



TRANSFORMATION

ANNUAL
REPORT

20
22



THE HOMAN SQUARE CAMPUS INCLUDES:

AMPT: Advancing Nonprofits

Chicago Park District

DRW College Prep

Family Focus Lawndale

Gardeneers - Homan Rails Farm

Green Garden Café

Holy Family School

IFF

Lawndale Business Renaissance Association

Lawndale Christian Health Center

The Lunch Box Café

Neighborhood Housing Services of Chicago

North Lawndale YMCA

Options for Youth

School of the Art Institute of Chicago

Turning the Page

West Side United

**YWCA Julian Grace Innovation and
Technology Institute**



TRANSFORMATION

Dear Friends,

The past year has been one of adaptation as our community—and society as a whole—recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic. But thanks to your support, Foundation for Homan Square has been steadfast in its neighborhood investments and in enriching the lives of residents through an array of supportive services. Despite the public health crisis, we've carried out the vision of our founders, who saw 55 acres left vacant by the Sears Catalog Facility and imagined a brighter future for the land and its remaining assets. I've seen this up close this year as we've broken ground on 21 units of supportive housing across three sites. I've seen it as we conceptualize a dynamic new multipurpose facility for the corner of Homan and Harrison. And I've seen it as we've opened a vertical art gallery in the stairwell at Nichols Tower.

There may be no greater validation of our strategy and vision than the pride longtime residents like Shirley Williams take in living here. Shirley, a member of our Ladies Club, became a first-time homeowner in 1995 and enjoys amenities like the tower, the area's greenspace, and neighborhood dining with her friends. Shirley didn't think she could be a homeowner until she learned about Homan Square's affordable housing options, but she went on to raise her children here with her husband.

It takes resources to develop and manage properties and to coordinate responses that enhance education, health care, recreation, and family support. I hope as you read through this report, you're as inspired as I am by the next phase of Homan Square's journey and that you consider additional financial support for our work. After all, it's your contributions that have made dreams come true for people like Shirley Williams. I cannot think of a better outcome than that.

Kevin Sutton
Executive Director
Foundation for Homan Square



"The neighborhood is beautiful," Shirley says. "When I found out [Nichols Tower] was being restored, I came up and visited. It's beautiful."

Longtime West Sider says she's "living my best life"

Shirley Williams had lived in rental properties her entire life when her husband came to her with a suggestion.

"My husband asked me, 'Would you like to be a homeowner?'" she recalls. "I said 'I don't know.' I had doubts because I'm Black and didn't make a lot of money."

Twenty-seven years later, Shirley is one of the longest-tenured homeowners in Homan Square. She raised all three of her sons in the community and serves as one of its most vocal ambassadors.

"I would not trade it, I love it over here," she says. "I love the atmosphere, I love my neighbors."

Shirley worked as a chef at a suburban hotel for nearly three decades. She retired six years ago and enjoys spending time with her husband and five grandchildren. She's lived her entire life on Chicago's West Side.

"Now that we have raised our children and grandchildren, it's our time to go out and enjoy ourselves," Shirley says. "I'm living my best life."

Shirley is a longtime congregant at New Morningstar Missionary Baptist Church in West Garfield Park. She enjoys spending time with friends during regular gatherings at Nichols Tower and in a variety of classes at Homan Square Park District. Her favorite restaurants include the Green Tomato Café on West Ogden Avenue and the Beelove Café on South Homan Avenue.

"The neighborhood is beautiful," Shirley says. "When I found out Nichols Tower was being restored, I came up and visited. It's beautiful."

As a neighborhood advocate, Shirley regularly shares her thoughts with civic leaders about how to continue strengthening Homan Square. Additional recreational options and public safety are two areas, in particular, where she sees opportunities for growth.

At a recent community meeting, Shirley and fellow Homan Square residents had an opportunity to share their perspectives about a new mixed-use development. Also on the horizon is a proposed elevated recreational trail, the Altenheim Line, that will utilize a former railroad corridor. Shirley is dreaming big after experiencing the rebirth of Homan Square firsthand.

