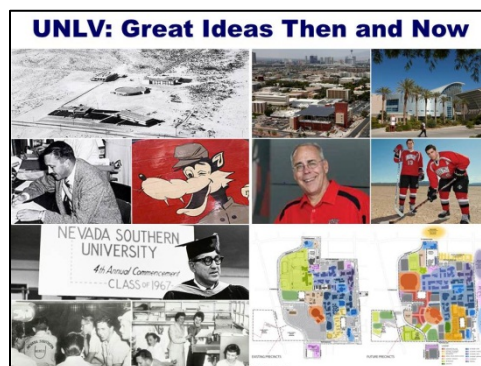


Universities as Anchor Institutions: Building Coalitions and Collective Expertise

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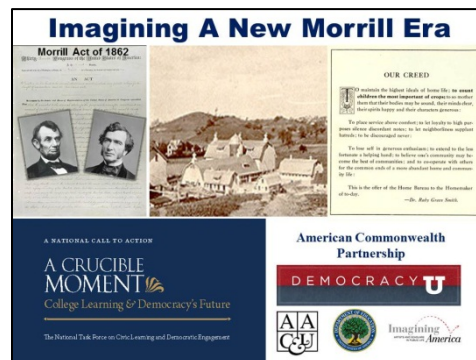
It's a great pleasure to meet you today. This is my first visit to Las Vegas and to your very modern, rapidly-expanding campus. It's incredible to think how much has changed since those days in 1951 when your first 28 students met for classes in the dressing rooms of the Las Vegas High School auditorium! Now, with more than 28,000 students and a major research profile, you have a foothold firmly connected to the next diverse generation of our nation's talent pool and the innovation that will bring us prosperity.



¹ Invited lecture given under the Kai Juba Lecture Series at the University of Nevada-Las Vegas School of Architecture, September 25, 2012.

As your own experiences over these years have shown, great institutions are also great ideas.² And a great university nurtures the interplay of ideas, people, and place in ways that serve them all. So this is the right time and the right opportunity to talk about the special role that we, as universities, can and should play in the places we inhabit.

Many of us are anchor institutions in our larger communities, with strengths and resources of great value if we can create a two-way street between us. This pathway is both physical and experiential, a place where trust can grow and public problems can be solved. To use the words of Barbara White, a composer at Princeton, it can be a jointly-owned “experience-oriented imaginative space” for communities of experts of all kinds. It also can and must be a pathway of educational opportunity for the next generation of civic leaders, professionals, and citizens---all of them, not just a few. Our future as a nation---and our democracy---will depend on this.



We now find ourselves at what the National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement has called a “crucible moment,”³ much like another critical juncture in the history of our nation, 150 years ago, when the passage of the Morrill Land Grant Act of 1862 launched a revolution in higher education. Responding to President Lincoln, Congress made a monumental commitment to a new and deeply democratic vision of colleges and universities as sites of opportunity and engagement for all Americans. The “democracy colleges” that resulted have profoundly influenced our nation’s character and prosperity.⁴

As Justin Smith Morrill, a man without a college education, told the legislature in his home state of Vermont, higher education should extend itself “not merely to those destined to

² Flora Miller Biddle, granddaughter of Gertrude Vanderbilt Whitney, founder of the Whitney Museum, is quoted on a sign at the construction site of the new Whitney Museum in downtown Manhattan next to the High Line Park.

³ National Task Force on Civic Learning and Democratic Engagement, *A Crucible Moment: College Learning and Democracy's Future* (Jan. 2012).

⁴ Harry Boyte, American Commonwealth Project short description (25 Aug. 2011). ACP is a partnership launched by the White House Office of Public Engagement, the Department of Education, AACU and other higher education groups on the occasion of the 150th anniversary of the Morrill Act in 1862. Also Nancy Cantor, “A New Morrill Act: Higher Education Anchors the ‘Remaking of America,’” *The Presidency: The American Council on Education's Magazine for Higher Education Leaders* (Fall 2009) 16-22.

sedentary professions,” as he put it, but more importantly to the majority of Americans who were working in agriculture, including many of those with the least education.⁵ At the time, 80 percent of our population was rural.

Today nearly 80 percent of our population lives in metropolitan areas,⁶ and higher education must again reach out to our nation’s majority in ways that nurture democracy. As the National Task Force commissioned by the Department of Education and led by AACU has urged so eloquently, this process must be “hands-on, face-to-face, active engagement in the midst of differing perspectives about how to address common problems that affect the well-being of our nation and the world.”⁷

All of us, privates and publics alike, must take part. Our times present tremendous challenges---from environmental degradation to failing schools to divided communities---issues that are felt most painfully by low income and minority populations who are under-represented in higher education even as they comprise our fastest growing talent pool.

Education is the key. As Frederick Douglass advised back in Morrill’s day, “It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”⁸ We can and must collaborate in our metropolitan areas with the energy and enthusiasm we once showed for the barn-raising on our farms. We must act deliberately to build inclusion and diversity into the heart of our cultures, structures, and practices.

