

The Northside of Minneapolis: It's Not All Shootings and Drugs

July 31, 2012 by Allison Herrera



Click on the image of these Soul Train hopefuls to hear about FLOW

Northside communities have a bad rap. Media coverage of the area mostly happens when there is a shooting or a drug bust. I'm not trying to downplay the recent gun violence that claimed two young, innocent lives. While violence does happen everyday-all over Minneapolis, it's not the only thing going on in this historic neighborhood. One community asset was on display in full force recently-the arts.

Stretching from 2nd Ave North and down West Broadway to Penn Avenue, FLOW, the annual Northside Arts Crawl featured live music on a pedal-powered music stage, a lesson in urban planning at Juxtaposition Arts, dance classes and what might be the longest Soul Train boogy down on West Broadway.

There's been a lot of talk about the Northside of Minneapolis being the key developing the city of Minneapolis. A lot of residents will tell you that talk is cheap, while some firmly believe in the system.

"We're a community that's been dis-invested in for decades. The resources have been taken-the assets have been extrapolated and not necessarily put back in....So what we're trying to do is help people understand that as goes North Minneapolis-so goes the Twin Cities as a whole," says Juxtaposition Arts director DeAnna Cummings.

Juxtaposition Arts is just one example of economic revitalization that is sprouting through vacant lots and abandoned buildings-literally. Nearly 10 years ago, JXTA, as they are known rehabilitated an abandoned building on Emerson Avenue North to create a gallery and learning space for one of the city's largest concentration of young people. Today, they've done the same for two other buildings located on West Broadway.

During a recent state of the city address, Mayor RT Rybak discussed the possibility of putting street cars on West Broadway as a way to spur street traffic and new businesses. Some argue that LRT is a better way to go. Local architect and teacher at Juxtaposition Samuel Babatunde Ero-Phillips asked for community members input about the process. On a large chalkboard display outside Juxtaposition, people commented such things as, "Northside Needs It, Golden Valley Doesn't Want It", "Don't Turn Minneapolis into DC."

"I've basically put this up here to get input from the community. A highway is not the same as light rail and I think people understand that," says Babatunde Er-Phillips.

Community leaders also pointed out the Northside's entrepreneurial spirit. Such is the case with Osiris James and his group The Famous Boys who performed on the Pedal Powered Stage created by a local artist. He produces and records on his own record label. Osiris' mom Marcellina was on hand to sing his praises. As a long time Northside resident, she says FLOW is like the Harlem Renaissance.

"This in itself is like a renaissance for North Minneapolis," says Marcellina proudly as she watched her son sing away with a the local drum and dance corps.

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