



Gifford Park's Pride

Gifford Park Neighborhood: A Great Place to Live, Work, Learn, and Play
www.giffordparkomaha.org

December 2020

A Publication of the Gifford Park Neighborhood Association

Yates Illuminates everyone who wants it. Let's all get to work now to make it happen.

By Adrian S. Petrescu

After over a year of steady advocacy, Monday, November 16, 2020, we had only a few minutes, not even hours let alone days, to celebrate. It's true, as you must have heard. With a six to one vote the Omaha Public Schools Board of Education voted to sell Yates—the former elementary school at 3262 Davenport St—back to the community. It was the second time in five+ years that we had to “Save Yates.” The first time it was from the wrecking ball. This time it took a year+ of steady work, of dreaming big and selling our big dreams to everyone, of strategizing and connecting partners and resources and committed community-oriented local organizations, of advocacy for the community and of organizing our Omaha-wide effort, of fund-raising and of supporting an Omaha-wide campaign to convince all of our OPS Board of Education elected officials of our reputation and how that will impact the viability of our project. By February alone—when we had to persuade OPS administration a viable plan was in the making—we had spent over 1500 hours of volunteer work organizing. Public school parents and home schooling parents, neighbors, neighborhood associations and alliances across town, non-profits large and small, foundations and educational institutions on both sides



Supporters of the Yates Illuminates proposal celebrate!

ANNOUNCEMENT

In the interest of community health and safety, there will be **NO GPNA HOLIDAY BANQUET** this year

of the Missouri all got together and brainstormed and worked to make bold dreams into viable plans and a strategy ahead. By mid-November the Yates effort had spent over \$100,000 in unpaid volunteer work, with over half put in on Zoom or meeting socially distanced outside or inside Yates itself in small groups with masks on, or advocating our bold dreams and matching well-crafted plans to the Board, all in the middle of a pandemic.



Yates Illuminates logo

It all paid off. The OPS Board of Education believed in community, education and employment, and in nurturing opportunity for young and young at heart alike over more immediate cash on their table. Pleasantly surprised at the heartfelt speeches preceding the vote in support of our proposal, we wiped off our tears of joy and we congratulated and thanked everyone for a few minutes Monday evening, and then we got straight back to work. We plan to have Yates Illuminates open for the public as early as January, as soon as the real estate transaction is complete, and as soon as the initial committed tenant organizations move in. Metropolitan Community College, Learning for All, Refugee Empowerment Center, Benson Area Refugee Task Force, D2 Center, Great Plains Theatre Commons, and Restoring Dignity are but a few of the initial tenants to soon settle into their respective space. Other organizations (*continued on page 4*)

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Spring Cleanup

Chris Foster 402-290-8187

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Editor's note: If you have neighborhood news or an editorial to share, we want to hear from you! Please include your contact information and put "GPNA Newsletter" in the subject line and submit by email to a.r.huckins@gmail.com. Editorials are subject to approval by the GPNA Executive Board.

From the President

2020 comes to an end...

It is time to look back at what we have accomplished this year. Some may say nothing positive happened. It was a year we all want to forget as soon as possible, it was a year of major challenges and major changes.

Even though 'everything' had to be cancelled, here in Gifford Park we managed to keep some sense of normality and still organize a few staples in the neighborhood: the Community Garden gave (adult) gardeners the opportunity to relax and meet while socially distancing; the Neighborhood Market took place every Friday from early June to the end of September, and Chris organized a couple of park cleanups with Creighton students and members of the Iowa Western Softball Team. **Thank you Brittany** for all the great work leading the Community Garden, **Martin and all the volunteers and vendors** who made the market possible, and **Chris and his crews** for maintaining Gifford Park clean!

I also want to **thank** our neighbors who started the **Midtown Mutual Aid Network** in April to offer help and resources to those in need during this pandemic.

But the most important event in 2020, the one that will change our neighborhood and the entire Omaha community for years to come, is the decision OPS Board Members took mid-November when they voted in favor of Yates Illuminates, our proposal to open a Community Center in the old Yates Elementary School.