Scholarship in Action: The University as Anchor Institution

As anchor institutions, colleges and universities can be superb. We can connect knowledge to action to produce social change while educating the next diverse generation of civically-engaged talent.⁹ In Syracuse, we call this Scholarship in Action, and it is quickly transforming both our rust-belt city and the way many of us pursue our scholarship, leadership, teaching, learning and public problem-solving. It’s been a win-win proposition for both the university and the community, and in my remaining time today, I’d like to give you a quick tour of some of this work, using some concrete examples to convey its catalytic value.

⁵ Martin C. Jischke, 2004 Justin Smith Morrill Lecture, “Adapting Justin Morrill’s Vision to a New Century: The Imperative of Change for Land-Grant Universities,” National Association of State Universities and Land-Grant Colleges, San Diego, 14 Nov. 2004. Online at www.csrees.usda.gov/about/speeches/04_morrill.html Accessed 24 Jan. 2012

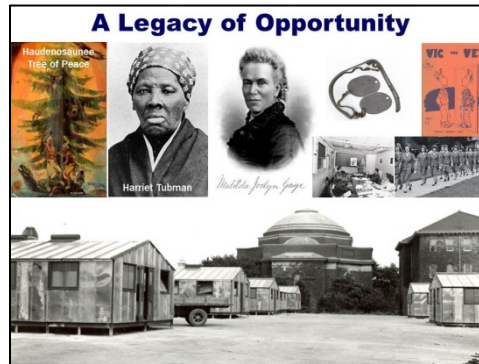
⁶ Robert Weissbourd with Christopher Berry, “Cities and Economic Prosperity: A Data Scan on the Role of Cities in Regional and National Economies,” A Report for CEOs for Cities (9 Apr. 2001) 4.

⁷ “Highlights,” *A Crucible Moment*.

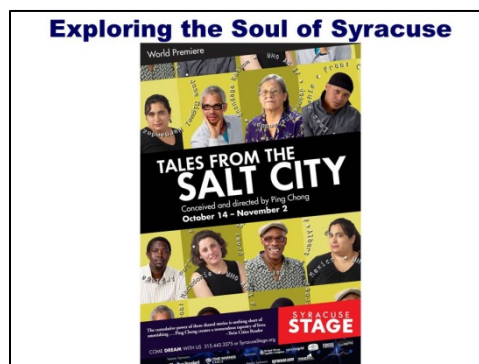
⁸ Frederick Douglass, cited by Nicholas Kristof, “A Poverty Solution that Starts with a Hug,” *The New York Times* (8 Jan. 2012) SR11.

⁹ Susan Sturm and Nancy Cantor, *Transformative Leadership for a More Just Society: Revitalizing Higher Education’s Role*, Working Group Paper, Ford Foundation, 2011.

Social action has a proud history in both Syracuse and the university. The city was a way station on the Underground Railroad and the cockpit of the movement for women's suffrage and women's rights. The university reached out during World War II to invite Japanese American internees to study on our campus. After the war, when few private universities were willing to admit soldiers under the G.I. Bill, SU opened its doors to almost 10,000 veterans, tripling our enrollment overnight.



Once again, we have found ourselves facing a call to action: to galvanize our population--its diverse pool of talent--to remake our post-industrial future. SU is working to be a big part of that future, but we understand that we have to act in collaboration, not domination. In a city with many voices, we've learned to listen.



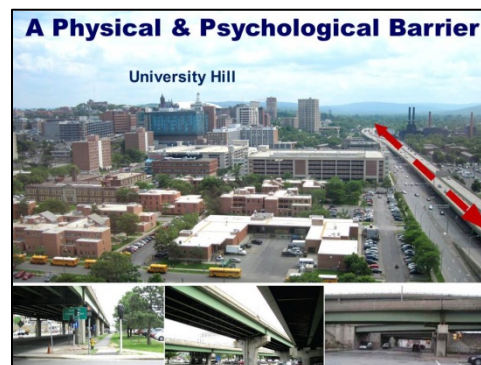
Eight years ago, we began to engage in dialogues on campus and off to explore the city's history, stories, challenges and dreams and to see how they mapped onto our academic strengths. We called this "Exploring the Soul of Syracuse." In the years since then, it has been an ongoing conversation.

True dialogue must be deep, sustained, and systemic. As John Kuo Wei Tchen once told a conference of Imagining America, the national consortium of universities located at SU,

authentic dialogue “must be a mutual meaning-making process that feeds the soul and clarifies choices we must make. It must be short-term, long-term, and medium term.”¹⁰

As an anchor institution in Syracuse, we began by talking about how we could help build civil infrastructure for the long haul. Just as architecture is more than a form that contains space--as Maya Lin once observed, architecture is also “an experience, a passage”--- a university’s physical infrastructure is more than a real estate investment. Its physical presence helps create, for good or for ill, its social---its civic---infrastructure.

Our own location was a challenge. We’re situated on University Hill, so high above the city that the students call the space where two of our residence halls are located “Mount Olympus.” Although we’re only a 15-minute walk from downtown, we’ve been cut off for years by Interstate-81, an actual and a symbolic divide. We had to find some way to jump that highway, both physically and psychologically.



When I think of building creative places, I think of a task force I served on for the National Science Foundation years ago on “civil infrastructure.” As the social psychologist in a room of engineers, presumably brought in to humanize the project, I asked for a definition of civil infrastructure, and it has stuck with me ever since – *large things attached to the ground*. So as a first step in connecting SU in Syracuse, we bought a building on the opposite side of downtown and then used world-class design to recapture the city’s historic spirit of innovation in both practical and symbolic ways.

