children.

With boomers living longer, wages currently stagnating, and a lack of housing supply contributing to the problem, one big question remains: if boomers without kids refuse to move out of their large houses, are they just making things harder for millennial parents who need sizable homes where they could raise a family?

Brettney Duck, a realtor at LifeVenture Buy Choice Homes, and director of homeownership for Catapult Greater Pittsburgh - a local nonprofit that helps build financial security in low-income and underserved neighborhoods - understands these challenges.

In her work with Catapult, Duck has helped many young families searching for homes in the Pittsburgh area.

As she told *City Paper*: "If it's just one person, you can be a little less selective about what kind of house you get, but if you have four children ... there's not a lot of affordable four-bedrooms in Allegheny County, I'm noticing," Duck says. "So, if you have multiple children, trying to find the space and still stay within your affordability range is an issue."

BELOW: *Kia Buchanan (center) accepts her "Homeowner of the Year" award at last year's Black Excellence in Real Estate gala. Tammy Thompson (left), executive director of Catapult Greater Pittsburgh, joins Mary Hester, director of real estate operations at LifeVenture Buy Choice Homes, in presenting the award. Photo courtesy of Black Excellence in Real Estate.*



In Pittsburgh's East Liberty neighborhood, the local community development organization East Liberty Development, Inc., has long approached development with the goal of helping neighbors - particularly minority residents - build equity and become homeowners.

From 2020 through 2022, the organization built 51 housing units (26 affordable, 10 workforce, and 15 market-rate); 62% of these units were sold to minority families.

Through its Affordable Homeownership Opportunities (AHO) program, ELDI has also been giving its tenants a preference to purchase homes within the organization's housing portfolio in East Liberty and surrounding communities for years.

In preparing tenants for homeownership, ELDI works closely with Catapult to provide homeownership education and training. Kia Buchanan was one of those tenants.

She first got connected with ELDI while living at the former East Liberty Gardens apartment complex. During the redevelopment of East Liberty Gardens, she was relocated to Enright Court, where she

heard about ELDI's AHO program.

By this point, Buchanan had already started to consider homeownership to avoid moving her three kids around again.

That was in 2017, but it was not until she got some encouragement from ELDI's affordable homeownership specialist [and founder of LifeVenture Buy Choice Homes] Mary Hester, that she started to take action.

"I said, 'I'm going to stay on you, Kia,'" Hester recalled.

By 2019, Buchanan began getting all of the elements in place to become a homeowner, working with Catapult (called "Circles Greater Pittsburgh" at the time) to fix her credit and learn more everything that homeownership entails. But in June 2020, everything came to a standstill after Buchanan's son died in a tragic accident.

"I shut down. I was able to take off six months from work, so I shut all the way down," she said.

Buchanan went back to work in December but, as soon as March 2021, both of her parents had fallen ill with COVID-19.

If it were not for the persistence of the LifeVenture team, Buchanan says, she probably would have let go of her dream altogether.

"Ms. Mary kept calling me, and I'm like, 'Alright, I'm going to get my life together,'" Buchanan said.

With limited affordable housing stock in the city, the LifeVenture team began searching the Greater Pittsburgh area. After looking at 10-15 houses, Buchanan toured a four-bedroom/two-bathroom home in McKeesport that just felt right.

"My kids actually picked it," she shared. "They love that they have their own bathroom and a yard."

After using up most of her savings during her bereavement, Buchanan's next hurdle was finding funds for the closing costs.

Joe Tomaceski, vice president of community lending at First Commonwealth Bank, was able to help secure a \$5,000 grant from the Federal Home Loan Bank's "First Front Door" program for Buchanan. ELDI provided her with a \$3,000 grant to cover the rest.

On July 28, 2023, representatives from ELDI, First Commonwealth Bank, Catapult, and LifeVenture gathered to celebrate Buchanan's closing. Years of perseverance and persistence had finally paid off - and all that remained of her journey to become a homeowner was the signing of some papers.

"The hardest part was trying to keep my head on after losing my son. It kicked the whole seat out of my pants, but everybody I got connected with was on me," Buchanan shared. "If it wasn't for all of them, I would've given up, or it might have taken longer than it did, so I'm very appreciative of all of the help I've received. I made it to the finish line." ♦



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LHS extends Lawrenceville lecture series

By Jude Wudarczyk *Lawrenceville Historical Society*

Lawrenceville - On Tuesday, Mar. 19, the Lawrenceville Historical Society (LHS) kicks off Year 42 of its annual series with a presentation on the history of Arsenal Park.

