

Louisville

in collaboration with

RUSSELL: A PLACE OF PROMISE



“The neighborhood is starting to look like a different place.”

Words by me, Josh Moss, editor of Louisville Magazine
Cover photo and all photos by Jon Cherry

In 2018, we published a story in *Louisville Magazine* about all the money — some \$867 million — being invested west of Ninth Street, much of it in the Russell neighborhood. “Change,” we wrote, to make an understatement, “seems guaranteed.” The razing of the Beecher Terrace projects, a new YMCA, a new track-and-field complex, a new Goodwill campus, new “mixed-income” housing developments, new, new, new.

So all that money, all that change, was top of mind when, in collaboration with the nonprofit Russell: A Place of Promise, we asked these two questions to a group of people connected to the neighborhood:

IN LOUISVILLE, _____ IS POWER.

and

IN RUSSELL, _____ IS POWER.

On the cover: Jon Cherry took this drone photo of a Central High School football game in the fall. The Central Yellowjackets beat Christian Academy 48-28

Just some of the folks who answered our questions about Russell.



This group from Russell that we interviewed, these are folks who've lived in the neighborhood for a couple of years, for 10 years, 50 years, 80 years. Whose first job was at the McDonald's at 28th and Broadway or at the old Winn-Dixie at 12th and Broadway. Who grew up in Beecher Terrace, spent lots of time in their great-aunt's beauty shop and answering service, graduated from Central High School, own businesses, run nonprofits.

Here's how they answered this one:

IN LOUISVILLE, _____ IS POWER.

IN LOUISVILLE, _____ IS POWER.

People
Louisville
Money
Collaboration The System
Organized People
"Wealth but specifically: generational wealth."
Privilege
Equity
Unity Relationships
Community
Love Knowledge
Wealth

IN LOUISVILLE, they said, **MONEY** (there's that word again) **AND CONNECTIONS ARE POWER.**

And in Russell? Here's how they answered:

IN RUSSELL, _____ IS POWER.

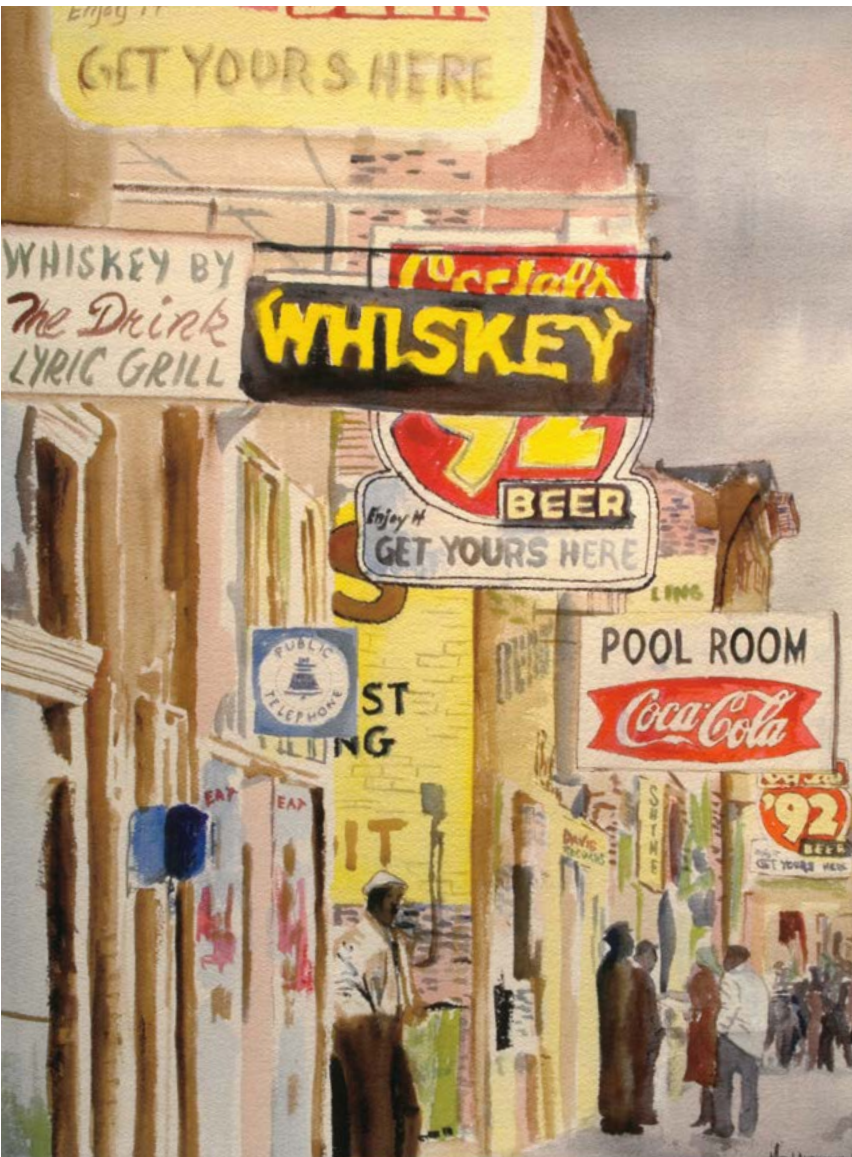
Tenacity Voting
Connections Courage
Collaboration
Growth Organized People Kindness
God Economics Education Peace
People Neighborhood Pride Unity
Community
Knowledge
Black Excellence
Heritage Perseverance
Equity Resiliency Culture
Awareness
Potential

IN RUSSELL, they said, **COMMUNITY IS POWER.**

I was surprised. Not because of what people mentioned — *community* is a theme that comes up over and over, and we'll get into that — but because of what they didn't. **IN A NEIGHBORHOOD EXPERIENCING SUCH AN INFLUX OF INVESTMENT (SOME \$867 MILLION AND COUNTING), NOT ONE PERSON SAID THAT MONEY IS POWER IN RUSSELL.**

I asked some of the folks who answered our questions if this surprised them too. Not so much. They're too familiar with where Russell has been.

Russell (bordered by Market, Ninth, Broadway and 32nd streets) was named in 1926 after nationally recognized Black educator Harvey C. Russell, and by the 1940s, to quote from the *Encyclopedia of Louisville*, it was “the city’s premier African American neighborhood,” nicknamed “Louisville’s Harlem” for its bustling Walnut Street (now Muhammad Ali Boulevard).



Two Centuries of Black Louisville: A Photographic History includes this image of a painting of Old Walnut Street by Merv Aubespain, who co-authored the book and spent a 35-year career at the Courier-Journal.

That story of ours from 2018 bullet-pointed much of Russell's history: white people moving away, segregation, Black residents moving away too, urban renewal ("a way to clear out troubled urban areas [that ended up] decimating Black neighborhoods"), redlining ("the discriminatory practice of denying loans in certain neighborhoods based on racial and socioeconomic makeup").

I was thinking about that condensed history when I came across this quote in *Two Centuries of Black Louisville* (def worth your time if you've never flipped through it). Maybe it's not surprising, but it still stuck with me, just as a reminder of Louisville's past some 100 years ago: "In a telling example of the attitudes of local whites, legislation was... passed that changed the names of the east-west streets in western Louisville. ... So, if white Louisvillians had to live on the same streets as Black Louisvillians, the streets at least would not have the same names."

By the 1970s and '80s in Russell, to quote from the *Encyclopedia of Louisville* one more time, "the city had difficulty finding people to purchase lots even when they were offered for one dollar."

Today, though, to quote our understatement again:
Change seems guaranteed.

The end of our 2018 story mentioned a *Courier-Journal* headline about 40203, which was “the hottest ZIP code” with “attractive and affordable housing” — in Shelby Park, Smoketown, Limerick...and the eastern part of Russell.