I want to **thank each OPS Board Member** for listening to us and for their courage to vote in favor of a truly community-oriented effort. I also take this opportunity to **thank the members of the Weitz Family Foundation** for their trust, their expertise, their availability and relentless effort and support to make our mutual Dream come true. We are so grateful to have met you!

And I want to **thank each and all of you** who got involved in this Dream, attended 'Yates Future' meetings, shared ideas, supported the effort by telling their story at the OPS Board meetings, calling and writing letters to their OPS Board Member, asking family and friends to support us. This project wouldn't have been possible without your help and support!

2021 will be the year we open a one-of-a-kind innovative educational Community Center in our neighborhood, thanks to each of you! I hope to see you all at our 'Grand Opening' in a few months!

Finally, I want to **thank Chris Foster** for his continuous dedication to make our neighborhood a better place to live, work, learn and play: You make our neighborhood so special, Chris! I know you will still be involved in many activities around. While not being a Board Member anymore, you will from now on be our '**Special Adviser**'! ;-)

I wish you a Safe and Happy Holiday time, and a great start of 2021! Take care of yourself, your loved ones and your neighbors!

- Marie Hélène

Big Muddy Urban Farm Enchanted Forest // October 31st



*Spooky fun in the
Permaculture Forest*



(continued from page 1) may soon also join. Once they complete their advertising and recruitment of participants, the new Yates Illuminates Community Center will open for services to everyone. We have waiting a small Thomas D. Mangelsen fine photographic art gallery ready to be set up, the Science and Arts in Parks project funded and ready, arts and crafts training, restoration training, and several other ideas that need to be implemented. The most important is the plan for a nonprofit incubator and of course the entrepreneurial know-how and nurturing of opportunities that we plan to make available to our youth passing through Yates Illuminates' doors. Here in Gifford Park we have a saying—a strategy so to call it—one that Bob Hutton and Chris Foster and company have been promoting for thirty plus years. "You do what you have to do to get the job done." Now is that time, again. Let's all get to work. As always we are welcoming ideas and help. Let's all roll up our sleeves and get it done. See you soon at Yates Illuminates!



The slogan can now read "Saved Yates"

Wow! Would You Look At This Place...

By: Mike Caban

*NOTE: In light of a 3rd successful campaign to "Save Yates", we offer this reprint of an impossibly accurate prediction which was published in the *July 1991* GPNA Newsletter*

A few years ago I move out of the Gifford Park area because it was falling apart at the seams. Now look at it. The house I sold for twenty thousand dollars is now worth fifty thousand. There are people actually picnicking at the park, and baseball leagues use the field almost every day of the week. What happened to all the broken glass in the park's foot paths, all the trash, and the weeds growing two foot high in every other lot? Why, even the people seem different. I walked to the grocery store and on the way there, people actually said hello with smiles on their faces. There were five bikes outside the Arctic Circle and none of them were chained up. A couple of young ladies played jump rope in front of the newly remodeled apartment buildings across the street from the California Bar, as their mothers kept an eye on them and chatted. And I couldn't believe those beautiful planters on all four corners of 33rd and California. One in front of the apartments, one in front of J'N'Js, one in front of the New Drugstore, and one in front of the New Dry Cleaners. I heard that the plants were all donated by the owner of the New Garden Shop, on the corner of 33rd and Cass streets. I stopped in for lunch at the recently opened

Mexican restaurant, between the Garden Shop and the New Pet Store, and recognized the girl behind the counter as one of the kids who went to Yates Elementary School some year back. She told me that the new Yates school on the east side of 33rd street, between Burt and Webster, across the street from TAC, opened last fall and it's one of these new Learning Centers, where all the new innovative teaching concepts are used, and that everyone one in town wants to send their kids to it. She told me not to miss going to see the new Zorinski Community Center where the old Yates School used to be. She said they have Literacy classes, and parenting classes, and there's a Daycare and a Pre-school, and arts and craft workshops, and other programs for the elderly. She said Mutual of Omaha, Creighton University, and Boys Town Institute donated all the equipment for the Computer Center, and that volunteers help local young people improve their chances of getting good jobs. She said she's a senior in high school now, and she volunteers at the Community Center as a math tutor for elementary age kids in the neighborhood, and that Creighton University students also tutor high school dropouts in their G.E.D. program at one of the fraternity houses in the area. She was apparently very proud of her neighborhood, and with good reason. "What in the world happened here?" I asked. And you know what she told me?

