



**VANGUARD COMMUNITY
DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION
IS LEADING THEIR DETROIT
NEIGHBORHOOD THROUGH
MAIN STREET REVITALIZATION**

NORTH END, DETROIT

Narrative by Lisa Tucker, Vice President of Vanguard Community Development Corporation (CDC), and Ette Garth, Board Member of Vanguard CDC, and Phil Eich, Storyville Social, as part of the Michigan Main Street Story Series

COMMUNITY SPOTLIGHT

Growing Up in the North End

"I've been here in the North End for most of my life. I moved away for a couple of years to the suburbs, but that's nothing like coming home! I raised both of my daughters in the North End. Growing up in the North End was amazing. I grew up on East Grand Boulevard and I've seen the transformations that have taken place from being a young child to a young adult.

The North End, there's nothing like it. I've been to New York and D.C., and they are just not the same. The people who live in the North End are here because they want to be here.

I go back to my childhood, where I grew up, two doors down from here. My parents would give out food and different things like that to people in the neighborhood. If you needed a hot meal, my mother and father provided that. People knew that they could stop past my house and get a hot meal. My parents never turned anyone away. That is the sense you'll get from everybody in the North End. If they see you are bleeding, they're going to bandage you up. If they see you without a shirt, they'll give you the shirt off their backs, and they don't ask for anything in return. It's just who we are.

I can remember as a kid, it was a running joke that the sun doesn't shine on the North End. That's so far from the truth - and if that was true before, then it's definitely not true now. The North End shines bright like a diamond. It stands out compared to many other cities. You can go anywhere in the country and if I tell people I'm from Detroit, they gravitate to me just because I'm from Detroit. They want to know about the culture, the people, the personalities, the developments. It's just a world-wide place in such a little part of the world.

I am assistant principal on the eastside of Detroit and a board member on Vanguard, and I'm also a community advocate for the North End as well."

—Ette Garth, Vanguard Community Development Corporation Board Member and Assistant Principal for Detroit Public Schools

Harnessing Community Assets through Main Street

"The North End is an innovative and eclectic neighborhood that is very much independent in thought. They're innovators. There are so many things that have been created from this community that people don't even know. I didn't know some of the things until I began to work here. The people here are very, very passionate about their neighborhood, their history, where they come from, and actually making sure that history doesn't disappear.

Vanguard CDC has been around for a little over 28 years. It is a place-based nonprofit, and we service the North End and Milwaukee Junction communities by cultivating a healthy community that you can live, work, and play in. We do that through using core values of economic equity and racial justice. We accomplish that through housing development, commercial development, community development, and community improvement and beautification.

North End is the first African American Main Street Program in Michigan. From my perspective of growing up on East Grand Boulevard, let's say for example during the holidays, everything took place on the west side of East Grand Boulevard. All the lights,



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all the hustle and bustle, all the shops, all the people that were coming into the city – everything was going on over on the west side of the boulevard, and nothing was coming on our side. This was only split by Woodward Avenue, literally 10 feet away.

Even growing up, I would stand on my front porch looking down the street, and everything was going on over there. Between Taste Fest, to Dally in the Alley, and even before it became Dally in the Alley, they cut off different streets, and there were street vendors and marketplaces, and different things like that. But there was nothing on the east side of Woodward. So close, yet so far.

The North End Main Street program is going to bring those things to our side. It covers beautification, community engagement and building a sense of community. It's a way for people to know what they have and to see it come to fruition, which is a powerful thing for a community.

From the LISC and DTE grants, we were able to form those roundtable conversations that brought our

community together. That lifted up the community and we noticed in those meetings that we were at a very critical point.

We wanted to get ahead of that tipping point. We wanted to be proactive and not reactive, hence the Main Street program. Part of its essence is to hold the uniqueness of the community and cultural elements, even though the neighborhood is growing exponentially. We're within the seven-mile radius of downtown Detroit. We're kitty-corner from Midtown. We're right across the street from New Center, so the growth is moving.