"I always tell people, never say never. It doesn't hurt to try."

Shirley Williams at a recent community engagement event at Nichols Tower.

Senior Ladies Club finds silver lining at Nichols Tower

Isalee Fisher has lived her entire life on the West Side, where she raised two children before retiring from her job with the Environmental Protection Agency. But it wasn't until the pandemic hit that she learned about the Foundation for Homan Square (FHS) and its community hub at Nichols Tower, which once housed the management offices for the Sears campus.

"This has just been an eye-opener for us," Isalee says. "It has been a blessing having someplace to go and feel safe."

Isalee and other members of the Homan Square Senior Ladies Club had been meeting at a nearby park district building. When the COVID-19 pandemic hit, the park district closed its doors to prevent the spread of the virus. FHS stepped in to provide space so the club could continue to socialize and remain connected during the pandemic—and meet safely at that.

"I thank FHS for giving us a place to come every Friday," adds club member Shirley Williams. "We come and play cards, we go out to lunch. It's a place to let our hair down."

"I love my neighbors," Isalee says. "Sometimes when you just feel like you need someone to talk to, there's us. We're able to help each other out."



The Ladies Club has found a haven with weekly gatherings over lunch and cards.

Community artists transform tower stairwell into gallery

The idea to turn **the stairwell at Nichols Tower** into a vertical art gallery has extra meaning for photographer Alexy Irving. A display of six of her images on the fourth floor is the first project of hers that's been formally commissioned. And each of the photos connects her passion for nature with her family.

"I'm here for people getting outside and finding the beauty that's surrounding them," Alexy says. "There are a lot of health benefits to people getting outside. Taking walks and breathing in nature helps with asthma, helps with allergies. I'm for any opportunities for people to explore their neighborhood."

Alexy's works are part of the new gallery in Nichols Tower that spans seven floors. Foundation for Homan Square brought together the exhibit, themed "Transformation," in partnership with the School of the Art Institute (SAIC) and OPEN Center for the Arts. The artwork has been in place since this summer.

Alexy, who works in the North Lawndale neighborhood as a garden educator, was inspired by visits to her grandfather's home in South Carolina. One of her gallery photos features a sprawling oak tree on the back yard of her grandfather's property.

"I like to go to South Carolina as often as I can," Alexy says. "It's a space where I really get to enjoy nature. South Carolina is a beautiful state, with so much marshland and some of the most beautiful large trees."

SAIC has long been a tenant at Nichols Tower, hosting artists-in-residence and providing classes. OPEN Center for the Arts, based in South Lawndale, offers exhibitions and workshops as part of its mission to provide artists an opportunity to showcase their works and develop their talents. The gallery features several artists with close connections to the community, presenting an opportunity to bring together the northern and southern sections of Lawndale—something that hasn't always happened in the past.

"It's a beautiful partnership to create a gallery with an organization that aligns with us," says Omar Magana, Executive Director and Founder of OPEN Center for the Arts. "Being in the community and being able to support community artists; this is what we do and this is who we are."

Alexy's connection with the tower won't end with the vertical gallery, though. She'll serve as SAIC's artist-in-residence in Spring 2023.

"I'm really excited to teach the classes and lead people walking around nature in North Lawndale," Alexy says. "It's always been in my DNA to grow my own food and enjoy nature. Now I'm just getting the opportunity to do it. I want more people to get outside and feel they can enjoy nature."

Alexy Irving's images are among several works that tap into artists' close ties with West Side communities.





A new multipurpose building will provide affordable office space on a property that serves as a gateway to Homan Square.

"All projects are community-led and about community voice," says Eden Hurd-Smith, IFF's Vice President of Community Development Solutions. "We try to get in front of the community often to give progress updates and invite them into the design process. We want to make sure the space is theirs, that they really utilize it, and that it's not just a pretty building they walk by but don't know why it's there."

