

In memory of Christa Robinson



This edition of the Vision Russell newsletter is dedicated to the memory of longtime Russell resident, Christa Robinson. As the legislative aide for Councilwoman Barbara Sexton Smith, Robinson served on the Coordinating Committee for the Vision Russell/Choice Neighborhood Initiative. She was involved in and supported many of the activities that are currently being implemented throughout the neighborhood. Robinson recently passed away unexpectedly and will be remembered for her commitment to serving and supporting the residents of District 4, which includes the historic Russell area.

“One of her favorite sayings when folks were acting crazy was ‘they’re just a bunch of peanut butter heads — ma’am I’m just visiting,’ ” said Councilwoman Barbara Sexton Smith. “In her own way I think she was telling us, we’re all just visiting. Christa left our earth a little better than she found it.”



Russell Choice Neighborhood Initiative NEWSLETTER

Officials Celebrate Phase I Groundbreaking: Let the Construction Begin!



Pictured from left to right: Vincent James, Chief of Community Building LMG; Jackie Floyd, Russell Neighborhood Association; Mary Ellen Wiederwohl, Louisville Forward; Congressman John Yarmuth; Manfred Reid Sr, Chairman LMHA Board of Commissioners; Mayor Greg Fischer; Richard Baron, Co-Founder & Chairman McCormack Baron Salazar; Councilwoman Barbara Sexton Smith, 4th District; Carol Spencer, HUD Ky Office Director of Public Housing; Peg Moertl, President & CEO Ohio Capital Housing Corp; Edwin King, Executive Director Kentucky Housing Corporation; Kyle Sullivan, Red Capital Group; and Rev. Geoffrey Ellis, Retired Pastor Asbury Chapel /LMHA Board Member.

Federal, state and local officials joined Russell and Beecher Terrace residents and community stakeholders on March 29th to celebrate the start of construction for the first phase of new development at the Beecher Terrace site. Representatives from the Russell Neighborhood Association, the Department of Housing and Urban Development, Kentucky Housing Corporation, Ohio Capital Housing, Red Capital Group, McCormack Baron Salazar and the Louisville Metro Housing Authority also helped celebrate, and Mayor Greg Fischer announced a naming contest for the site at the ceremony (see page 3 for details).

Profile: Erica Bledsaw – A Passion for Performance

There are some people who spend years trying to discover their passion and purpose in life, and then there are people like Erica Denise Bledsaw whose passion is evident long before they are willing to embrace it. But if you’ve ever attended a play produced by Bledsaw, or seen her perform at a local theatre, it’s difficult to imagine her doing anything else.

“As a child, I would do these elaborate plays using my dolls and friends as the actors and props,” said Bledsaw who has been participating in arts since she was a student at Greathouse Shyrock Elementary School. “But when it came time for college, I was encouraged to choose a safer path than a career in the arts, so I majored in business.”

After graduating from Sullivan University with a degree in business, Bledsaw served in a number of jobs that allowed her to put her education to good use, including a stint with Jefferson County Public Schools. But during this time, her interest and passion for the arts, particularly the performing arts, never faded.

“I still viewed the arts as a hobby rather than something I could make a living doing, but I continued to be active in community theatre scene and did some freelance work so that I could remain connected to the local arts world,” Bledsaw said. In fact, it was while Bledsaw was sitting in her car waiting to perform in a local play that she had an idea on how to turn her passion into a full-time job.

“The arts have the ability to bring people together and yet there’s a shortage of affordable opportunities, especially in west Louisville, for kids to be a part of these programs,” said Bledsaw. “So, I had the idea to start a performing arts camp for kids that would provide students something to do after school.”

With a clear vision in place, Bledsaw set up a GoFundMe page to help cover the cost for the camp. This effort eventually led her to the Louisville Central Community Centers, where she now serves as Manager of Youth Education. While participating in one of LCCC’s theatre troupes, students not only develop performing skills but also work to improve their academic performance.

“We have high expectations for the students in our theatre troupes both inside and outside of the classroom,” said Bledsaw. “We have an academic coach that helps



Erica Bledsaw and LCCC’s youth theatre and dance troupe in a performance of Aladdin



them with their work and helps to ensure they are being just as successful in the classroom as they are on stage.”

Her approach has allowed LCCC’s fine arts program to grow from just seven kids to 52 kids who participate in the full-scale production of up to six shows annually.

“When we begin practicing for a play, I always start the first rehearsal the same way. I remind the kids that the next eight weeks can either be the best or worst experience of their life and, ultimately, only they can decide which way it will go,” Bledsaw said. “Helping them to understand that whatever they choose to do in life, their attitude will determine their overall experience is important.”

As Bledsaw considers the changes taking place throughout the Russell neighborhood, she hopes that current residents are able to remain in the historic neighborhood and enjoy the benefits from the improvements being made.

“I feel very fortunate to be a part of the changes that are taking place in the Russell neighborhood and see the revitalization as a great opportunity to reach even more kids,” said Bledsaw who is enrolled full-time at the Kentucky College of Art and Design pursuing a degree in fine arts. “As the redevelopment moves forward, and it is important that current residents not only benefit from the improvements but also play an active role and drive what this neighborhood becomes.”

Naming Contest – Win a Prize by helping us name the new Beecher Terrace Community!

Vision Russell, neighborhood residents, and stakeholders have been engaged in a community planning and design process over the last four years. Construction is now underway, and it’s time to develop a new name for the site. Help us come up with a name that celebrates the past, present, and/or future of the Beecher Terrace community and Russell neighborhood.

You can submit your idea online at visionrussell.org, by phone/text at (502) 276-6366, or in person at ballot boxes located throughout the Russell neighborhood. You can find ballot boxes at the Beecher Terrace Management Office in the Baxter Community Center, Western Branch Library, Chestnut Street YMCA, Kentucky Center for African American Heritage, Parkway Place Management Office, and more! All submissions are due by May 31, 2019.

A selection team of Beecher residents, Russell stakeholders, Louisville Metro Housing Authority, Louisville Metro Government staff, and other Vision Russell team members will narrow down the entries to the top THREE. Beecher and West Louisville residents will then have the opportunity to vote on their favorite. The entry with the most votes will win a \$250 VISA gift card, and the two runners-up will also win prizes. Complete contest rules are available at www.visionrussell.org.

Best of luck!

Louisville is becoming a Book Rich Environment!

Through the National Book Foundation’s “Book Rich Environments” program, Louisville Metro Housing Authority (LMHA) is partnering with the Louisville Free Public Library, Friends of the Library, and other local literacy partners to distribute over 14,000 brand-new books to underserved children ages 0 to 18. If your organization is interested in distributing books to your clients – either through an event, a literacy program or other means – please visit the LMHA website – www.lmha1.org, and click on “Special Programs”, then “Book Rich Environments” to download a pdf Book Request Form. For more information, please contact Pam Bischoff at bischoff@lmha1.org, or call (502) 569-3554.





Performing Arts Summer Camps at LCCC

Louisville Central Community Center (LCCC) is offering two performing arts camp this summer beginning June 17 through August 2. The first camp is open to students between the ages of 6-11 and students will rehearse *Annie Jr.* The second camp is open to students between the ages of 12-18 and students will rehearse *Grease*. Both camps will run from 9:00 a.m.-3:00 p.m., Monday through Friday, and will conclude with several performances that will be open to the community. The cost for each camps is \$300 per student. A limited number of scholarships are available. If you are interested in learning more about the camp, please contact LCCC’s manager of education and fine arts, Erica Bledsaw, at (502) 583-8821, ext. 130.