"IT ALL BEGAN WITH THE GIFFORD PARK NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION..."

...today's fiction can be tomorrow's fact.

Congratulations Dana & Stuart!

By Chris Foster

The GPNA wishes huge congratulations to longtime 34th & Webster Street Gifford Park neighbors, volunteers, and GPNA members Dana Freeman & Stuart Shell for the birth of their baby boy Elliot Orion Shell. Baby Elliot was born November 6. Many of you know Dana & Stuart and their families for the great work with many of our finest neighborhood projects and programs, especially for our youth. They have lead and/or been involved with the community garden, youth garden (directed for 5 years!), Community Bicycle Project, GPNA board (Stuart as vice president), membership, holiday banquet, youth tennis, block party, Yates Educational Community Partnership, Restore Omaha Conference, historic preservation, newsletter articles, cleanups, and being great stewards for urban farming and land conservation. No doubt Elliot will hit the ground running with Dana & Stuart as parents!

I couldn't help myself, I went digging back through old photos to find these gems of Dana & Stuart's wedding day September 2009 in Gifford Park! I remember

I was super excited and always appreciated them hosting their wedding reception IN GIFFORD PARK – what a great thing to do at a time when the neighborhood was improving but still had many more public safety issues than today. Everything turned out great!!



Welcome to the neighborhood, Elliot!



Dana and Stuart's Gifford Park Wedding in 2009

Neighbors Show Support at Midtown Mutual Aid Fundraiser

by Amanda Huckins

During the first weekend of the "holiday shopping season", neighbors from Gifford Park and beyond showed Midtown Mutual Aid tremendous support and took home a variety of items which were donated by a handful of organizers and collaborators. Thanks to Myrtle & Cypress Coffeehouse for coffee and hot cocoa!

Winter hats, banana bread, sauces, pickles, and art were just a few of the goodies available. The donations brought in at the event on November 28th, plus those made during the week long drive surrounding the event, will ensure that MMA's monthly free food distribution will continue on the 3rd Saturday of *at least* the next 2 months. All are welcome to utilize this distribution!

If you are interested in donating food, we are accepting: pasta, dry rice, canned vegetables, canned fruit or applesauce, canned meat, dry or canned beans, peanut butter, jelly, breakfast cereal, shelf stable milk (like almond or soy milk), and boxed complete pancake mix. Contact mutualaidnetworkomaha@gmail.com if you have any questions.

Gifford Park Cleanup

by Chris Foster

On Saturday November 7 we had great weather and a small but mighty crew of familiar GPNA volunteers including the Pellerito family (dad Paul and kids Andrew, Josie, Stella) and the Stanley family (Wendell Junior, sister Justine & her husband Logan Neese) cut down the out-of-control bushes and weeds and picked up litter in Gifford Park around the 33rd & Cass Street plantings and near the tennis courts. Unfortunately, these planting areas had become a nuisance and difficult to maintain over the years. The GPNA plans to work with the City Parks Department to develop a plan to beautify and maintain these and other areas of the park for everyone to enjoy. Coincidentally at the same time, a group of Creighton University students lead by Grae Koloski canvassed the park and surrounding neighborhood streets picking up litter – THANK YOU guys, well done!