The guest speaker is Rebekah Wudarczyk, who was awarded a master's degree in landscape architecture from Chatham University. The chronology of her talk will run from when the US government first obtained the grounds in 1814 through the City's acquisition for use as a park, and then continue to the park's status today.

This year will see some changes. In recent years, the LHS usually conducted lectures and music programs at the Carnegie Library on Fisk Street. Due to the library's earlier closing time over the last few years, the society has been hosting programs at an earlier time. This time slot proved to be inconvenient for many potential attendees, who requested that the program start later in the evening.

Society members scoured the neighborhood for another suitable venue that could not only accommodate the size of the audience, but also provide ample parking. The LHS was fortunate enough to obtain an invitation from Zion Evangelical Church (237 37th St.) to use its church basement space.

Father Tom Gramc, pastor of St. Pio of Pietrelcina Parish, is kind enough to allow LHS program attendees to use St. Augustine's church parking lot during program hours. The lot will be open to these individuals from 7:15 to 9:15 p.m.; those staying after 9:15 face the possibility of having their car towed. The new time slot for the programs will be from 7:30 to 9:00 p.m. This allows people attending mass at St. Augustine's to also participate in LHS meetings.

Another change for LHS will be expanding from seven to nine public meetings this year. The meeting day has been changed from the third Thursday to the third Tuesday of each month. No meetings will be held in December, January, or February - all programs are free, and everyone is welcome.

Upcoming programs in the LHS series will feature art historian Gary Grimes speaking about 19th century Lawrenceville artists, Ray Czachowski unpacking the history of the Lawrenceville's Boys & Girls Club, and the Slim Forsythe Trio singing songs of Western Pennsylvania. Visit lawrencevillehistoricalsociety.org for more information. ♦

'Day of Prayer' to share blessings with Sojourner House families

By Kristen Nuss *Sojourner House*

East End - Sojourner House and Sojourner House MOMS provide compassionate, faith-based residential recovery services and housing to mothers and children in the Pittsburgh area.

We support mothers who are facing substance use disorder, helping them learn how to break the intergenerational cycle of poverty and substance use while rebuilding damaged relationships with their children.

In recognition of our faith-based roots, both organizations are pleased to announce our first interfaith Day of Prayer - to be held at our MOMS Green play yard (5529 Black St.) on Wednesday, Mar. 6.

Beginning at 10 a.m., prayers will go out to the families at our facilities who are dealing with substance use disorder, mental health disorders, and homelessness.

We have invited clergy and lay representatives from multiple faiths to join us in East Liberty. Representatives from each faith in attendance will be given a few moments to share their blessings, prayers, and words of encouragement for the families, programs, and facilities of Sojourner House and Sojourner House MOMS.

Substance use disorder, mental health disorders, and homelessness are challenges

faced by many in the Greater Pittsburgh community.

We hope this Day of Prayer will serve as a reminder - to those impacted by these problems - that there is hope for a brighter future and an entire community ready to support them.

"The Day of Prayer has been a goal of mine since starting at Sojourner House in 2019," De'netta Benjamin-Miller, Executive Director of Sojourner House, said. "No one grows up with dreams of facing substance use disorder or homelessness. I want those facing these challenges to see a community ready to show them compassion, and help them face their challenges."

For more info, please visit our website at sojournerhousepa.org. ♦

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A Digital World: Youth, Social Media, Sexualized Content, & Mental Health

Shape the Sky's training is designed for adults and led by licensed counselor and founder of Shape the Sky, Ryan Klingensmith. The goal of this presentation is to help adults educate children about creating a responsible image in the digital world.

Adults have the wisdom and experience to be responsible online, but they may not be aware of the latest social media trends and the negative effects of social media. We'll provide you with the most up-to-date information regarding the current digital climate, so you know what to look for and how to ensure children are using smartphones and devices responsibly.