“THE LAST NEIGHBORHOOD,” we wrote, **“TO TOUCH DOWNTOWN AND NOT SPARK GREAT INTEREST AMONG THOSE SEEKING CITY LIVING.”**

Russell: A Place of Promise was still a fledgling initiative in 2018, with a mission to ensure Russell residents reap revitalization’s rewards. In 2023, I met with the small RPOP team at the Kentucky Center for African American Heritage, across the street from their office. We talked about the nonprofit’s first five years, and what the next five years, and beyond, might look like in Russell.

One person said, **“RUSSELL HAS GROWN SO MUCH, CHANGED SO MUCH. IT’S STARTING TO LOOK LIKE A DIFFERENT PLACE.”**

Another shared a common fear: **“I’VE SEEN RUSSELL CHANGE OVER THE YEARS. AND WHEN CHANGE HAPPENS, THE SPIRIT CAN CHANGE. I MEAN, WE CAN’T LET THAT GO.”**

I wondered: **AS RUSSELL STARTS TO RESEMBLE A DIFFERENT PLACE — AS IT GROWS — CAN IT PRESERVE THAT SENSE OF COMMUNITY, THAT SPIRIT?**

We at the magazine, in collaboration with RPOP, decided to ask that question, and much more, to a group people, beyond the RPOP team, who are connected to Russell.

We were curious about any sort of shared sentiment in the neighborhood, what change bubbles up, and asked a series of questions — multiple-choice or needing a one-word answer or open-ended.

WHAT PLACE IN RUSSELL MAKES YOU FEEL AT HOME?

WHAT CLOSED RUSSELL BUSINESSES DO YOU MISS THE MOST?

WHAT'S SOMETHING ABOUT RUSSELL THAT OTHER PEOPLE SEEM TO WORRY ABOUT A LOT MORE THAN YOU DO?

NEXT YEAR AT THIS TIME, I'LL KNOW RUSSELL GOT A BIT BETTER WHEN I SEE _____ .

We also asked this one:

SINCE THIS TIME LAST YEAR, RUSSELL HAS...

- Taken two steps forward
- Taken one step forward
- More or less stayed in place. Things don't change much here
- Taken one step back
- Taken two steps back

That multiple-choice question, we've posed it several times before to a group (actually, a group of groups) that we've been assembling at *Louisville Magazine*, made up of people from throughout our city (based on our locations, vocations and avocations). We check in with the citywide group often and sort of think of it as the Chamber of Common Sense, a nod to the magazine's founding in March 1950 by the Chamber of Commerce. (The mag became independently owned in the 1990s.)

WE ASKED THAT MULTIPLE-CHOICE QUESTION IN FEBRUARY TO THE CITYWIDE GROUP:

SINCE THIS TIME LAST YEAR, LOUISVILLE HAS...

- Taken two steps forward
- Taken one step forward
- More or less stayed in place. Things don't change much here
- Taken one step back
- Taken two steps back

AND 27 PERCENT OF US SAID WE'D TAKEN ONE OR TWO STEPS BACK...

...20 PERCENT SAID WE'D TAKEN ONE OR TWO STEPS FORWARD...

...AND 46 PERCENT SAID WE'D MORE OR LESS STAYED IN PLACE.

In February, the biggest reason people said our city had taken a step back was about another changing neighborhood: downtown.

One of us said: "It's getting harder and harder to fill the office space downtown, which is taking all the hits. There is still a perception that it is unsafe. With the forthcoming loss of three major downtown offices — Fifth Third, LG&E, Humana — it's hard to imagine any restaurant will be able to sustain."

THEN IN JUNE, WE ASKED AGAIN: HOW IS OUR CITY DOING SO FAR THIS YEAR?

HALFWAY THROUGH THE YEAR, 43 PERCENT OF US — COMPARED WITH 27 PERCENT BACK IN FEBRUARY — SAID THE CITY HAD TAKEN ONE OR TWO STEPS BACK.

The biggest reason people said our city had taken a step back: in-the-headlines-again LMPD, following the departure of police chief Jacquelyn Gwinn-Villaroel amid concerns that she mishandled a sexual-harassment allegation within the department.

One of us said: “I’m sick of this pattern of corruption within our police department. This cloud looms over our city and impacts everything it touches.”

Another simply put it like this: “This police stuff...👮”

Which brings me back to Russell, where folks didn't hold back their frustrations about the neighborhood:

"Every major fast-food chain has a store on West Broadway, but where can you find fresh vegetables and fruit? It is shameful."

"Predatory developers. The long game concerns me."

"Too much litter."

"Still dealing with the impact of crime and racism."

"Too many dilapidated homes."

"Broken promises are something West End residents are very familiar with."

So I'm wondering:

WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE DO YOU THINK ANSWERED THAT RUSSELL HAS TAKEN A STEP BACK SINCE THIS TIME LAST YEAR?

- a. Almost everybody
- b. 75% or so
- c. About half
- d. 25% or so
- e. Less than 10%
- f. Almost nobody

**WHAT PERCENTAGE OF PEOPLE SAID RUSSELL HAS
TAKEN A STEP BACK SINCE THIS TIME LAST YEAR?**

ALMOST NOBODY.

JUST 3 PERCENT.

The vast majority — 83 percent — answered that the neighborhood had taken a step forward (with 57 percent picking “two steps forward”). Given all those frustrations people shared, the answer surprised me.

Two words came up a lot when folks described what they love about Russell: *classy* and *classic*. And we got at those words by asking not for adjectives to describe the neighborhood but:

IF RUSSELL WERE A CAR, WHAT WOULD IT BE?

The most popular answer, by far: a Cadillac.

“Specifically, a mid-century pink Cadillac convertible. Classy, classic and connections to history.”

“I see Russell as a 1980 Cadillac Fleetwood. Fresh and clean from the car wash at 19th and Jefferson streets and cruising 20 miles an hour playing Al Green’s ‘I’m Still in Love with You.’”

“Never loses its charm.”

“A 1970s Cadillac DeVille. That car represented style and luxury, being hip, fancy, happening!”

And my favorite, because it seems to encapsulate a growing and changing neighborhood, grounded in its past but not anchored down by it:

**“LIKE A RESTORED CADILLAC, ONE THAT KEEPS
THE GOOD STUFF BUT HAS A NEW TWIST.”**

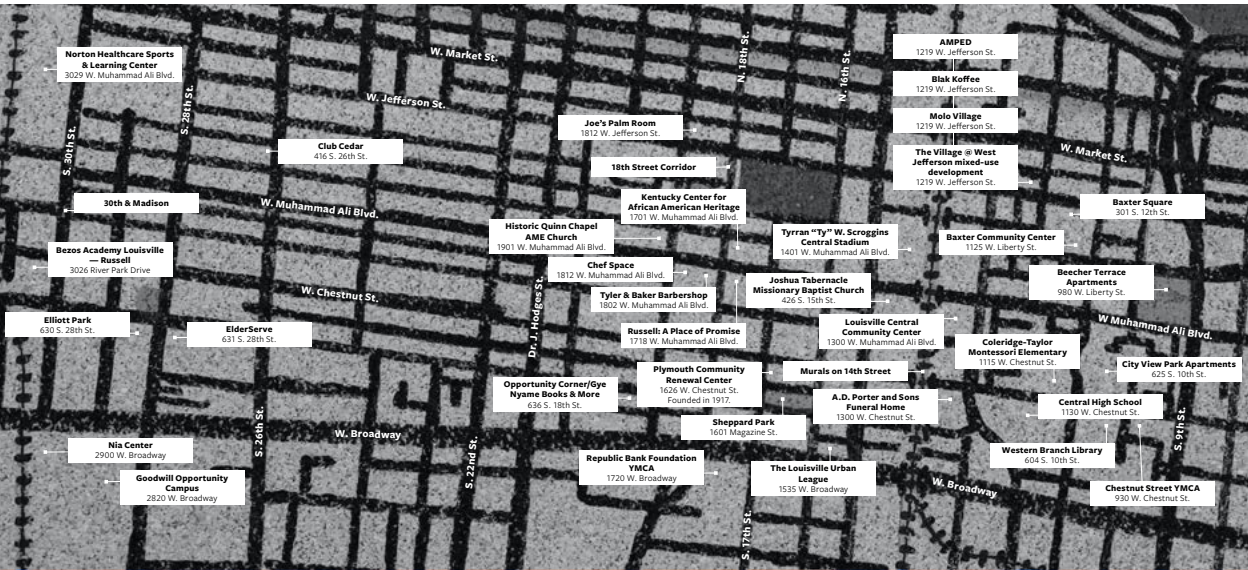




We also asked:

WHAT RUSSELL PLACE MAKES YOU FEEL MOST AT HOME?