¹⁰ John Kuo Wei Tchen, “Homeland Insecurities: Teaching and the Intercultural Imagination,” *Foreseeable Futures #5, Position Papers from Imagining America: Arts and Scholars in Public Life*, originally given as the keynote address at the Imagining America Conference, Rutgers University, 2005.



The building was a very ugly and very old furniture warehouse---140,000 square feet without windows. One of our alums, the architect Richard Gluckman transformed it into a beautiful home for programs in design, journalism, photography and literacy, and architecture, along with a contemporary gallery, and shared university-community meeting spaces. All of a sudden, hundreds of SU students found themselves downtown every day, many of them for the first time, studying in fields that easily cross disciplines and lend themselves to civic engagement. Rather quickly, the neighborhood around the Warehouse began to thrive.

The Connective Corridor: A Site for History and Innovation

In the space between the Warehouse and the University we began to imagine and build a multi-year project, a Connective Corridor that is still very much a work in progress. It is conceived as part bus route and part arts district with pedestrian walkways, public art, bicycle paths, and green infrastructure and landscaping. It links all of the city's major cultural institutions: theaters, museums, galleries, the central library, and performance venues. We've been able to get funds for this project with help from the local utility company and officials from the city, state and Federal governments.



Dozens of students, professors, classes, community groups, and other organizations have given input on landscaping, lighting, design, and infrastructure. The Corridor's vibrant and ever-changing urban video project, galleries, new restaurants and apartments, and its updated hotels are beginning to make it a destination as well as a connection, and it is anything but passive. It continues to generate new scholarship, new art, and new public dialogue. In the process, it has served as a site for rediscovering the past and re-imagining the future.



The Corridor passes through what was once the historic 15th Ward, a vibrant African-American district that was bulldozed for the interstate and for urban renewal. As a sign of our commitment to reawakening the legacy of this space, the Community Folk Art Center has been situated on the Corridor in a prominently located storefront. The Center was started by our African American Studies Department 40 years ago and has deep connections with the city's African American community. Our South Side Initiative, a community-university partnership, has worked with the families and descendants of those who once lived in the 15th Ward to create an online history museum that displays and contextualizes their photographs, music, and stories.¹¹

Bringing the past and present into convergence, the Connective Corridor inaugurated a large public art project, "Iconic Syracuse," two weeks ago. It pairs historic scenes of Syracuse found along the Corridor with oil paintings by SU students Greg Mawicke and Jesse Handelman on a series of 12 billboards that will change the first of each month for the coming year. Iconic Syracuse is a collaboration between SU Industrial and Interaction Design students, under the direction of Professor Denise Heckman, and the Onondaga Historical Association and its curator of history, Dennis Connors.

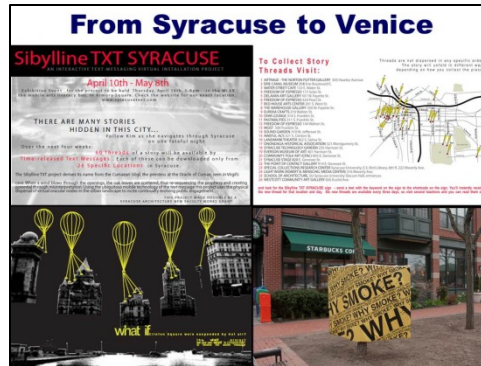
¹¹<http://ourstories.syr.edu/>



SU architecture professor Anda French also used the Corridor as a setting for two projects she called Spatial ConTXTS, an effort to take on issues raised by a very modern icon, the cell phone, and the disengaged and atomized public it so famously has created. Her effort to enlist the cell phone in an imaginative exploration of the built environment was selected for inclusion in the American pavilion at the current Venice Biennale. For her first project, Sibylline TXT---named after an oracle in Virgil's Aeneid--- French invited participants to visit 26 art and cultural sites along the Corridor over a span of 30 days. At each destination they would receive part of an original fictional story via text message.

For the other project, SyrAsks, French and her SU students asked 7th and 8th graders at a Syracuse middle school what questions they would want to ask the whole city, if the city were listening. The SU students then designed four informational sculptures and placed them in public spaces (a process that required approval from city officials and taught the students a great deal about city government!). Each installation had a specific question and instructions how to answer via text message. When an answer arrived, an automated text response would invite that person to an unveiling of the answers. This was a multimedia presentation designed by the SU students and projected for several nights on the walls of the Everson Museum by the Urban Video Project. Some of the questions asked by the 7th and 8th graders were: "What should we do with the abandoned houses?" "What do you like about Syracuse?" And "Why Smoke?"

The efforts by French and her students to foster new forms of public dialogue are very much in keeping with the theme of the Biennale, "Common Ground," described by exhibition president Paolo Baratta as an effort "to mend the fracture between architecture and civil society."