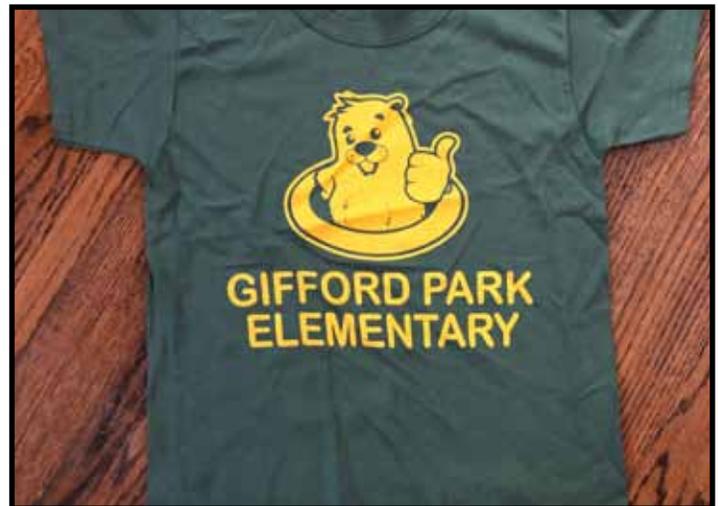
Gifford Park Elementary PTO

Update

By Joy Doll

Greetings from the Gifford Park Elementary Parent Teacher Organization! It has been quite a year and we still are working hard to support Gifford Park Elementary. We want to thank all our GPE teachers who support the children despite the many challenges faced. Thank you for all you do!

Get your Gifford Park Gear as holiday gift! We have a few short sleeve t-shirts available in last year's thumbs up design. These are discounted to \$7 each, and available in sizes Youth XS-XL, Adult S and Adult 2XL. Email us at giffordparkpto@gmail.com if you would like to order one! Proceeds support the Gifford Park Elementary PTO.



Save The Date -- PTO Meetings

All meetings will be virtual, at 8pm and open to everyone. Email us at giffordparkpto@gmail.com if you would like an invitation for any of these dates: 2/9/21, 4/13/21



Community Garden/ Adventure Playground Update

by Chris Foster



Another HUGE THANK YOU on behalf of our Gifford Park Neighborhood Association and Community Garden/Adventure Playground to the THIRTY volunteers from the Iowa Western Women's Softball Team for your team's great efforts Saturday October 17 with our fall garden cleanup! In particular, head coach Ben Greer (and assistant coach McKenzie) and former teammate (and Gifford Park neighbor) Logon Brown have made this happen for the past three years. Thanks Brittany Stebbins for organizing the various cleanup tasks including youth & family plots cleanup, weeding several garden beds and the front area, compost area, and stayed late that Saturday afternoon after most folks left to prep and plant cover crop seeds in family plots. Thanks Adventure Playground director Monica Lehn for doing a bang-up job with volunteers cleaning out the Adventure Playground area and moving large stones for our future fire pit. We hauled away three of my pickup loads of junk and scrap metal! Thanks Big Muddy Urban Farm director Brent Lubbert for managing volunteers with mulching in and around



the chicken coop area so the "lady hens" have fresh bedding. And Rose Carlson provided ALL the pizza, fried chicken, fruit, and drinks we had for lunch, it was perfect to keep us fueled up! The weather was



excellent, we got a ton of stuff done, everyone had a good time working together outside and meeting new friends, we got exercise and fresh air...it was great fall day!

You may have seen we added seven awesome sitting benches in various spots in the community garden for anyone to enjoy reading, eating a bite to eat, or taking a break sipping on Myrtle & Cypress coffee or tea! The benches came from a generous donation by the Dundee Business District when they replaced theirs a few years ago. GPNA then received a Midtown Neighborhood Alliance grant to repair and refinish, the excellent work was done by Keystone Stripping Technology, owner Horace Johnson. We eventually plan to relocate some of the benches to Gifford Park once we get with City Parks Department to identify



appropriate locations.

Of note, we let our community garden chickens "free range" in the areas around the garden, Adventure Playground and adjacent neighbor's yards. We hope everyone enjoys these curious birds roaming and scratching the ground for food, please keep this in mind if you walk your dog through the garden – it's totally fine and we more than welcome this, please pick up after your dog since families and children also frequent these areas – thank you!