And here are just some of the places, both old and new, that people mentioned. For more on some of these places, head to page 34.



18th Street Corridor

30th & Madison

A.D. Porter and Sons Funeral Home

AMPED

Baxter Community Center

Baxter Square

Beecher Terrace Apartments

Bezos Academy Louisville — Russell

Blak Koffee

Central High School

Chef Space

Chestnut Street YMCA

City View Park Apartments

Club Cedar

Coleridge-Taylor Montessori Elementary

ElderServe

Elliott Park

Goodwill Opportunity Campus

Historic Quinn Chapel AME Church

Joe's Palm Room

Joshua Tabernacle Missionary Baptist Church

Kentucky Center for African American Heritage

Louisville Central Community Center

Molo Village

Murals on 14th Street

Nia Center

Norton Healthcare Sports & Learning Center

Norton West Louisville Hospital

Opportunity Corner/Gye Nyame Books & More

Plymouth Community Renewal Center

Republic Bank Foundation YMCA

Russell: A Place of Promise

Sheppard Park

Tyler & Baker Barbershop

Tyrran "Ty" W. Scroggins Central Stadium

The Louisville Urban League

The Village @ West Jefferson mixed-use development

Western Branch Library

Some of our questions needing a one-word answer did get at some of the shared sentiment I mentioned — at the idea that loving a neighborhood can also mean doling out some necessary tough love, too.

We asked: **IN ONE WORD, WHAT'S SOMETHING ABOUT RUSSELL THAT OTHER PEOPLE SEEM TO WORRY ABOUT A LOT MORE THAN YOU DO?**

Despite what tends to be a dominant narrative about west Louisville, this group doesn't worry about crime too much.

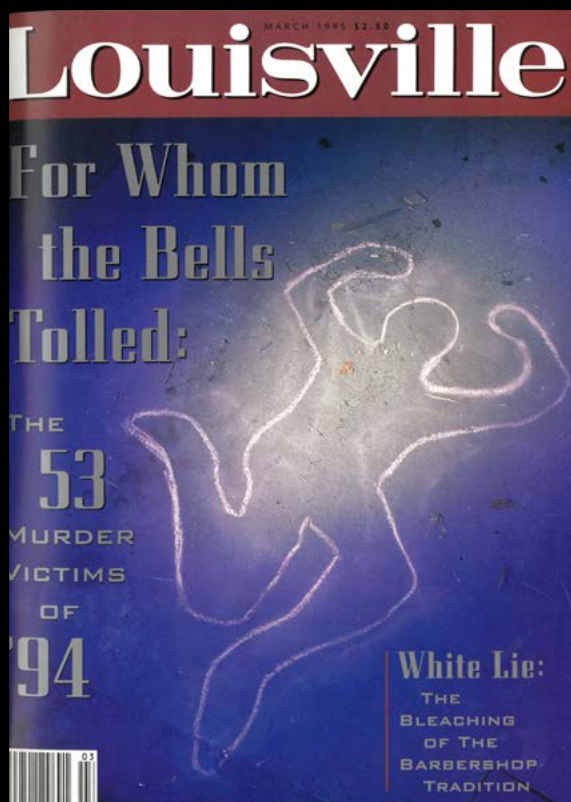
That word cloud looks like this:

WHAT'S SOMETHING ABOUT RUSSELL THAT OTHER PEOPLE
SEEM TO WORRY ABOUT A LOT MORE THAN YOU DO?

Children Drugs
"The youth being a danger."
False Hope
Violence
Disconnection
Crime
Shootings
Safety
Growth Opportunity
Change Jealousy

One person said, “Russell has been identified by crime too much. It has much more culture and collaboration than people give it credit for.” Another said, “If I could change one thing about Russell, it’d be the negative connotation associated with certain areas of the community due to historical context, lack of investment, media portrayal.”

A quick aside, I immediately thought of this cover from our archive, March 1995, and how we at the magazine have contributed to that portrayal.



One of the covers during my tenure as editor, for a story that mostly took place in west Louisville, included a black-and-white image of an abandoned and dilapidated home. Another featured a bullet, for a story about homicides.

We also asked the group: **IN ONE WORD, WHAT'S SOMETHING ABOUT RUSSELL THAT YOU SEEM TO WORRY ABOUT A LOT MORE THAN OTHERS?**

This group does worry about people from Russell being able to afford to stay in Russell.

Here's that word cloud:

WHAT'S SOMETHING ABOUT RUSSELL THAT YOU SEEM TO WORRY ABOUT A LOT MORE THAN OTHERS?

"Loss of historical significance."
New Metro Council Representative

Safety

Affordable Housing

Gentrification

Youth Black-Owned Businesses
Sustainability Divestment Predatory Developers
Violence

Healing Displacement

Vacant Properties

Economic Power

Childcare

Litter

One person said, "I worry about people getting priced out of the area that they gave its culture."

Another shared, "I'm concerned about seniors, disabled people and working poor families being able to STAY in Russell. With all the development, property taxes have increased substantially."

Community — not *money* — was the most common answer when we asked:

IN RUSSELL, _____ IS POWER.

And *community*, that theme, came up again and again when we asked:

**NEXT YEAR AT THIS TIME, I'LL KNOW RUSSELL GOT
A BIT BETTER WHEN I SEE _____ .**

“More people attending community meetings.”

“Just more community, period.”

“Community. People and families walking the neighborhood.”

Some people got specific, mentioning the completion of the Baxter Community Center.

“I’m excited we were able to get the funds to renovate and reopen it.”

“The Baxter Community Center held a diverse range of programs, from Shakespeare and dance to bike safety and 4-H and hosting the mayor’s State of the City address.”

“Life-long connections formed there.”

“I worry if the newly renovated community center will be as welcoming to everyday people as the old center was. I hope the new occupants love on the community as much as I did. While change can bring uncertainties, my hope and advocacy for the new community center stem from a desire to see Russell continue to thrive and feel supported.”



Baxter Community Center

Community was also the reason for the most popular answer when we asked this question:

WHAT CLOSED BUSINESS OR PLACE FROM RUSSELL'S PAST DO YOU MISS THE MOST?

The most common answer: Jay's Cafeteria. For the soul food, sure, but more because of what it represented, and a fear of what Russell loses when a place like Jay's closes.

"I miss Jay's Cafeteria most. I have such fond memories of Sunday dinner there after church."

"I'm glad Jay's was replaced by restaurant opportunities for more people" — the incubator with kitchen space called ChefSpace — "but I wish we had both."

"A good soul food restaurant like Jay's. Good food will attract people from all over to a neighborhood they would not visit otherwise."

"When I moved to Louisville in 1976, a friend told me, 'For the best soul food in Louisville, you must visit Jay's Cafeteria.' I found that to be true and learned that people from all over Metro Louisville patronized Jay's."

"I miss Jay's on the corner of 18th and Muhammad Ali. It was a staple of the neighborhood, a place where you could run into family and friends and were treated with dignity and respect."



Clockwise from top left:
White, Webb, Marshall,
Moore, Dallum and Maiden.