Not long after the inception of the Corridor and not far away, we and our partners began another effort to reclaim history and remake the future. We acquired a brownfield site that was once home to the old Smith Corona Typewriter factory near the Erie Canal. Using LEED-Platinum design and technology, we entered a collaboration that built a “living laboratory” that is now the New York State Center of Excellence in Environmental and Energy Systems. Twelve academic institutions are participants, along with some 200 firms that range in size from large corporations such as Carrier and Siemens to small, entrepreneurial start-ups in Central New York. It draws from many different communities of experts, not only scientists and engineers, but also leaders from the Haudenosaunee Nations, who have a deep religious commitment to the environment and are pursuing a Center for Indigenous Knowledge. Although the partners are geographically dispersed, it’s important that the Center itself is embedded in the city, serving as a stake in the ground, so to speak, as well as a catalyst for new collaborations in sustainable neighborhoods and technology innovation.

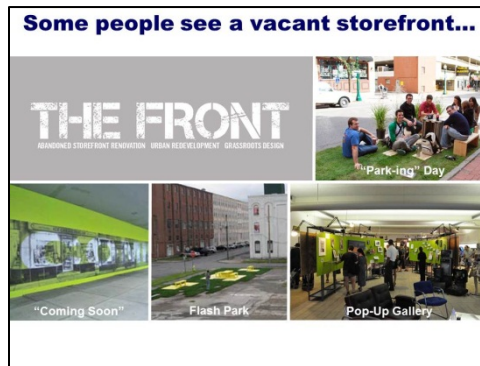


Transformative Leaders and Boundary Crossings

As we’ve evolved in our role as an anchor institution in our city and the perception has grown that everyone “wins” in the process, we’ve found that the impetus for a new project or partnership may come from anyone: from a dean, an external foundation, a group of residents, a long-standing faculty group with close community ties, or a New York State sponsored consortium. Their projects have one thing in common: namely, that they’re firmly embedded in

the city with joint university-community governance and/or engagement. As they grow, they create larger ecosystems for democratic engagement, serving as overarching hubs for activities that often produce other smaller scale projects and initiatives.

The Warehouse has been ideal as such a hub. Steve Klimek, a member of the first School of Architecture class to be there for a full year, remembers seeing vacant storefronts in the area and thinking, “Why can’t we do something with them?” As undergraduates, he and fellow student Nilus Klingel were galvanized into a series of projects that included a Pop-Up gallery to exhibit local artists. When they became Engagement Fellows with Imagining America, they renovated and opened a storefront downtown to use for what they describe as “an urban design center, a think tank, and a public space where people can get excited about architecture and urbanism.” This project, “Storefront: Syracuse,” is among 30 projects being featured as part of “Syracuse Downtown,” also chosen for the American pavilion at the Venice Biennale. Klimek is now an adjunct professor at SU and recently served as graphic designer for the “Iconic Syracuse” project.



These collaborations in public scholarship have involved “experts” of all descriptions---real estate developers, local government officials and staffers, SU students, local non-profits, journalists, artists and art educators, school children and their teachers, grandmothers and their neighbors.



Leadership in these collaborations has come from the top-down and the ground up. From campus, it's included deans and the university's vice president for economic development, as well as students from first years to PhD candidates. From the larger community, they've come from our local Gifford Foundation and the Community Foundation, as well as from local residents and business people. On a national level, a driving force has been the Kauffman Foundation, which sponsored our wide-ranging Initiative in entrepreneurship, and the Say Yes to Education Foundation, which is partnering with Syracuse in landmark urban education reform.


Along the way, the university and the community have gotten new eyes for each other and the sense that our spaces, our problems, and our opportunities are jointly "owned." The process has created new social infrastructures that have paved the way for even more coalition-building.

Creating an Ecosystem for Democratic Engagement on the Near Westside

One key example is in the Near Westside, right by the Warehouse. Originally, we intended that the Warehouse would be the western anchor of the Corridor. But we couldn't help looking a little further west. Just across the street---unfortunately a busy street eight lanes wide---was a hidden world, the Near Westside, an old industrial neighborhood obscured by abandoned warehouses and ugly railroad trestles aligned so densely that some residents called them "the Berlin Wall."

The Near Westside is a neighborhood with a rich legacy and many contemporary challenges not unfamiliar to metropolitan communities across our nation. It's the ninth poorest census district in the nation, with all the tragedies that come with that, including high rates of crime, environmental degradation, illiteracy, poor health, and joblessness. In recent decades, this largely invisible neighborhood has had very little political clout---only a tiny percentage of residents ever turn out to vote.

Hidden Strength



- Poorest neighborhood in Syracuse & 9th poorest in the country
- 3,310 residents: 31% White, 41% African American, 34% Hispanic
- 52% living in poverty (*double the city's rate*)
- 40% unemployment
- 37% with disabilities
- Violent crime rate 5 times the county rate
- 1,244 housing units, 20% vacancy rate (*double NYS rate*)
- Owner-occupancy rate of 15% within the 0.33 sq mile area (215 acres)

At the same time, this is a neighborhood with considerable strengths and vast possibilities. In so many ways, it represents the future of our metropolitan regions. It is a multi-racial, multi-ethnic community with a socially active Roman Catholic church, a supermarket run by the same family for three generations, a nucleus of artists living and working there, grandmothers with long memories and deep connections, children eager to participate, and a strong culture of neighborliness.