Great Gardening!

by Liz Potter

Hello Gifford Park Neighbors! My name is Liz and I was new to the Gifford Park Community Garden this summer! This year I got a small 8ft by 5ft plot where I had quite the successful harvest! I perhaps was over eager with all the veggies I planted as it got a little crowded by the time they all fully grew, but I loved tending to it and watching and anticipating the slow growth. I also had some zinnias that my mom gave me that she grew from seed. Throughout the summer, I hosted picnics at the tables in back, and walked to the garden every morning to have my cup of coffee and read poetry as the sun came up. I even got my parents to drive up from Lincoln to help me edge my garden and learned from my mom who was working to become a Master Gardener. Having my plot during the pandemic was one of the bright spots that kept me active and introduced me to community members that I otherwise wouldn't have met! When so much of the world was shutting down and becoming inaccessible, the garden was open with possibilities and connection! I got recipes, did veggies swaps, connected people to job opportunities, encouraged people about school work, and so much more through my plot. My last harvest was a huge haul of brussel sprouts that made their debut at my family's Thanksgiving dinner! It was fun because I had never grown brussel sprouts before, as well as I was able to share my produce around a table with others. I feel this is an important spirit of what the garden was created to do! Be a connection point for others during planting, watering, weeding, tending, harvesting, sharing and the best part, eating!! The Gifford Park Community Garden has been instrumental in creating a neighborhood gem of growth, cultivation, and relationships!



Liz and her fall harvest of brussels sprouts



Chris works hard to build community on and off the court!

Tennis Award for Chris Foster

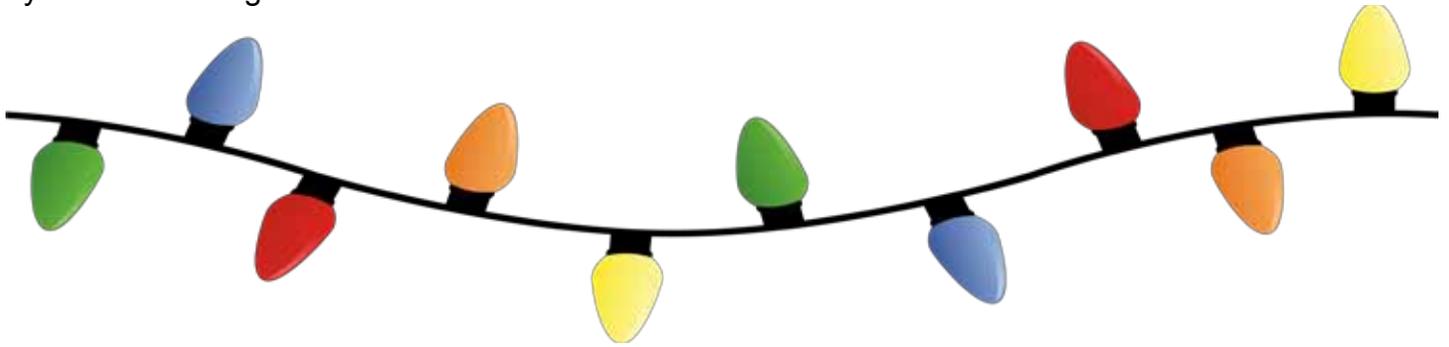
In celebration of their 100th anniversary, USTA Missouri Valley honored 100 people with the Gold Star award in recognition of their contributions to growing the game of tennis in their communities. Gifford Park's Chris Foster was one of the recipients. Chris and his sister Jenny started the Gifford Park Youth Tennis Program in 1994. The full article can be found in USTA Missouri Valley/Nebraska by Andrea Gallagher on October 21, 2020. Congratulations, Chris! Read the whole article at <https://www.usta.com/en/home/stay-current/missourivalley/nebraska/chris-foster-gives-back-to-omaha-community.html>

Season's Greetings



Winter Blues (and reds, and greens)

by Jim Wilwerding



It always makes me sad when the days grow short, and the nights grow long, when fall is turning to winter.

So I look forward to having lights up for Christmas. Over the years we have accumulated a set of decorations and light strings, although we usually make small changes each year. Some go back 10 years or more. Spending a day outdoors, hopefully in the sunshine, putting them up is just a bonus. I was glad to see that we had quite a number of people decorating for the holidays this year, although more would always be better. With easy availability of LED light strings at reasonable prices, much less impact on the power bill. And the bulbs last a long, long time, so no need to change multiple bulbs in each string each year. I've had LED strings that I've used year after year, with few if any bulb changes. Box stores like Menards sell timers for less than \$10 that can either turn the lights on and off at set times, or on at dusk and off a set number of hours later, making operation of the lights automatic, once set. Nice to come home after dark and see the lights already on.