We decided to go a bit deeper into that idea of community, of a changing neighborhood, with a few of the folks who answered our questions about Russell: Ramona Dallum from the Community Foundation of Louisville; the artist Clara “Charisma” Maiden; Kimberly Moore, who does work related to gun violence; Lavel White, a community outreach specialist at Jefferson Memorial Forest; and Cassandra Webb and Doneah Marshall from the RPOP team.

On the video call, I mentioned those two fill-in-the-blank questions about power, and the most common answers:

In Louisville, *money* is power.

In Russell, *community* is power.

Level: “We have the East End that has a vast amount of wealth, then **THE WEST END**, parts with no income and then parts somewhere in between. **YOU MIGHT SEE ALL THESE NEW FANCY BUILDINGS, BUT YOU MAY NOT SEE THE PEOPLE’S POCKETS CHANGE.**”

Cassandra: “Over the next five years, one of the challenges in Russell is **OUTSIDE INVESTORS**. Folks who do not live in the neighborhood yet have the means, through financial capital and power, to be able to invest in the community. But they **OFTENTIMES DON’T HAVE THE COMMUNITY’S BEST INTEREST AT HEART**. Nor do they take the time to really get to know community.”

Kimberly: “My office, I’m on 22nd and Chestnut. Someone came over here and bought the entire block. One person, she said this was one of the most beautiful blocks in the city and she didn’t want big developers to get it. She didn’t raise rent. She really invested in human capital. We have to be mindful of people coming into this neighborhood who don’t look like us, telling us what we need.”

Ramona: “Some well-intentioned folks think that because where we live might not look like what they think we should want to have, we should aspire to have what they have. Everybody’s values aren’t the same. My kids are grown now, but when I was raising them, they had this community of support around them that understood what they were gonna face in the world. And you have to stay, **YOU HAVE TO BE A PART OF THAT THREAD THAT HOLDS ALL OF US TOGETHER.**”

Kimberly: “I work with kids who have criminal records, who’ve been in trouble, but they are some of the brightest kids in the world. They just have not had a chance. We’ve got to stop letting people paint this narrative that west Louisville’s a bunch of uneducated people who are violent and are criminal-minded.

“There’s a bunch of educated, brilliant people who live in west Louisville. **EVERYBODY WHO’S RICH AND BRIGHT AIN’T WHITE.**”

Ramona: “There are so many of us who don’t necessarily see the potential because we have swallowed the narrative that what we have is invaluable. Until we regurgitate that belief, I think we’re gonna continue to be held down and bound. But I see the potential of my community, of my people. And it’s not just the potential. I see the greatness. So how do we continue to cultivate that? How do we unlock more capital for those of us who haven’t historically had access to it?”

At one point during the video call, I mentioned how the most popular answer to this question — What closed Russell businesses do you miss the most? — was Jay’s Cafeteria.

Charisma: “I remember going to Jay’s coming from church. Jay’s used to be so crowded. You felt like the workers were your aunts and uncles. You would always reunite with somebody in there regardless of if it was family or if it was just somebody who you used to live next door to. I really miss that spot. I felt a decline when they closed.”

Lavel: “**JAY’S CAFETERIA**, that was my very first job when I was like 13, 14 years old. I used to work there Thursday, Friday, Saturday, Sunday as a waiter and in the dish room. And you would see all types of movers and shakers. You would see Mayor Abramson, Mayor Dave Armstrong, the Bingham family from the *Courier-Journal*. Having those experiences of eating and fellowship in the community I worked in, lived in — Beecher Terrace [public-housing complex] at the time. **YOU WOULD SEE THAT SPIRIT AND FEEL IT, THE PRIDE THAT PEOPLE HAD IN THAT NEIGHBORHOOD, THOSE CLOSE-KNIT BONDS.**”

Ramona: “**CULTURALLY, AS BLACK FOLKS, WE HAVE SURVIVED BASED ON OUR ABILITY TO CONNECT AND COMMUNE WITH EACH OTHER. IT SEEMS TO ME IT’S HARDER TO MAINTAIN THAT SENSE OF COMMUNITY AND CLOSE RELATIONSHIPS AS THINGS ARE CHANGING.**”

Me: “I wanted to share a quote from somebody who answered our questions about Russell. She said: ‘One of the doctors I worked with for many years used to ask me why I stayed in Russell. He would say, “You should move away from all that crime.” I would explain to him that I’m not a quitter and others like me are the fabric that holds this neighborhood together. I don’t think he grasped what I meant.’”

Ramona: “Who’s telling the story that whenever you go in the West End, you’re gonna get shot? You are not going to get shot down every street during every second that you’re standing in the West End. So, somebody’s telling a story that’s inaccurate, that’s making the larger population afraid of an area of our city.

“I know we’re talking about Russell, but the West End Women’s Collaborative that we started, it’s in Chickasaw. We created a labyrinth and a garden. We had an East End resident, a white woman, come to the labyrinth. They volunteered with us all day, worked in the garden and then looked at me, looked at us, and said: ‘How do I get back to Louisville from here?’

“WHAT STORIES ARE WE LISTENING TO THAT MAKE US THINK THAT ONCE YOU CROSS NINTH STREET, YOU ARE NO LONGER IN THE CITY OF LOUISVILLE? Or that you’re doing a special favor for someone by going to this area? How do we get those stories changed?”

Kimberly: “Another big struggle is changing our own mindsets around what is possible because **MANY OF US HAVE DEALT WITH THE SAME PROBLEMS FOR SO LONG THAT WE HAVE DEVELOPED A DEFEATIST MINDSET** that it’s not ever going to get better. How do we see positive changes happening in our community and see those as wins? And not think that it’s something that won’t last because it’s in our neighborhood. Because I’ve heard that from folks.”

Charimsa: **“THE ELDERS WHO WERE A PART OF THE COMMUNITY WHEN I WAS COMING UP, THEY JUST — THEY BURNED OUT. AND I DON’T WANNA BURN OUT.** Because it can be exhausting.

“It’s not up to the baby boomers to make change. I think the younger population of Russell — and of the West End, period — is more involved because they see that it’s up to them. They’re cleaning up the residual, cleaning up the debris.”

Ramona: “I have embraced that I am an elder in the community now. And so, it’s my job to pave the way for the future generations to come behind me and continue the work.

“I spent a lot of my time as a youth, elementary-school age, in Russell because my great-aunt owned a business there, a beauty shop and answering service. And there always seemed to be places where you could gather — you know, that sense of community. I always saw people who were achieving and excelling in their own way. I always saw the Black businessowners. And I knew that there were possibilities for me, and I always saw those possibilities in the people where I lived. I could go to the 10th Street Y and know that that building was created by us, for us. I could go to the Black Achievers program there and see Black professionals who were working — and were encouraging me to do the same. I didn’t have to go too far to get those real-life examples.

“And they exist now in Russell, but not at the same level as when I was growing up. Things were there that aren’t there now. **HOW DO WE BRING THAT BACK, THAT SENSE OF COMMUNITY?”**

I wanted to share that quote again from my first meeting with RPOP in 2023:

“I’VE SEEN RUSSELL CHANGE OVER THE YEARS. AND WHEN CHANGE HAPPENS, THE SPIRIT CAN CHANGE. I MEAN, WE CAN’T LET THAT GO.”

I was thinking of that, and so much of what was shared on that video call, when **I DECIDED TO ASK A HANDFUL OF LOCAL THINKERS AND PRACTITIONERS** (a wise but by no means comprehensive group from the worlds of city planning, preservation, development, etc.) **TO PUT ON CONSULTANT HATS:**

We wondered: What are a few ideas and warnings to help a changing neighborhood — Russell or anywhere else — keep its residents and character while building up economically?

What’s one thing, big or small, they’d definitely suggest should be done?

And one they’d definitely warn against?

Here’s some of the advice that stood out:

ONE-WAY: OUT

Get rid of one-way streets. This was the clear top answer. They isolate and disconnect neighborhoods, as drivers fly by, and walkers shy away. Make all one-way streets two-way.