Topics Include:

- * TikTok, Snapchat & Instagram
- * Mental health concerns on popular social media apps
- * Using a Technology Contract
- * Cyberbullying resources
- * Prevention steps
- * Sexualized content online
- * How to set expectations
- * Common mistakes made by youth
- * Monitoring services
- * Drug content on popular apps
- * Access to online resources

WHEN	TIME	LOCATION
Wednesday, March 20, 2024	6-8 p.m. Doors open at 5:30	Environmental Charter Middle School 5525 Columbo St. Pittsburgh, PA 15206

Scan the QR code to RSVP.



About Shape The Sky:

Shape the Sky's Founder, Ryan Klingensmith, is a parent and licensed counselor who works regularly with K-12 kids. Through his work, he gains first-hand experience of how social media can impact kids' and teenagers' mental health. His expertise and experience allow Shape the Sky to provide relevant, reliable information.

"Kids have the knowledge to use the technology, but sometimes lack the wisdom to use it. Adults have the wisdom to use the technology, but sometimes lack the knowledge to use it. My goal is to connect knowledge with wisdom."
-Founder Ryan Klingensmith



Free Help with Preparing & Filing 2023 Tax Returns

The Bloomfield-Garfield Corporation (BGC), in cooperation with the IRS, will once again be assisting individual taxpayers with filing their federal and state tax returns online. There is no charge for this service, which will be offered every Saturday, beginning February 10 and ending on Saturday, April 13, 2024. Taxpayers will need to make appointments in advance, and then come to:

BGC Community Activity Center
Lower Level
113 North Pacific Avenue
Garfield (15224)

The earliest appointment we offer is at 12:30, and the last available slot is 4:30 p.m. We do not assist business filers, or individuals who have rental income or numerous capital gains' transactions to report. City residents will also be able to receive help in filing their city tax returns. All taxpayers will need to have photo ID and proof of their Social Security number when they come for their appointment.

Call either Pamela Schon (412-441-6950, ext. 110) or Rick Swartz (412-441-6950, ext. 111) at the BGC to schedule an appointment.

Penn Ave. construction notice: Peoples Gas embarks on year-long project

A Message from the City of Pittsburgh

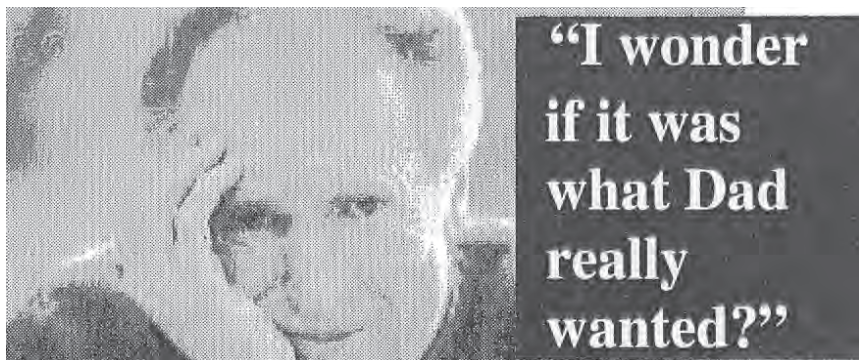
Penn Avenue - Peoples Natural Gas will conduct work on the avenue, between Roup Ave. and 45th St., over the next 12 months.

Work will take place on a rolling, segment-by-segment basis, beginning in March [between Aiken & Roup Aves.] and ending between Cullen & 45th Sts. in early 2025. Construction on each section/block will take approximately six-to-eight weeks to complete.

During that timeframe, the westbound lane of Penn Avenue will be closed to traffic [between 8 a.m. and 4 p.m. while the eastbound lane remains open. Both lanes will be open outside of work hours; westbound traffic will be detoured, but the final detour route is still being determined.

Peoples Natural Gas will inform any impacted residents and businesses about this project in the coming weeks, and the City will share details about pending detours once they are finalized.

Please reach out to lindsey.robles@pittsburghpa.gov with any questions. ♦



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Scholarships available for Point Park's Citizen Reporting Academy

A Message from TribLIVE Local

BELOW: Citizen Reporting Academy graduates, from the program's inaugural class, celebrate newfound certification on Feb. 10. Photo by Ethan Stoner.



Downtown - The Citizen Reporting Academy at Point Park University's Center for Media Innovation is a fully online certificate program to help individuals become citizen reporters and take control of their community's local story.