Development will mark new chapter for long vacant property

Foundation for Homan Square has embarked on a number of important community development efforts through the years, but, according to some residents, none has been as critical as a new project that has recently gotten under way. The Harrison Gateway Project will develop a parcel that's stood vacant since it was home to a liquor store decades ago. The prominent site on the southwest corner of Harrison and Homan greets commuters, motorists, and pedestrians as they cross I-290 from the north.

The new development seeks to combine locally owned commercial space and co-working offices in an inviting, community-facing gateway building. The concept calls for the construction of a three-story, 17,800-square-foot, mixed-use building with food service and flexible small office spaces. Future tenants likely will include nonprofit organizations and the ward office of Ald. Monique Scott.

Community engagement has been at the center of the development process, led by Foundation for Homan Square and IFF. The two organizations formally joined forces in 2018 to maintain and expand the tapestry of community resources built up in the area over the last 20 years. IFF is a mission-driven lender, developer, and consultant that strengthens nonprofits and the communities they serve by providing leadership, capital, and real estate solutions.

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Homan Square residents asked that the Harrison Gateway building be brightly colored to contrast with the gray hues so prevalent in Chicago, particularly in winter. At a recent meeting at Nichols Tower, the residents provided positive feedback about the proposed building's eye-catching, contemporary design.

IFF expects to close on the city-owned parcel next year. If all goes as planned, the project's expected completion date is Fall 2024.

In the meantime, there will be additional community feedback meetings with Homan Square residents to gather input throughout the process.

"Events are opportunities for us to be in the community, to talk to people," Eden says. "That's what really makes these projects successful."



21 accessible, affordable apartments for residents with disabilities coming soon

Since the **Foundation for Homan Square (FHS)** and **IFF** joined forces in 2018, a strategic plan informed by input from community members has guided the partnership. Among the priorities is to preserve and increase housing options across the spectrum of affordability, with the understanding that quality, affordable homes are a prerequisite for every thriving community.

This August, FHS celebrated the latest milestone in this work with a community block party and groundbreaking ceremony for an \$11 million project that will create 21 new units of permanent supportive housing (PSH) in the community for residents with disabilities.

Reclaiming three vacant sites acquired through the Cook County Land Bank, construction is now underway on the 3300 and 3400 blocks of West Flournoy and the 3600 block of West Polk to build four, two-story facilities that will provide scattered site affordable rental housing to seniors, veterans, and other residents with a wide range of accessibility needs.

“We want to do what the community wants us to do, which is to acquire vacant lots and bring more housing to the neighborhood,” says FHS Executive Director Kevin Sutton. “There’s a need for more high-quality, affordable rental options in Homan Square, and that’s especially true for residents with disabilities.”

All of the apartments—being developed by IFF—will include universal design features, and ground-floor units in each building will be fully accessible to residents in wheelchairs. Input from members of FHS’ Community Advisory Council was essential to the final design of the apartments, providing critical feedback on accessibility features, aesthetics, safety measures, and more.

Expected to welcome residents by the end of 2023, the apartments will provide those living in them with greater personal freedom because of their accessibility and greater financial freedom because of their affordability. Thanks to project-based rental assistance, 16 of the apartments will be affordable to residents earning up to 30 percent of the area median income and five will be affordable to residents earning up to 60 percent of the area median income.

“This project is a win for everybody involved, and, most importantly, for the community itself,” says Kevin. “It’s meeting a documented need for more affordable rental housing in Homan Square, it will enable residents to live independently in the community instead of in congregate settings, it’s replacing blighted properties with community assets, and it’s creating local jobs through construction. This is what equitable community development is all about.”



“We want to do what the community wants us to do, which is to acquire vacant lots and bring more housing to the neighborhood,” says FHS Executive Director Kevin Sutton.

Our sincerest thanks to the individuals, families, and organizations who support Foundation for Homan Square. Because of you, we are able to meet the need for education, health care, recreation, and family support services in our community.

2021/2022 ANNUAL FUND

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TO TOUCH THE LIVES OF MANY.**

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