VILLAGES OF YES

A townhouse with a barbershop on the first floor? Yes. Tax preparers on the second floor? Yes. Family apartments above? Yes. Lots of that. A daytime senior center over a neighborhood evening bar? A single-family home between them? Yes to those, too. Don't master-plan. Don't over-conceive. Instead, think *multi*: multi-use, multi-generational, multi-services. Incentivize property owners to say yes, and watch the neighborhood build itself out.

POLICY STEERS

Cap property-tax increases for longtime residents.

Pay people to add or carve out extra apartments or mini-homes on their properties.

Establish a bank to buy and hold properties for owner-occupied, not speculation, purposes.

WRONG TURNS

Don't use out-of-state developers.

Don't add surface parking lots (unless attached to a busy new supermarket).

Don't let in the Family Dollars.

Don't overlook the stewardship of existing neighbors.

Don't take a one-size-fits-all approach. Every neighborhood is different.

OFFICERS, NEIGHBORS

What could LMPD look like if officers, at least a certain percentage of them, were required to have roots in the neighborhoods where they serve?

And as one person put it: “Next year at this time, I’ll know Russell — and Louisville — got a bit better when I see the police walking their beat.”

AND WHAT’S ONE IDEA THAT’S PROBABLY RIDICULOUS BUT YOU WONDER IF IT JUST MIGHT WORK?

Acquire, renovate and give away vacant/abandoned homes to existing or historical residents in the neighborhood.

Stop idolizing old buildings that were built before women could vote.

Bring back some of the old streetcar lines that once connected neighborhoods.

Erect a giant disco ball at the corner of Baxter Avenue and Broadway. And another one at the other end of Broadway, in the Shawnee/Chickasaw area.

Big downpayment-assistance grants for residents who’ve lived in the neighborhood for 10 years or more if they buy in that neighborhood.

PLACES OF PROMISE

JUST SOME OF WHAT PEOPLE HAD TO SHARE ABOUT
THOSE PLACES WE INCLUDED ON THE MAP ABOVE.



30TH & MADISON

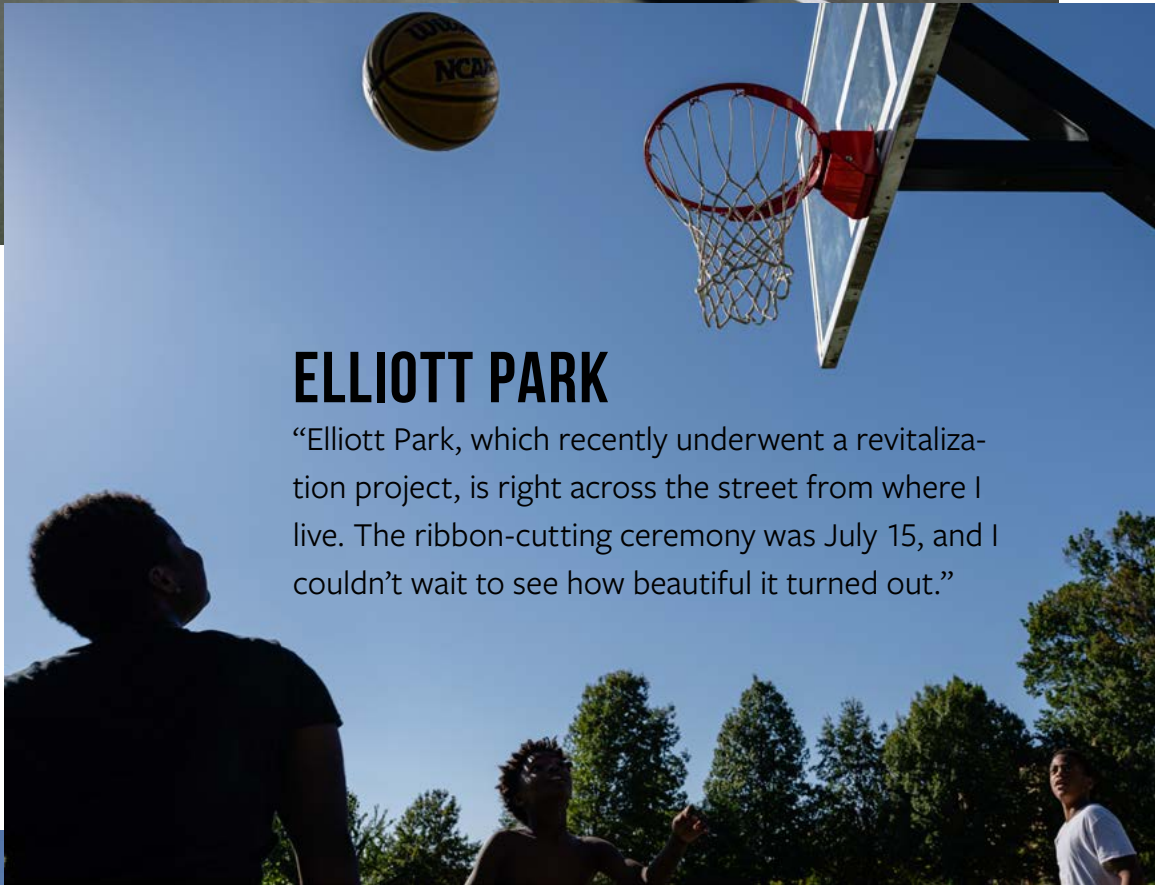
Future development, a collaboration between RPOP and neighbors, at the five-acre site of a former cigar factory. The \$150-million project, over multiple phases, will include a childcare provider, coffee shop, retail, marketplace and more, including in the resident-identified areas of: community and family, arts and culture, entrepreneurship, and wellness.



BLAK KOFFEE

“I do miss the Drippin’ Crab, but its closure gave us Blak Koffee, so I’ll take that.”