But even though the growth is happening and is positive, we want to make sure that our identity in the North End is not lost. That's where Main Street helps to keep those assets in place."

– Lisa Tucker, Vice President for Economic Development at Vanguard Community Development Corporation

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Good Community Transformation

“Good community transformation happens through the collaboration of the people who are already here in this neighborhood, and the people who want to come to this neighborhood. People want to come to the North End, and we’re not doing a dog and pony show to attract people here and then when they get here, it’s something different. We are who we are. We’ve always been the North End. We are authentic people, we are giving people and we are sharing people.

That’s not everywhere you go in the world, where it can be like a take-take relationship. In the North End, we’re give-give. So, it’s great to have the Main Street transformation project to get people to come and see what we are about. It helps us incorporate and put a stamp on the world of who we are.”

—Lisa Tucker, Vice President for Economic Development at Vanguard Community Development Corporation and Ette Garth, Vanguard CDC Board Member and Assistant Principal for Detroit Public Schools

East Grand Boulevard Streetscape Project

“East Grand Boulevard is the one of the central arteries in our Main Street district, and many years ago, the community worked on a plan to revitalize the boulevard. They put a lot of energy into that plan, but it didn’t launch because the funding was not available. Once we received the Main Street designation, however, guess what happened? Funding became available, the Knight Foundation stepped up, and the City of Detroit partnered with us to bring that plan off the piece of paper and into action.

It goes from Woodward East Grand



Boulevard to I-75. It’s a streetscape plan and it encompasses landscaping, furnishings that will be placed on the boulevard and signage. Everything about the streetscape project was community based. We did a plethora of community engagement and we knocked on doors to make sure that people were engaged if they wanted to come to the meetings. We also did zoom meetings, if you didn’t want to leave your house.

We have commissioned and completed the design of a sign that will be placed at Woodward and East Grand Boulevard. Just like New Center has a sign, North End and Milwaukee Junction will also have a sign that was commissioned by local artists. We also have just erected banners that were commissioned through a campaign of local artists, both within our community and around the surrounding areas. They are working with the community to put our heart image on those banners, which are beautiful and represent our community.

Then about a year and a half ago, we had a festival that went on the boulevard and down Oakland, called BLKOUT Walls. Sydney James was the artist who put together a group of muralists from around the country who came in for a

week and painted fabulous murals.

Then, just to add some whipped cream on top, we’ll be having kiosks that will go down the boulevard. When you push the kiosk, it’ll tell you a story about the boulevard told by people who live in the North End. We’re hoping that by 2023, that project will be complete. It’ll be like a live storybook that you’ll be able to see visually and you’ll also be able to hear.”

—Lisa Tucker, Vice President for Economic Development at Vanguard Community Development Corporation and Ette Garth, Vanguard CDC Board Member and Assistant Principal for Detroit Public Schools

The Value of Main Street

“We received the designation of a Main Street in 2020, which shows what the heart of North End is: that despite all odds and during COVID, we did it. It has opened the dialogue and brought closer communications with the new and the old. It’s helped us to work together to create our vision together, and to memorialize those goals on the Main Street dashboard, which is a live, working plan.

It helps us to define who the leadership is within our community, because we are volunteer-based and community-driven both by businesses and individuals who live in the community. It helps develop leadership and provides training. It also gives you benchmarks to keep you on course so that you can execute those goals. It's a working, living document. We get to test it out. Does it work? Is there something we're missing? Everybody gets to say and decide, 'Okay, let's add this. Let's take this off.'

Then we get something similar to an annual report, so that you can see where you're going. We get that guidance and technical assistance from the MEDC, and that is priceless.

It brings out what's in your head. You can think it, but when you say it, sometimes that's what other people are thinking or trying to say. Then you can collaborate within that group of people and then you have leadership that can lead this type of work.

It just bridges everything together. If you're not sitting down and collaborating, if you're not thinking and really saying

what's on your mind, nobody really knows what's in your head. It's those types of moments where you say, 'Hey, let's sit down and brainstorm. What do you think?'

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Michigan Main Street Story Series



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