So, as life and work at our Warehouse began to hit its stride and plans for the Connective Corridor took shape, we started to get to know our neighbors next door. SU students interviewed and photographed some of the Near Westside residents and told their stories as part of their research for a studio course offered by architecture professor Julia Czerniak. Syracuse photographer, educator and artist Stephen Mahan mixed students from SU and students from the Syracuse public schools in his Photography and Literacy course and began to display their self-portraits and narratives regularly at the Link Gallery at the Warehouse. These interactions paved the way for new coalitions.



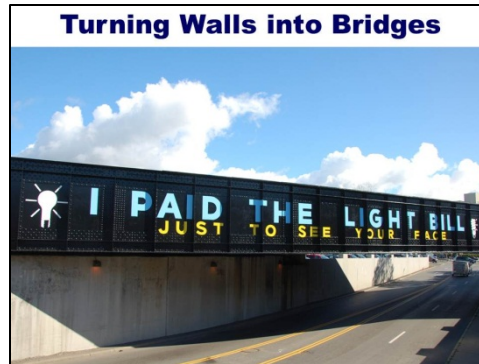
Then five years ago a group of residents joined with us and with foundations, businesses, not-for-profits, our School of Architecture and Center of Excellence in Energy and Environmental Systems, and officials in state and city government to create the Near Westside Initiative, a non-profit organization to rewrite the story and the future of the community. It was the kind of barn-raising collaborative approach I'm advocating to you today. We called it the SALT District, for Syracuse Art, Literacy, and Technology, the foundations on which we hoped to build a vibrant legacy, just as prior generations had built one around the salt industry.



Instead of setting up a “command and control” model directed exclusively by university experts, the Initiative adopted a collaborative model, asking participants to meet for consultation and discussion and move toward a common goal. Although the process can be loud and messy, the result has been an environment that allows, inspires, creates, and sustains a host of innovative and successful collaborations of “experts” of all descriptions. Its structure is one form of what the legal scholar Susan Sturm has called the “architecture of inclusion”¹² for full participation, and there is plenty of talking and even yelling across difference that provides an extraordinary education for all involved – certainly for our students, but also for our faculty and community partners alike.

The Near Westside Initiative has embedded design and technology with environmental sustainability, inclusive education, and neighborhood and cultural entrepreneurship as catalysts for innovation and transformation. It has involved 45 faculty members and 808 students from all over our campus, from architecture and visual and performing arts, from public communications and the public humanities, from the School of Education and the business school, from environmental engineering and our iSchool. Together, they stretch their knowledge not only by working across disciplines, but also---perhaps even more importantly--- by working on the ground with a rich array of residents of all ages, local business and government leaders, community-based organizations, and more. So far, we have been able to generate more than \$70.2 million in new investment during very hard economic times. Buildings, homes, businesses, schools, and public spaces have been coming back to life and strengthening the economic and social fabric of the community. Residents are finding their voice, and we are listening to each other. We are working for access and opportunity, so far creating 337 full time and 14 part time jobs in the neighborhood, and engaging in job training for residents.

¹² Susan Sturm, “The Architecture of Inclusion: Interdisciplinary Insights on Pursuing Institutional Citizenship,” *Harvard Journal of Law and Gender* 247 (2006) 248-334.



The so-called “Berlin Wall” has been transformed. The internationally-known graffiti artist Steven Power spoke with local residents and painted their words into poetry, changing the bridges into new city landmarks. Now that two huge empty warehouses have been given complete green renovations, their new tenants hold much promise for the revitalization of the community.

Two weeks ago, ProLiteracy, the oldest and largest membership organization in the United States dedicated to the cause of adult literacy and basic education, inaugurated its new headquarters in the 100-year-old Case Supply warehouse. ProLiteracy’s publishing division, New Readers Press, has also moved in. Vice President Mark Cass says he believes that being located among some of the people they’ll serve will “change the quality and depth of what we do.” One facet of the excellence of this approach to community transformation is that, ideally, it will change us all.



WCNY, the public broadcasting station that serves 19 counties in central New York, will move into another part of the Case Supply by January. In addition to state-of-the-art TV and radio studios, it will have a public courtyard, a wireless café that will also hold cooking classes, a theater that doubles as a rehearsal space, and a variety of educational programs for adults and children. This is part of our larger strategy of paying attention to the success of the diverse next generations, building inclusion into the heart of our cultures, structures, and practices. As our own students and faculty members increasingly come from metropolitan regions across our

nation---and indeed the globe---they can find a ready-made second home (not only for their disciplinary pursuits but also for their social connections) in places like the Case Supply.

We see this already happening at La Casita, a Latino/a cultural center created recently by SU faculty members in the public humanities in collaboration with La Liga, the Spanish Action League of Onondaga County, and now located on the first floor of the old Lincoln Supply Building. La Casita serves as an intellectual and artistic bridge between communities and generations, attracting new voices and faces to Syracuse.



Better nutrition, better health, and better housing are just some of the critical issues in the Near Westside. So are the condition and the sustainability of the environment. Our non-profit housing partner Home HeadQuarters has renovated or constructed 60 affordable homes in the neighborhood. SU Architecture's UPSTATE Center joined with the Center of Excellence to conduct an international competition called "From the Ground Up" to design three cutting-edge, green, affordable single-family homes on specific sites in the neighborhood. The winners were some of the nation's leading architects. We now have 11 green homes, and our students helped build some of them. Opportunities such as these have been a big draw for students who come to Syracuse with a commitment to their own communities and an interest in urban revitalization, and again, this is changing the face of SU as a result.