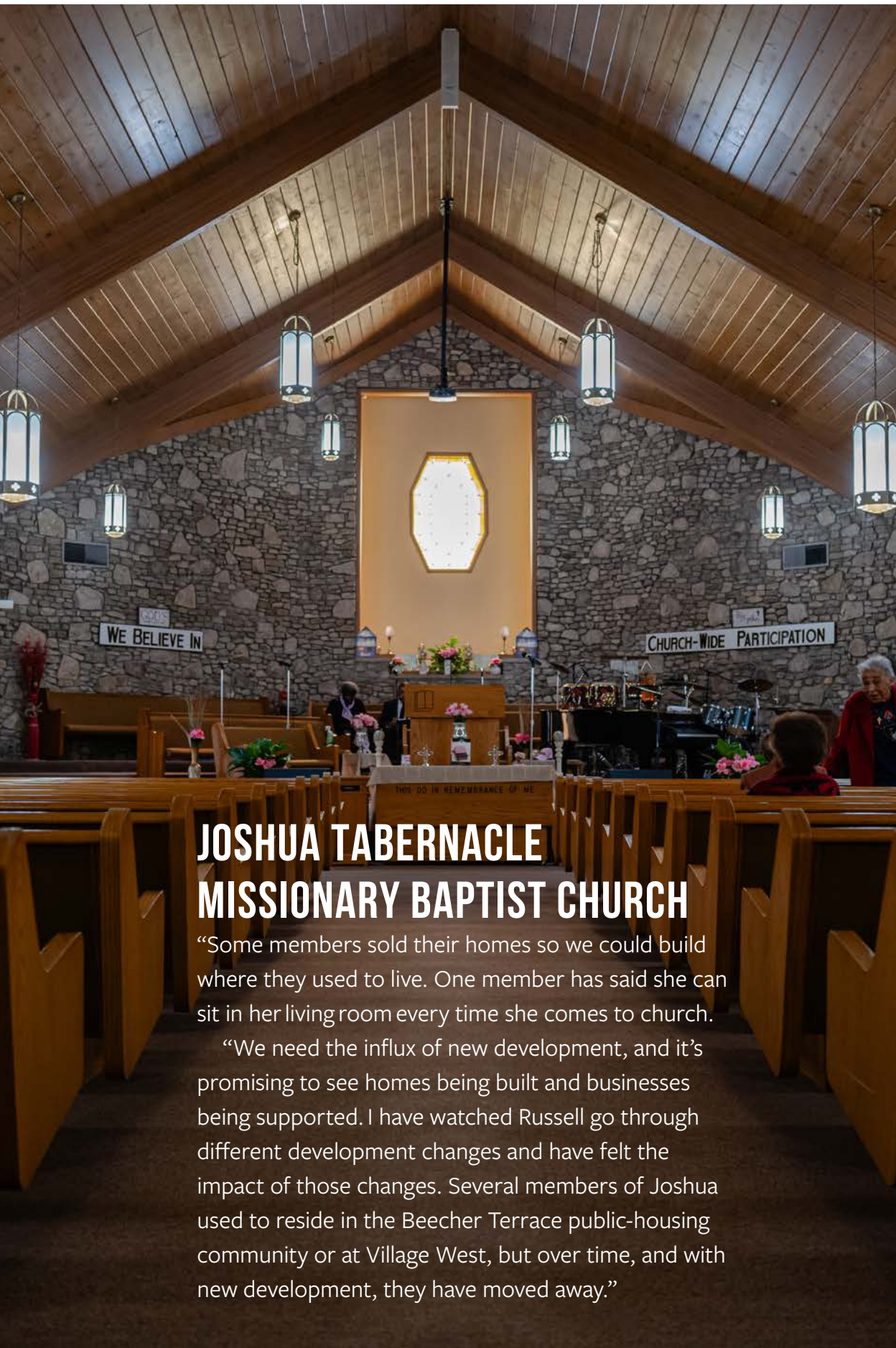




ELLIOTT PARK

“Elliott Park, which recently underwent a revitalization project, is right across the street from where I live. The ribbon-cutting ceremony was July 15, and I couldn’t wait to see how beautiful it turned out.”





JOSHUA TABERNACLE MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

“Some members sold their homes so we could build where they used to live. One member has said she can sit in her living room every time she comes to church.

“We need the influx of new development, and it’s promising to see homes being built and businesses being supported. I have watched Russell go through different development changes and have felt the impact of those changes. Several members of Joshua used to reside in the Beecher Terrace public-housing community or at Village West, but over time, and with new development, they have moved away.”

MURALS ON 14TH STREET

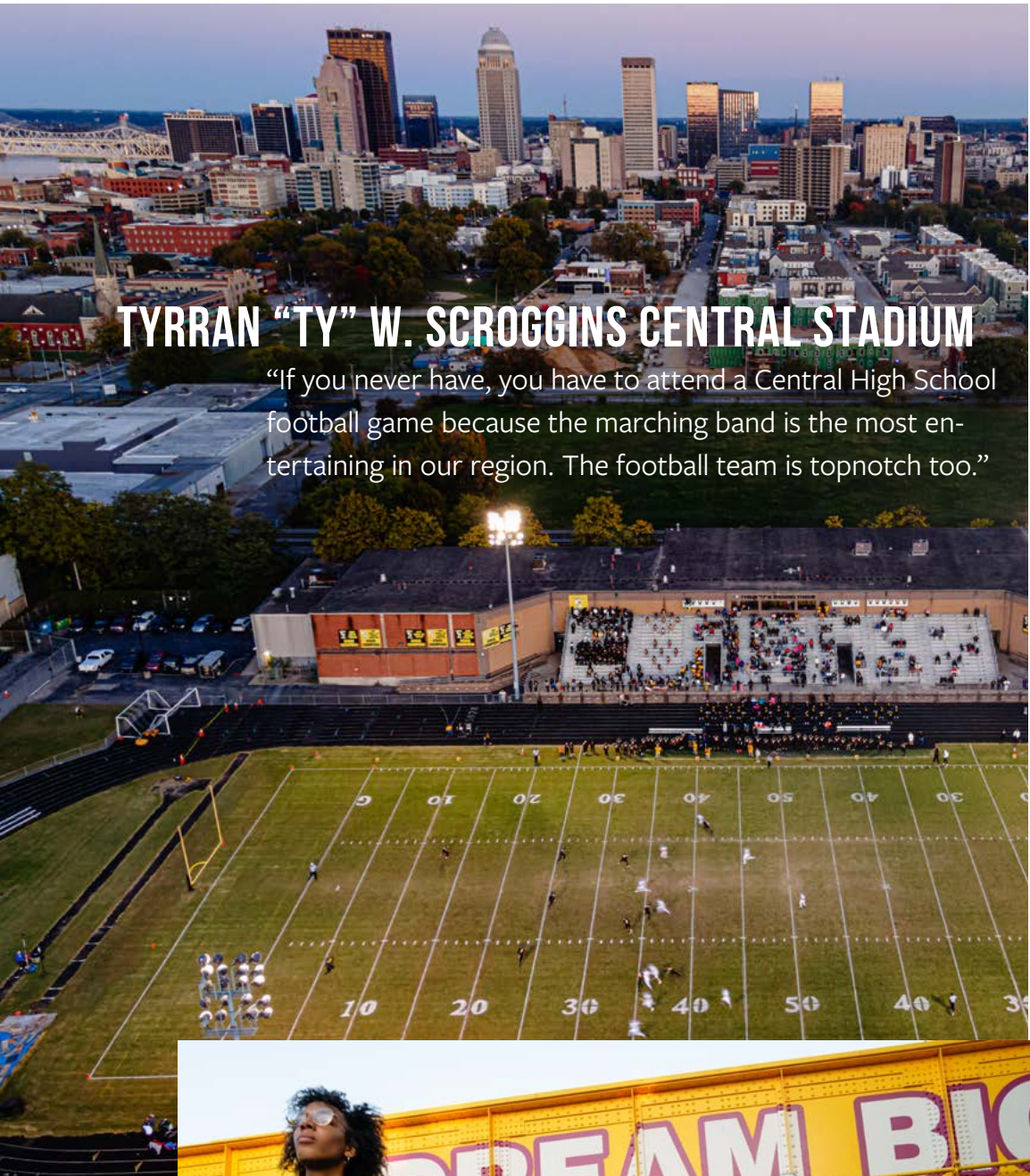
“Russell has several vibrant building murals, and the murals on the railroad overpasses. They are so special to the Russell story and its history.”





NORTON HEALTHCARE SPORTS & LEARNING CENTER

“I feel most connected to Russell through the Sports & Learning Center. I have seen so many community members use this space for everything from track meets to the family dinner after a funeral. When I see senior citizens walking in the morning or young people playing soccer and football — that lifts my spirit. When the people working in red shirts — who, more often than not, live in the community — stop city officials to ask them to fix potholes or talk about other issues, it reminds me that this is an empowerment space.”



TYRRAN "TY" W. SCROGGINS CENTRAL STADIUM

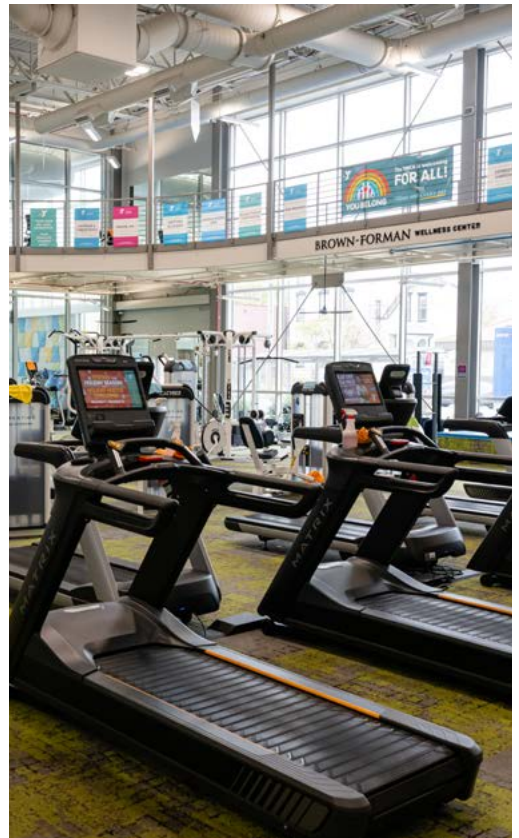
"If you never have, you have to attend a Central High School football game because the marching band is the most entertaining in our region. The football team is topnotch too."