Courses last two weeks each, and the program can be completed in six months. Industry-leading professionals will teach classes on how to conduct interviews, create stories and photographs, market your work – and make money.

The inaugural cohort celebrated their graduation on Saturday, Feb. 10. The second cohort of the Point Park University Citizen Reporting Academy begins Apr. 1.

TribLIVE Local is supporting the program and local communities by granting scholarships of up to \$2,500 [the full tuition amount], for the Citizen Reporting Academy. To apply for an academy scholarship, please complete and submit the online form at tribtotalmedia.com/triblive-scholarship-program/citizen-reporting-academy-scholarship.

Scholarships are limited; applicants must be 18 years of age or older. Applicants will be notified of their application status on or before Mar. 25. ♦

JOIN THE WEST PENN HOSPITAL PATIENT SAFETY COMMITTEE

West Penn Hospital [WPH, 4800 Liberty Ave.] is looking for community members to be a part of the Patient Safety Committee meeting; you cannot currently be employed by Allegheny Health Network.

The purpose of the committee is to provide oversight and management of the patient safety plan and ensure the hospital meets the patient safety requirements outlined in the Joint Commission standards and the Pennsylvania Medical Care Availability and Reduction of Error Act (MCARE).

The Patient Safety Committee's objectives are to promote change; show leadership, and maintain staff awareness of patient safety, by identifying safety issues; implement best practices that are user-friendly and data-driven; support actionable plans; reduce and eliminate medical errors by identifying problems and implementing solutions that promote patient safety.

We ask community members to commit to attending a monthly meeting, either in person or via Microsoft Teams, and help WPH ensure alignment with the Patient Safety Committee's purpose.

Information shared at the committee meeting is confidential [and protected from disclosure, except as otherwise permitted under Pennsylvania's Peer Review Protection Act, Patient Safety Work Product, and the MCARE Act]. Committee members will be obligated to not disclose any information. If you are interested in joining this committee, please contact Jacqueline Drahos (Jacqueline.Drahos@AHN.org).



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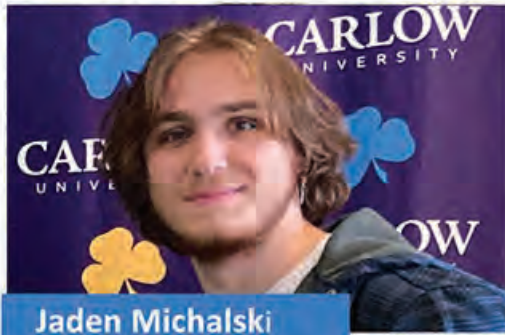
(www.facebook.com/BgcBulletin)

We promise not to overshare!



Dear Neighbor,

It has been a year to remember in our community. There are many successes to reflect back on and, as always, some things that still need a good deal of time or attention, or both. We are proud to share the stories of Jaden Michalski, Arianna Ethridge, and Chequila Estes – just three examples of the remarkable people who long for a better quality of life for themselves and their neighbors in spite of great challenges. With your support, we will head into 2024 with strengthened capacity to provide invaluable support systems for adults and children, create safe & affordable housing, and nurture new businesses and inclusive arts programming on Penn Avenue.



Jaden Michalski

Jaden Michalski, a Garfield resident who participated in both the College & Career Readiness Program and the Summer Learn & Earn Program, is now enrolled at Carlow University.



Arianna Ethridge

Arianna Ethridge, a Garfield resident who studied photography & ecology while participating in the Summer Learn & Earn Program.



Chequila Estes

Chequila Estes, a more recent arrival to Garfield who has received various means of support for her family through BGC programs.

These stories, and so many others, are the fruits of your generous support of our work. **Please help us reach our year-end fundraising goal of \$10,000 by donating to the BGC today.** By supporting this work, you are joining a growing coalition of neighbors and small businesses who believe in the future of Garfield and surrounding communities.

Gratefully,

Jarnele Fairclough,
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Rick Swartz,
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Academic superstar Cecil Price III embraces higher calling

Interview by Andrew McKeon *The Bulletin*

BELOW: Cecil Price III is ready to find his true calling in 2020. Photo courtesy of Price.



ABOVE: Four years later, Cecil is now a Morehouse Man with knowledge to share. Photo courtesy of Price.