This year the architecture students have partnered with VIP Structures , Architecture Professor Tim Stenson, and visiting critic Fred Stelle in a design-build studio that has used green building technology to rehabilitate two homes that are almost ready for occupancy. Starting next month, the Initiative will conduct another year-long competition, asking more than 20 landscape and design teams to redesign five blocks of Wyoming Street, one of the main arteries in the Near Westside, so the street will encourage fun and physical activity.

Wyoming Street links the Case and Lincoln Supply buildings to Nojaim’s Supermarket -- the site of another collaborative effort of the Initiative, a new community health and nutrition center jointly lead by St. Joseph’s Hospital, our public health faculty members, and Paul Nojaim, the third-generation local grocer in the Near Westside.

Ed Bogucz, director of the Center of Excellence and an environmental engineer, became passionate about creating these partnerships in the Near Westside because he regards it as “a grand challenge.” As he once observed: “If you look at the sustainability of the neighborhood-- its environmental sustainability, the economics, the social justice issues---I think it’s fair to say that this neighborhood and many other neighborhoods in cities across the country were essentially thrown away. And humanity simply can’t throw away neighborhoods and hope to survive on the planet.”¹³

In response to his efforts, the U.S. Green Building Council designated the Near Westside as the nation’s first LEED Neighborhood Development Project, committed to the vision that is now coming to life there: compact re-development, with green and mixed-used buildings, pedestrian-friendly streets, public transportation, community policing, neighborhood shops and businesses, and a centralized school and park.



To make all the properties more energy-efficient---not just the new green homes and renovated warehouses---the Center of Excellence has conducted free energy audits for businesses and homes and has helped their owners apply for financing for affordable energy-efficient

¹³ Conversation on 8 Jan. 2010.

upgrades. Working with SU and other partners committed to sustainable water management practices, they've introduced cutting edge technologies such as permeable pavements and rain gardens, and they've planted dozens of trees as part of the county's Save the Rain Program, instituted after County Executive Joanne Mahoney stopped the construction of an \$12.8 million sewage treatment facility next to the Near Westside in 2008 and proposed green infrastructure solutions instead.

Issues of sustainability speak not just about physical development but also to workforce development. With help from the Annie E. Casey Foundation, the Initiative has trained 60 men and women in general construction and green infrastructure, and 48 now have fulltime jobs. Two resident-owned cooperatives are being launched: a high-tech hydroponic greenhouse, to grow and sell fresh vegetables, and a green property management company, to maintain all those mixed-use warehouses we've transformed.

The Initiative has also helped start a Neighborhood Business Association of more than 30 members to engage in cross promotion and joint advertising, leveraging their resources and skills. The Central New York Community Foundation and the Cooperative Federal Credit Union have joined with the Initiative to create a revolving microloan program to provide vital credit financing for local entrepreneurs and businesses that want to expand. We're also sponsoring an entrepreneurship program that includes individualized one-on-one consulting on skills that range from business plan development to exporting and marketing.

Art and the Power of Many Voices

From the outset, members of the community and of the Initiative have been sensitive to issues of gentrification, and it's a matter of pride that 70 percent of the new and renovated houses have gone to existing residents. The rest have gone to newcomers, including artists and artisans who have been drawn to this creative community of more than 300 working artists.

In fact, two upper floors of one renovated warehouse, the Lincoln Supply Building, are live-work apartments for artists. The Initiative renovated a small building as a home and studio for Juan Cruz, a well-known artist from Puerto Rico who gives art lessons to local children. ArtPlace has just given us a grant to transform a dingy former restaurant into 4,000 square feet of space for artists-in-residence and a gallery for them to share with local artists.

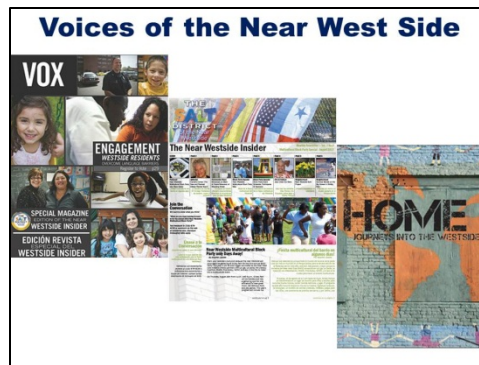


Not far away, a former crack house at 601 Tully now houses an art gallery, performance space, and venue for community meetings. Home Headquarters gutted the building, and SU students re-imagined and rebuilt it with recycled materials over a period of several semesters. The students, who came from a range of disciplines---from architecture to fashion design---were enrolled in studio classes in social sculpture taught by Marion Wilson, director of community initiatives in the visual arts in SU’s School of Education. From the start, students from nearby Fowler High School served as “experts” on the community and attended some of the classes on campus. Inclusion and exchange have been part of the fabric of this effort since the beginning.