REPUBLIC BANK FOUNDATION YMCA

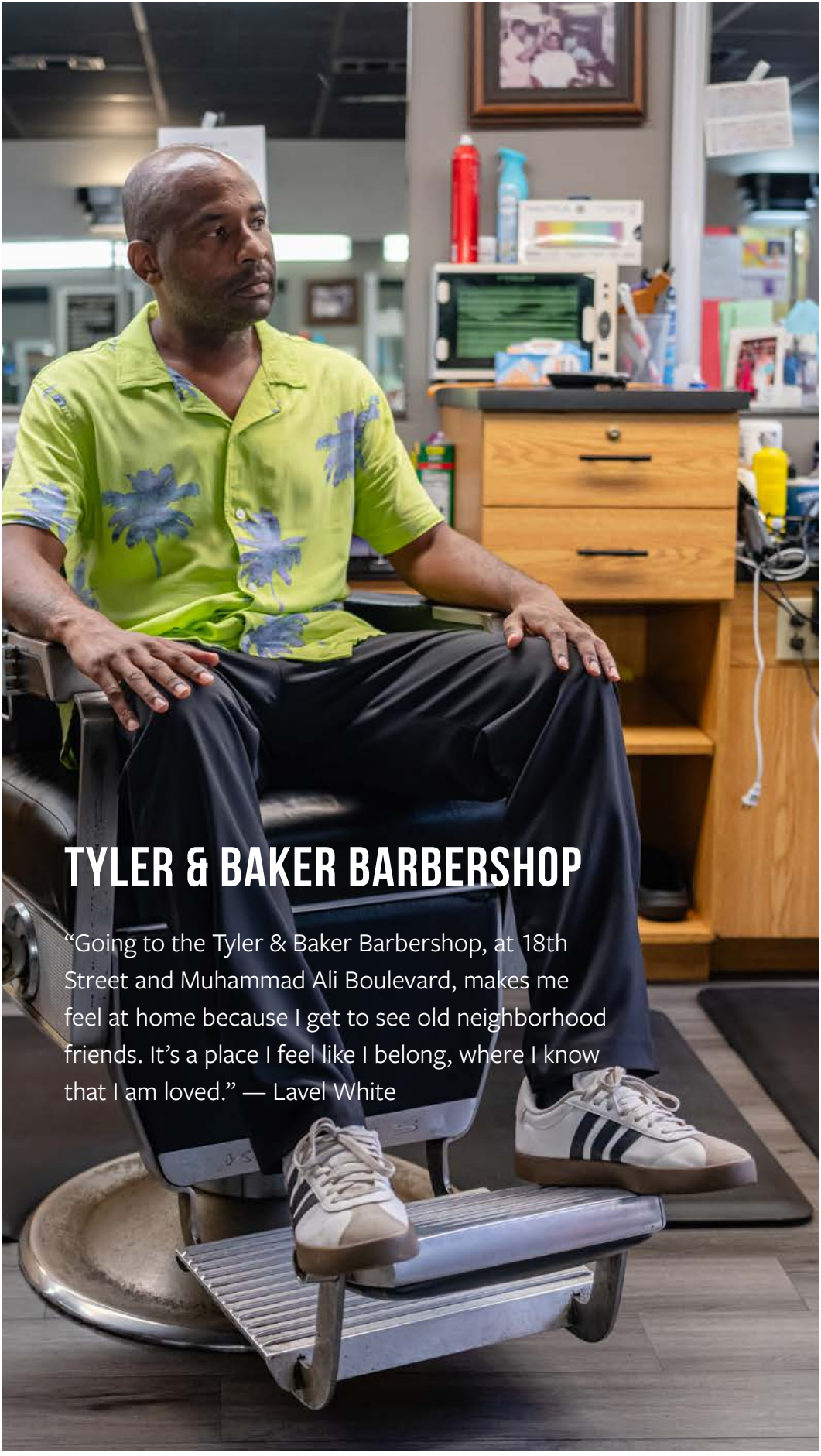
“The YMCA on Broadway is my favorite place away from home. My doctor’s office is there. I can work out, bank, swim, volunteer at Gilda’s West. This place is truly a blessing.”





WESTERN BRANCH LIBRARY

“When I worked in the Russell neighborhood from 1994 through 2015, on my lunch break, I often visited the Western Branch Library, on the corner of West Chestnut and South 10th streets. I learned more about the interesting and unique history of the Western Branch, being the first free public library in the U. S. for African Americans, staffed by African Americans. After I retired in 2015, I joined the Western Branch Library Support Association and continue as an active member.” — Al Mortenson



TYLER & BAKER BARBERSHOP

“Going to the Tyler & Baker Barbershop, at 18th Street and Muhammad Ali Boulevard, makes me feel at home because I get to see old neighborhood friends. It’s a place I feel like I belong, where I know that I am loved.” — Lavel White

A few of the voices from Russell whose words appear in this collaboration.

JASMINE HARRIS

What piece of art reminds you of Russell?

“The movie *Friday*. I can sit and watch the great that is Russell from my porch, just like Ice Cube’s main character, Craig.”

What closed business or place from Russell’s past do you miss the most?

“The Hip Hop Sweet Shop, but I’m thankful that they have their mobile bus.”

CLARA “CHARISMA” MAIDEN

What piece of art reminds you of Russell?

“Parliament-Funkadelic’s album *Mothership Connection*. My Uncle Roey used to sing at Joe’s Palm Room, and this was his favorite. P-Funk’s energy reminds me of how free-spirited Russell used to be.”

SADIQA REYNOLDS

What closed business or place from Russell’s past do you miss the most?

“I miss the Black-owned retail that I’ve heard so much about.”

In one word (or so), what’s something about Russell that you seem to worry about a lot more than most people you know?

“More intentional garbage pickup and places to dispose of trash. Russell is a very walkable community, and we need a better plan to keep our neighborhood clean.”



MARGO BRYANT

What’s your connection to the Russell neighborhood?

“I grew up in Russell and have since returned and been a resident for nine years and counting. My grandmother worked at the recreational center at the Beecher Terrace Apartments, where I always popped in to visit her.”



MARKHAM FRENCH

What closed business or place from Russell’s past do you miss the most?

“The old Consolidated department store at 15th and Jefferson. I also miss what would have been the Walmart if activists outside Russell hadn’t hijacked and defeated those plans.”



Next year at this time, I’ll know Russell got a bit better when I see _____.

“Russell becoming a more mixed-income neighborhood. People in Russell fear gentrification. I do not. With the proper safeguards in place, Russell could emerge as a more racially and financially diverse community.

“When I built my house in Russell in 2018, I did so because of what I believed the neighborhood would eventually become. Several years ago, a group came through Russell planting trees, including several in my yard. My job is to care for those trees. I will not benefit from the shade those trees will eventually produce, but future generations will.”

If you could change one thing about Russell, what would that be?

“More retail — Walmart, Kohl’s. More small manufacturing companies to provide jobs for young people upon high school graduation.”

PAT CLAY

What's your connection to the Russell neighborhood?

“I am for the betterment of Russell and remember the strength of old Walnut Street (now Muhammad Ali Boulevard) from my days as a kid. I remember beautifully dressed people parking in my aunt’s front yard on their way to hear Dr. King speak at Zion Baptist Church.”



What closed business or place from Russell's past do you miss the most?