Pittsburgh - When we last caught up with Cecil Price III, in June 2020, the world was a different place. The pandemic's long-term effects had yet to set in, and Price (valedictorian of his class at Obama Academy) had yet to answer his higher calling as a minister.

Nearly four years later, Price is proud to be a Morehouse Man and Oprah Winfrey scholar with his sights set on success. [Editor's Note: the following conversation has been edited for space].

Bulletin: Was it hard adjusting to life in a big city? Does Atlanta have much in common with Pittsburgh?

Price III: “Regarding my transition from Pittsburgh to Atlanta, the best way to fully explain my experience is with a quote I’ve heard many times before, ‘Anything worth having doesn’t come easy, and anything that comes easy is usually not worth having.’

I'm a 2020 graduate of the Barack Obama Academy of International Studies, who graduated during a global pandemic and completed my entire first year of college, virtually, from the comfort of my own home. One can only imagine how difficult the transition was from Pittsburgh to Atlanta amid the COVID-19 pandemic. However - despite the many challenges, and both cities being polar opposites of one another - in hindsight, I would not change a thing. I am proud to say that I am a Morehouse Man."

Bulletin: As a student of one of the most prestigious HBCUs, what does it mean to be a “Morehouse Man”?

Price III: “In essence, being a ‘Morehouse Man,’ or a graduate of Morehouse College, is not just about obtaining a degree, but about embracing a tradition and legacy of servant leaders that extends far beyond one’s time at the college. It’s about recognizing the responsibility to make a positive impact on the world and to uphold the values that we hold dear: leadership, siblinghood, integrity, the humane treatment of all people, justice, and selfless service - which are deeply ingrained in the fabric that is Morehouse’s rich history and culture.”

Bulletin: *How has your faith been tested over the last four years?*

Price III: “Objectively, my faith has been tested, like that of many others across this nation and world, as a student of a global pandemic. Yet, subjectively, especially in the past year, my faith has been tested like no other.”

As some may know, I had to step away from college for a brief moment, for a multitude of reasons. My biological mother had fallen ill and, as the oldest sibling, it was my duty and responsibility to step up where my biological mother could not. And that is okay because 22 years of her sacrifice, guidance, and love sustained me as the man of God that I am today. Furthermore, I had to respectfully and forcibly remove and separate myself from my biological father and his side of the family. Sometimes, you must be willing to call out somebody's toxic behavior, no matter who they are, and leave."

Then, as if that was not enough, my sister & best friend, Nikayla Julissa Gyles, passed away last October 2023, before she was able to walk the stage and graduate in May 2024. All of this may seem overwhelming to someone who is not a believer in God. However, as a believer, child of God, and Minister of the Gospel, I understand that ‘now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen’ (Hebrews 11:1).”

Bulletin: *Are you excited to visit South Africa this summer?*

Price III: “As an Oprah Winfrey scholar at Morehouse College, I am honored to be selected to join the Oprah Winfrey South Africa Leadership Program. Meetings with academic officials, faculty, students, and community leaders are all part of the experience. To learn about the remarkable history of South Africa, we will go to historical locations and institutions devoted to conserving the history of apartheid and reconciliation...”

Bulletin: *Where do you see yourself four years from now?*

Price III: “Four years from now, I see myself serving God, the people of God, and the community of Pittsburgh – in any way they see fit, but especially as the founder and Chief Executive Officer of the Youth Emergence Project, a nonprofit, youth-driven organization most commonly referred to as ‘YEP’ (@theofficialyep)...

The Youth Emergence Project operates as Pittsburgh's first-ever research-based, youth-led think tank to fill the gaps left by a lack of vision for our youths. Our ultimate goal is to be an incubator of possibility and hope, propelled by youths' thoughts, vigor, and enthusiasm. YEP puts young people at the forefront of research, analysis, and advocacy. Unlike traditional think tanks, our organization sees youths' expertise and lived experience as being paramount in the change-making process. YEP fosters a cooperative atmosphere where young people provide distinct viewpoints, ingenuity, and experiential knowledge to tackle urgent crises. At the crux of this work are matters of policy, technology, education, and social & environmental justice - all of which YEP is dedicated to dramatically changing in order to meet the needs of the next generation." ♦

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