“601 Tully” also houses one of three Little Free Libraries in the neighborhood. These libraries, about the size of a pay phone kiosk, have been an ongoing collaboration between neighborhood residents, the Near Westside Initiative, our iSchool, and the College of Visual and Performing Arts. It took just nine months to plan and install the first one, and the residents now manage them all. They have about 3,000 volumes, and anyone can use them.

Voices need to come from all sectors. The Initiative itself has been publishing *The Near Westside Insider*, a bilingual monthly newsletter. This month a group of undergraduate and graduate students in journalism, photography, and design published a special magazine edition of the newsletter called *Vox*, which is Latin for “Voice.” Advising them were Steve Davis, chair of the department of Newspaper and Online Journalism Department, Tom Kennedy, who holds the Alexia Foundation chair in the Multimedia, Photography, and Design Department, and Claudia Strong, an adjunct professor in that department.

The magazine, written in English and Spanish, explored the language barriers so often found in the neighborhood, including the political silence that accompanies them. *Vox* was mailed to every household on the Near Westside in time for readers to register to vote in the upcoming elections. At the back was a map of polling places in the community and a New York State Voter Registration Form.



Another important voice straight from the heart of the community, one that has involved the Writing Program of our College of Arts and Sciences, is the Gifford Street Community Press. Among those on the editorial board are Steve Parks, an SU professor of writing and rhetoric, and Gary Bonaparte, a Native American who moved away to California some time ago and then returned home to the Near Westside. In his chapter of the book *Home; Journeys into the Westside*, he writes that “it’s better to become involved in your community, and try to make it possible to have the things you want without moving away.”¹⁴

The writing in these books is deeply personal and often highly critical, as it is in *I Witness; Perspectives on Policing in the Near Westside*, an effort to answer the questions “What can the police do to support the community?” and “What can the community do to support the police?” Every contributor sees the problems. In fact, the complaint by Cherise Hunter, an activity counselor for the Boys and Girls Club, that “All anybody does in the community is look down on our kids”¹⁵ is mirrored in the words of Police Officer Todd Mooney, who says, “The thing is in this line of work we mainly only see the bad, you know? We don’t really have much time to deal with the good.” “Come talk with us,” he says. “Breaking that barrier---I think it is the biggest thing.”¹⁶

We need to collaborate. To do so, we must be able to speak. We must also be able to listen. The dialogue in this book is a beginning. As we have found throughout our experience with community engagement, trust happens only when everyone involved feels that they share not only the moment at hand, but also a common fate. Rosalee Jenkins, an older single mother,

¹⁴ Gary Bonaparte, “When I Was Young I Was Like A Lone Agent,” *Home; Journeys into the Westside*, eds. Gary Bonaparte, Mother Earth, Susan Hamilton, Steve Parks, Isaac Rothwell, Richard Vallejo (Syracuse: Gifford Street Community Press, 2011) 14-15.

¹⁵ Cherise Hunter, interview with Ben Kuebrich, “Time to Step Up and Make That Change,” *I Witness; Perspectives on Policing in the Near Westside*, ed. Ben Kuebrich (Syracuse, Gifford Street Community Press, 2012) 43.

¹⁶ Officer Todd Moroney, interview with Ben Kuebrich, “Come Talk to Us,” *I Witness; Perspectives on Policing in the Near Westside*, 110.

hopes for that and writes, “I taste togetherness on the Westside. It’s not as strong as it should be, but I taste it.”¹⁷

Say Yes to Education Syracuse

As this togetherness grows, it reminds us directly of the importance of collaboration and education as avenues of social mobility – a lesson built right into the heart of the multi-generational approach of the Near Westside Initiative. For SU, this also means fulfilling our role as a cultivator of the next diverse generation of talent – our role as an educational anchor institution. Our common fate and our hopes for all the children of Syracuse are pinned on an ambitious city-wide collaboration that is anchored by the Syracuse City School District, the Say Yes to Education Foundation, and Syracuse University, in partnership with the Syracuse Teacher’s Association, the City, County, numerous community-based organizations, corporate and private support, and the American Institutes for Research.



Say Yes to Education Syracuse reaches all 21,000 students in the district, starting in kindergarten and continuing through high school, with extended school days and summer programming, student monitoring systems, socio-emotional supports, health and legal assistance for students and families, college counseling and early college academic preparation, and tuition scholarships for graduates who qualify for admission to over two dozen private institutions or the SUNY/CUNY systems.

Syracuse University faculty and students from schools and colleges across campus are participating in making this grand 21st century barn-raising a success -- tutoring, working in the summer camps, designing inclusive K-8 Schools of Promise, creating mobile digital media labs to teach art across the district, creating Early College High Schools in the District buildings and structured Inter-Group Dialogue experiences, engaging with City students in labs on our campus, and evaluating progress across the District as Say Yes unfolds. It was Say Yes that helped Anda

¹⁷ Rosalee Jenkins, “I’m Really a Westside Kid,” *Home; Journeys into the Westside*, 22.

French and her SU students set up their workshops with the middle schoolers in their SyrAsks project.