“Black owners of our corner stores. The people who get these opportunities are not always interested in uplifting Russell’s families, who spend hundreds of dollars with them — but the money goes somewhere else.”

If you could change one thing about Russell, what would that be?

“The people who want to have so much to say about Russell but never have walked on one of our streets.”

MS. JAMIE Y. KEITH

What closed business or place from Russell's past do you miss the most?

“The Broadway Cinema. It was a short-lived business, but when it first opened in 1999, I felt such hope for us in the community to have a movie theater once again.” (The theater closed five years later.)



Plenty in Louisville needs mending. At the same time, some problems seem like they'll always be with us. Can you think of a problem that we always seem to be trying to solve as a city but probably can't?

“Racism. It’s not going anywhere as an institution until the Lord comes back for us. In the meantime, we can continue to chip away at it and pick our battles carefully.

“This interview has made me sit back and (re)think about the West End — what I always call the Best End. I remember a time when, even with ‘less than,’ we had a strong sense of community, interdependence, the mindset that everybody eats. I’ve watched that erode over time but see glimmers of hope in the return to those attributes that make a house a home, make a street into my block and make a few neighborhoods an entire community.”

RON JONES

What’s your connection to the Russell neighborhood?

“I grew up at 25th and West Jefferson, in the rear, in a little three-room white house behind an apartment complex. Later, I realized it was really on Green Alley, but my grandmother said she would not have me saying we lived in an alley.

“When I was little, I didn’t understand the concept of community that Russell had. People owned their property. You had stores, restaurants, Mr. Red’s Barbershop, Stith Dry Cleaners. You had schoolteachers, businessowners, political leaders, athletes and regular families like mine living and working in the same neighborhood.”

What closed business or place from Russell’s past do you miss the most?

“Mr. Red’s was more than a barbershop. Mr. Red taught you things, and young and old people were in the shop. He sold candy and pops, but you had to be able to count and tell him how much money was involved. It was a place that you felt safe in and had fun in.”



RAMONA DALLUM

If you could change one thing about Russell, what would that be?

“Affordability of high-quality housing.”



MINNIE WILSON

What piece of art reminds you of Russell?

“Spike Lee’s movie *Do the Right Thing* reminds me of a lot of Black neighborhoods. Lots of working-class poor people raising their families, trying to keep hope alive and elevate the next generation.”



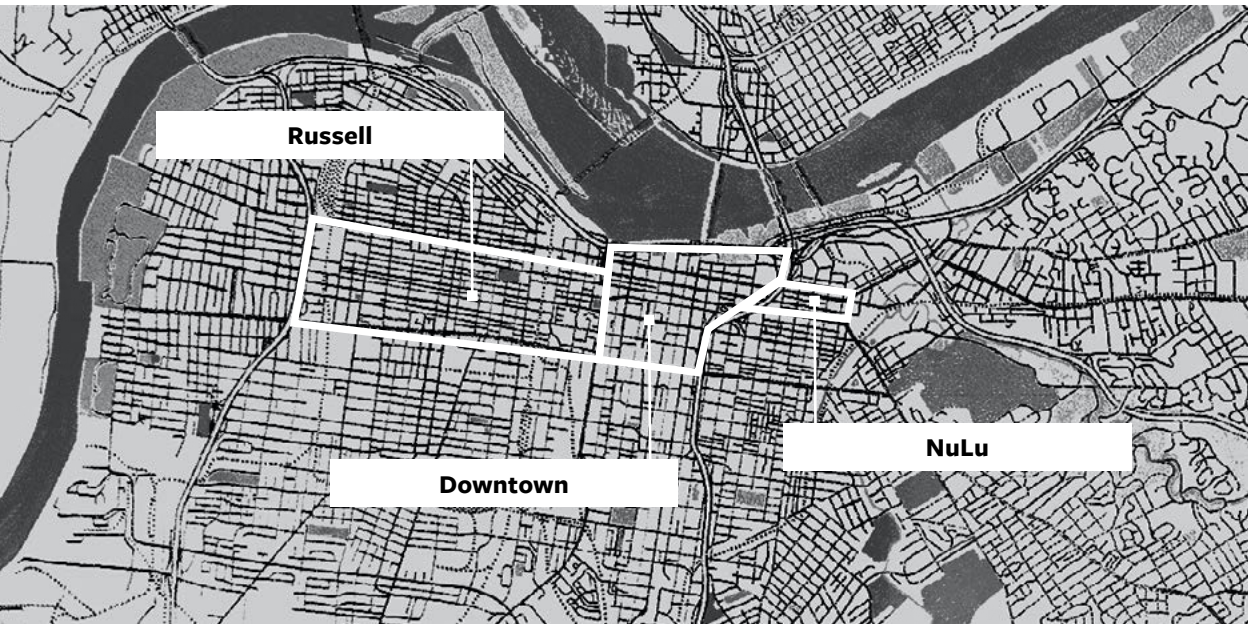
JECOREY ARTHUR

What’s your connection to the Russell neighborhood?

“My family has lived in Russell since 2017, and it’s the first place I bought a home. It’s worth noting that our neighborhood’s namesake, Harvey C. Russell Sr., was a teacher. I am, too, and have taught music lessons in my house and even hosted concerts. Through different conversations with neighbors, I found out a musician used to live in our house. He used to rehearse in it, and the neighborhood would hear his music. I remember hearing live music on our block when we were first moving in, at the Molo Village Festival. That music represented a culture to me that made it easy to call Russell home. It also reflects the historical tradition of Russell being Louisville’s Harlem.”



I was thinking about that opening image we used, and how the vantage point from that altitude emphasizes Russell's proximity to downtown. Russell, the first neighborhood west of downtown, made me think about the first neighborhood east of downtown: Butchertown, aka East Market Street — which, 20 years ago, didn't yet have the NuLu nickname. (Or as one person from the world of developing said to me: “NuLu, which used to be East Market Street.”)



Earlier, I mentioned how I've been asking lots of questions to that group of groups we've been assembling throughout our city. And whenever I ask them something about downtown, the discussion, like so many other topics, tends to scatter to either-or opposites:

**“NULU IS TRULY ANTI-NEIGHBORHOOD
AND PRO-DEVELOPERS.”**

Or...

**“OUR CITY, AND DOWNTOWN SPECIFICALLY,
SHOULD COPY WHAT NULU IS DOING.”**

Our changing neighborhoods are more complicated than that, more multicolored than black-and-white. All of them: Anchorage and Germantown and Old Louisville and Shelby Park and Smoketown. Russell and downtown and Butchertown/East Market Street/ NuLu.

And we'll continue to keep our eyes on downtown, where so many of our city's issues are playing out:

Major corporations packing up. WFH. Shuttered local restaurants and bars. Homelessness and (a lack of) affordable housing. LMPD's presence. But also renovations at the Belvedere. U of L's New Vision of Health Campus. Waterfront Park's westward expansion. Hotels and bourbon and Derby.

And we'll be wondering: **AS DOWNTOWN CHANGES, HOW DOES THAT IMPACT RUSSELL?**

HOW DOES THAT IMPACT ALL OF US?

We've been asking that question to groups besides Russell: A Place of Promise: the nonprofit Change Today, Change Tomorrow; the Louisville Urban League; South Louisville Community Ministries; the Louisville Independent Business Alliance; the Center for Interfaith Relations; Olmsted Parks Conservancy; the philanthropic women's collective Impact100....

And **I'D LOVE TO HEAR FROM YOU TOO**, especially if you have any suggestions about groups whose perspectives I need to hear.

Send me a note and I'll email ya right back.

— Josh, josh@louisville.com

AND FROM AN ANONYMOUS 81-YEAR-OLD

“Driving through Russell, now one can see the steady improvement to the housing and the infrastructure, which is bringing back a vibrant neighborhood in which to live. At 81, I doubt I’m around long enough to see the completion of all the dreams.”

