



A LETTER FROM THE  
INTERIM EXECUTIVE  
DIRECTOR AND  
BOARD CHAIR P2



STORIES TRACE  
NORTH LAWNDALE'S  
HISTORY P3



OPEN HOUSE  
CHICAGO 2025

P4

FOUNDATION FOR HOMAN SQUARE • ANNUAL UPDATE • 2025



## GROWING. BUILDING. THRIVING.



## SEARS SUNKEN GARDEN RENOVATION GETS UNDER WAY

A historic landmark in Homan Square is blossoming again. The Sears Sunken Garden was created in 1907 as a respite for employees of Sears, Roebuck, and Co. It was part of a trend in the United States that followed from the sunken gardens of England in the 1800s. Placed below the surface level, the gardens created the feeling of an outdoor "room" and often featured statuary and fountains. A distinctive feature of the Sears Sunken Garden is the outdoor pergola that still stands and will be refurbished as part of the renovation.

On October 15, community leaders gathered for a groundbreaking celebration for the renovation of the garden. It was the culmination of a participatory design



Ceremonial Groundbreaking on October 15.

(CONTINUED PAGE 4)



## A year of growth and progress

### DEAR FRIENDS,

The rebirth of Homan Square is a tale of people and purpose. Community members, partners, funders, and elected leaders coming together around shared goals. Our campus remains a thriving place and in great demand, whether as a work space for nonprofit organizations, for hosting an event at Nichols Tower, or a gathering place for neighbors.

We have again achieved many of our goals, all with a focus on our core mission of community development and enriching the lives of residents. We've tapped into the potential of a neighborhood with vast historical assets and a desire for new development. The groundbreaking of the revitalized Sears Sunken Garden is a testament to that.

Homan Square remains an affordable, accessible place to live that has provided longtime West Side residents the opportunity to become first-time homeowners. People like Johnny Jones and Sharon Turner, noted in this report, who have placed roots and make our community a better place.

While we have made progress this year, there still is so much work to do. When we stand in our own "Sears Tower," we look at the Willis Tower in the distance and perceive a gap in prosperity. We intend to continue to invest in this community and reduce that divide. Some of our plans include the renovation of more than 100 affordable housing units to help meet the demand of residents and those on a waiting list, and the completion of the Homan Gateway as a welcoming space and a place for artistry.

We hope you will continue with us on this journey. It is because of all of you that we have made progress, and we look forward to continued partnership in the coming year.

Thank you,



**O. Victoria Lakes-Battle**  
**Interim Executive Director**  
**Foundation for Homan Square**  
**Executive Director, Chicago Metro Region, IFF**



**Michael Halbert**  
**Board Chair**  
**Foundation for Homan Square**  
**North Lawndale Community Resident**

*Homan Square strives to sustain an environment that helps students and families live their best lives through quality education, recreation, health care and family support services, while instilling the desire to DREAM BIG and the skills to maximize success. The Homan Square campus includes:*

- **Chicago Park District**
- **DRW College Prep**
- **Family Focus Lawndale**
- **Gardeneers - Homan Rails Farm**
- **Goodwill Industries of Metropolitan Chicago, Inc**
- **Holy Family School**
- **IFF**
- **Julius Rosenwald Park Campaign**
- **Lawndale Business Renaissance Association**
- **Lawndale Christian Dental Center**
- **Lawndale Christian Health Center**
- **Lawndale Employment Network**
- **North Lawndale Employment Network**
- **North Lawndale YMCA**
- **Options for Youth**
- **School of the Art Institute of Chicago**
- **West Side United**
- **YWCA Julian Grace Innovation and Technology Institute**



# STORIES TRACE NORTH LAWNDALE'S HISTORY

Sharon Turner has lived in North Lawndale for more than five decades. She has fond memories of the neighborhood growing up, and places like Lawson Elementary School, Douglass Park, and Collins High School.

*"With the school in the park, it was like we had an after-school program. You just had to be in the house before the street lights came on," said Sharon. "It was so much going on in this area. It was not enough time in the day for me."*

Sharon is among more than a dozen participants in Lawndale Love Stories, a project of artist Alexie Young in partnership with Foundation for Homan Square. The goal of the project is to document the community histories of Homan Square and North Lawndale residents as it's not just the historical, physical structure that makes up Homan Square, but also the people who live, work, and worship here that bring vibrancy to the community.

Another participant is Johnny Jones, a lifelong North Lawndale resident who is raising his two daughters in the community. Johnny has observed firsthand how the neighborhood has evolved in recent decades.

*"I think that there are a lot of really cool things...to be from North Lawndale, and we had nothing, to see all of the development that has taken place," Johnny said. "So it makes me very hopeful for more things to come. It's been pretty cool to see some of these vacant lots become full."*

The Love Stories project is supported by the City of Chicago's Department



of Cultural Affairs and Special Events through the Together We Heal Creative Place Program grant. The stories have shown several common themes among residents, including community connections, family ties, and hope for the future. Alexie posed several questions to interview subjects, such as "what does North Lawndale need more of?"

Said Johnny, "I think I would love to see more leisure-based things. Like we don't have... if I want to go shoot some pool or

something. We don't have places to go to do that, right?"

Participants noted that the neighborhood is home to many important and meaningful community assets like schools, parks, churches, health care centers, and employment opportunities.

*"What I love about Lawndale is that right now it's an up-and-coming area," said Sharon, "and it's come from a long way. A very long way."*

## SEARS SUNKEN GARDEN (CONT.)

process that involved community members, landscape architects, faith leaders, and local nonprofits. The Friends of Sears Sunken Garden, a 501c3 nonprofit organization, guided the process and operates in partnership with the Foundation for Homan Square with support from many others.

Under the guidance of renowned public landscape designer, Piet Oudolf, the transformation of the iconic Sears Sunken Garden will highlight North Lawndale's ambition for a green future and will continue Homan Square's journey of revitalization. Piet is well known as the planting designer for the Lurie Garden in Chicago's Millennium Park and the High Line in New York City.

The transformed garden will include improved lighting, refreshed water features, a bevy of perennial plantings, updated signs, and ADA accessibility. Piet is known for gardens that contain year-round interest with bloom succession, flower and foliage color, and fantastic plant combinations. The entire project is expected to take 18 months.

The restoration of the garden is another step forward in Homan Square's rebirth and shows how North Lawndale remains a vibrant, welcoming place today.

## OPEN HOUSE CHICAGO 2025

Foundation for Homan Square was excited to welcome Open House Chicago to the campus. More than 300 visitors explored Nichols Tower, the original Sears Tower, wandering/wandering its 14th floor and shared spaces throughout the building. Self-guided tours invited guests to take in the historic architecture, while local art adorned the 3rd floor. Celebrating 15 years of architecture, culture, and community, Open House Chicago—one of the world's largest architecture and urban exploration festivals—took place on October 18 and 19.



### FOUNDATION FOR HOMAN SQUARE

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## 2025 ANNUAL FUND

*Because of you, we are able to continue expanding our capacity to meet the need for education, health care, recreation, and family support services in our community.*

**Bev Hayford**

**Catherine Shaw**

**James Martin**

**Kenneth Bailey**

**Maurice Hoffman**

**Yvonne Shields**

**Bettye Goodman**

**Charles & Bev Shaw Foundation**

**Steans Family Foundation**

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