I usually leave a string of color LEDs up on the back fence until the end of February. They look really nice with the snow. And add some color to the monochrome landscape.

I suppose, for some, it seems like too much work. But it wouldn't take much more than an hour to put up a string or two. Taking them down, even less, although I'm careful to wind the lights in neat coils and zip-tie or wirewrap them for easy deployment next year.

So, thanks to all those who went to the trouble. And I hope to see more, next year.



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GPNA Welcomes New Board Member MC Raterman

MC moved from Chicago to Omaha in the Fall of 2016, and has lived in the Joslyn Castle/ Gifford Park neighborhood for three years. They graduated from Creighton University in May of 2020 with degrees in philosophy and art history, and plans to attend graduate school for urban planning in the fall of 2021. MC helped to found Feed the People Omaha (FTP-OMA) in 2017, and is the organization's current Director of Communications. While serving on the board, they intend to help Gifford Park fight food insecurity, and strengthen the neighborhood's communal bonds. When they are not studying or organizing, they like to ride their bike, play tennis, and listen to house music.



Autumn Snow in the Community Garden October 26th



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Thank you! (An open letter to the OPS School Board)

by Chris Foster

First, I am of course a huge supporter of OPS, I attended Castelar, Dundee, Lewis & Clark, Central – I received a great education that prepared me for life. Thank you for leading our awesome OPS School District through extremely challenging times, you have done are continuing to do a tremendous job handling so many difficult situations, most with no precedence or “playbook” to help navigate what to do to protect 53,000 young learners, not to mention parents and family. Knowing you can’t please everyone...and hardly anyone...adds to your challenge.

This is what also made our Save Yates effort a challenge – the last thing me and others involved wanted to do was add more burden to your number one priority of taking care of OPS children. I really appreciate your patience and understanding during this effort going back to late October last year when Dr. Logan first announced OPS would sell Yates. I know this Yates sale was unique and required more examination and work on your part than other property sales. Including the “...educational purposes only...” stipulation was very important.

Thank you for listening to our many

passionate Yates community supporters speak at OPS Board meetings, and also for receiving many emails, letters, and phone calls from the community.

I just listened again to the November 16 OPS Board meeting podcast. Everyone had excellent points from all sides of the discussion. Of course, I’m bias so I particularly appreciated comments from Marque, Amanda, Kimara and Tracy describing our Yates Illuminates proposal as a holistic investment that will greatly benefit the Omaha community in so many ways including economically. Marque and others spoke about OPS having a history of being good stewards and good neighbors, this means more than you will ever know to neighborhood folks like me!

Following your vote, I was disappointed to see a few media take some unfair shots at the OPS Board. In my humble opinion, those outlets did not know or understand all the facts, especially the educational stipulation. Me and many other community members have received nothing but very positive support since the vote, from people all over the City!

Moving forward, the best thing we can do for you the OPS Board, Dr. Logan and OPS Administration, and Omaha is to execute our plan and make you proud of selling Yates to our Yates Illuminates and be a great OPS resource, partner and neighbor for generations to come!



Yates Illuminates MISSION

- “A coalition of organizations that work together to elevate and promote the lived experience of our diverse community. We curate a space that cultivates education, creative, and expressive opportunities for individuals to thrive”

Yates Illuminates! The former school and educational partnership will continue to serve Omahans.



Gifford Park Neighborhood Association
 PO Box 31462
 Omaha, NE 68131

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**Gifford Park Neighborhood Association
 Membership Application**

The GPNA membership year runs from January 1 to December 31.

Type of membership: ___ Single (\$10) ___ Family (\$15) ___ Business (\$25)
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Business Name (if applicable): _____
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Volunteer Opportunities! I'm interested in helping with...

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| <input type="checkbox"/> History | <input type="checkbox"/> Neighborhood Walks | <input type="checkbox"/> Soccer | |

Return completed form along with check or money order to:
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