21st Century Barn-Raising

Faculty and students from across SU schools/colleges participating in:

- Tutoring
- Summer camps
- Mobile digital media labs to teach art
- Early College High Schools in district buildings
- K-8 Schools of Promise
- Syracuse City School District students engaging in labs on SU campus
- Intergroup dialogue in schools and between districts
- District-wide evaluation
- Legal and health clinics

Next month the Syracuse City School District, under the leadership of its new Superintendent Sharon Contreras, will introduce a Parent University to offer a host of free courses for parents in the city. The topics will range from such classes as Talking to Your Kids and Getting Your Child Ready for Collegiate Athletics to activities such as Zumba classes and Family Swimming Lessons.

Say Yes: Early Impact

- 300 new students enrolled in the District—the first time in a decade that enrollment has increased
- 3.5% increase in median home sales value in the District, even with sluggish economy
- Ninth grader dropout rate is down 44%
- 2,000 Say Yes alumni are in college now, including 157 at SU
- Building the culture of college attendance: "It starts with a vision..." (Say Yes alum, Jaquiel Ash)

We won't know the full impact of Say Yes until the first kindergartners graduate from high school in 2019, but we are encouraged by early indicators. We've seen enrollment in the city schools increase for the first time in a decade—by 300 which tells us that parents are choosing to move to keep their children in the city schools.¹⁸ We've seen median home sales values increase by 3.5% since 2009, even with a persistently sluggish real estate market. We've seen the drop-out rate for 9th graders fall 44 percent from 2009-2010. And since the fall of 2009, nearly 2000 Say Yes students have enrolled in two and four year colleges, 157 at SU.

¹⁸ R. Bifulco and R. Rubenstein, *The Effect of the Syracuse Say Yes City-wide Turnaround Strategy on Public School Enrollments: A Report on Initial Trends*. (Syracuse, NY: Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, Syracuse University, 2011).

Listen to one Say Yes student, Jaquiel Ash. He was a senior at Nottingham High School -- one of Syracuse's persistently "low performing" schools by NY State standards --when he heard George Weiss, the founder of Say Yes, make the Say Yes promise. "I'd grown up on Midland when all the violence and shootings were going down," he said, "and I thought that was the only environment that existed, the only chance there was," he told Sean Kirst, a reporter for the Post Standard newspaper in Syracuse.¹⁹ "I knew there might be something else out there for me."

Ash graduated from high school and enrolled at Monroe Community College near Rochester, where he performed in campus plays and musicals, was elected to student government, and worked as a youth counselor with the Rochester public schools. Without this experience, he said last month, "I'd still be absent-minded to the world. All these new conversations with new people, the love of literature I have now, none of it would have happened." He's received his associate's degree and hopes to move on to a four-year state school with tuition through Say Yes. As a guest speaker at a ceremony last month, Ash told Weiss face to face, "It starts with a vision in your head. You have to see it, you have to keep it, and you can't cancel it."²⁰

Importantly, Say Yes has also transformed our thinking about our SU students. Instead of excluding, as many admissions programs inevitably do, we are working to include members of the huge pool of young talent that surrounds us, starting at home and then spreading beyond. As a crucial piece of the road to opportunity, SU is partnering with Onondaga Community College in Syracuse on a 2+2 program to give qualifying students dual admission and a guaranteed transfer into 33 degree programs at SU, as well as a predictive financial aid package. We are working on similar pathways and community college partnerships in geographies of opportunity around the country. Education is an act of cultivation, just as our barn-raising efforts in Syracuse have turned out to be – planting new ideas and bringing new voices to our dialogue.

Transforming Ourselves

There is no question that pursuing an agenda of Scholarship in Action has meant transforming ourselves. It has required us to care about public scholarship, attuning our professional skills toward public problems and community collaboration, whether we are designing and building affordable green homes with the latest technology in one of the poorest census tracts in the nation or collaborating to turn around low performing schools and close the pervasive achievement gap for low income, largely minority children, by first closing the educational *opportunity* gap and then believing in our children's talent to finish the task at hand.

¹⁹ Sean Kirst, "The Promise of Say Yes: Something Else Out There for Me," *The Post-Standard* (20 Aug 2012) available online at <http://sayyessyracuse.org/news/promise-say-yes-something-else-out-there-me> accessed 10 September 2012.

²⁰ Kirst (2012).

This work has taught us how critically important it is to change our institutional systems to accommodate and reward this public scholarship, especially at promotion and tenure time for members of our faculty, and in the admissions cycle as we reach out to welcome the next diverse generation of new talent to our campuses. At its heart, we are trying to be good institutional citizens, creating transformative leaders of all generations across the university who are committed to civic engagement.

Being an anchor institution has meant playing a role in our Regional Economic Development Council, building collaborative facilities with sustainable futures and many partners in the region rather than concentrating our efforts only on campus. It also means building on skills of deliberative democracy and dialogue to empower multiple voices of “expertise.” As Paulo Freire wrote many years ago, “Human beings are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection. Without dialogue, there is no communication and without communication there can be no true education.”²¹



This work of crossing boundaries to engage and dialogue with many different partners in addressing the critical issues of our day is a kind of 21st Century barn-raising that can be our best hope in an era that is just as divided and divisive as it was 150 years ago, in the era of the Morrill Act. Education is still the avenue of social mobility, and civic engagement is a two-way street that will benefit us as well as those with whom we partner and the future we all hope to share.

²¹ Paulo Freire, *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*, 30th anniversary ed. (London and New York: Continuum, 2006): 88-93.