

THE BEACON

YOUR VISION, YOUR VOICE

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Valerie Peavy and Jeff Harrison, Owners of The Office@Uptown

LIGHTHOUSE KEEPERS

Google The Office@Uptown and you'll find a perfect 5-star rating. That could be because of their famous Ooey-Goey Butter Cake. Or, maybe it is because of the entrees named after communities like the Scutterfield Club Salad, Bearwater Roast Beef, or the Smokey City Melt. These dishes served patrons the fondest nostalgia of the neighborhoods that raised them. But, most likely, the rating is a mixture of tasty food, a great location and unforgettable people.

Jeff Harrison calls it, "The Cheers Effect", "You can get food anywhere," says Jeff, "but, The Office@Uptown was that place where everybody knows your name." The news has likely traveled throughout Memphis that Jeff Harrison & Valerie Peavy have retired, and that the Office@Uptown, as Memphians know it, has closed.

That's hard for many to hear, but a close look at how the couple started the business will demonstrate how truly remarkable their story is.

In 2011, Valerie Peavy owned a tech business and Jeff was in construction. They were looking for office space near their home, "I didn't want to drive far," says Valerie, "my idea was to open something like a co-working space."

Valerie searched daily for commercial spaces in her community and finally discovered what would become The Office@Uptown. "It was an interesting space before we renovated it. There was a 6-foot chain length fence with barbed wire surrounding the building, broken sidewalks and open wiring wrapping from inside the building, connecting lights on the outside," said Jeff.



**"GOOD LEADERS
DON'T MAKE
FOLLOWERS, THEY
MAKE LEADERS."**

-Tom Peters





“WHEN YOU SEE A WINDOW OF OPPORTUNITY, DON'T CLOSE THE SHADE.”

-TOM PETERS

A neighborhood eatery was not in view! But, when Valerie’s son, who’d spent time in France frequenting neighborhood cafes, saw the space, he saw a restaurant. And, while Jeff had an affinity for cooking, he never envisioned himself as a chef of a top rated cafe in the city.

However, it didn’t take Jeff and Valerie long to feel the necessity to become more than an office space. There were very few food options in the neighborhood and who works without food, or coffee for that matter?

So, it was settled, The Office@Uptown would become a space for work, coffee, food and most notably, friendship. “I think any business that chooses to move to the neighborhood, needs to be a part of the neighborhood, respect the people in the neighborhood and seek not only what they can get, but what they can give.”

That is exactly what the couple has accomplished. Through their partnership with the CRA, they received a business grant to have a parking lot constructed on the property, but they have given so much more! They’ve brought awareness to the CRA Single Family Homes Rehab Program, giving homeowners the opportunity to apply for grant funds for the upkeep of their homes.

They’ve been a space for neighborhood meetings and planning, and they’ve advocated for the elderly in the community.

When Covid 19 struck the country, Valerie and Jeff decided it was time to make room for the next generation of leadership.

“We’ve set the space in place and people are accustomed to coming here to be with family, now all the new owner(s) have to do is build on what’s already here,” says Valerie.

The couple, who spent 10 years as faithful community stewards vs. opportunistic business owners, is hopeful for new, vibrant leadership full of ingenuity, vision and a love for Uptown and Memphis.

Valerie said, “I never saw myself retiring, but we realized, we can do this now and still be cheerleaders for the next owners.” Valerie and Jeff still plan to be strong voices in the community, actively engaged with the work of the CRA. This is all good news!

“This is our neighborhood, our home,” says Jeff, “I want to thank everyone for all of their support, we’ve been welcomed in the community. We are excited about the next phase and I just know it's going to be bigger.”



WHERE ENTREPRENEURSHIP, COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND OPPORTUNITY MEET



Bruce Quinn, Owner of Quinn Family Landscaping



The CRA recently started the Block Crew Initiative to help execute the work of the Block Wellness Program, addressing infrastructure repairs, organic overgrowth, blight remediation and the elimination of abandoned or unused structures. Block Crews consists of North Memphis non-profits and entrepreneurs that clear sidewalks of litter, trim overgrown grass along the public right of ways and remove debris from the gutters running along the sidewalks, which assists in the prevention of clogs in the city's storm water drainage system. These cleanings happen within the district once per month. Block Crews also maintain CRA vacant lots.

This month we are highlighting one of those crews, **Quinn Family Landscaping**, owned and led by Bruce Quinn. When Quinn started his business 7 years ago, he never imagined it would grow to serve an agency like the CRA.

"I prayed that my business would become more than just a mom and pop shop," said Quinn. In addition to his regular clientele, Quinn cleans 25 streets and another 27 vacant lots.

Quinn grew up on Leath Street

and moved back into the home where he was raised in 2020 after his mother passed. The home was built by Habitat for Humanity in 1994.

Quinn's work with the CRA started with a simple question to his neighbors, "How are you all getting all of these trees cut down?" A neighbor connected him with Kimani Shotwell, CRA Director of Community Building & Engagement. "I called Kimani to get work done on my own property, but when he found out I had a landscaping business, he gave me an opportunity." Kimani said, "Community development is pushed into hyper-drive when micro-community entrepreneurs are supported and economic growth opportunities are presented."

Quinn has had the opportunity to not only expand his business through his work with the CRA, but he has become an impactful role model and employer to the people in his own community. "If you only see people around you surviving by selling drugs or other illegal means, then you may think that's all there is for you. I get to tell and show young guys that there are so many more opportunities in life than what they may see."

Quinn is committed to ensuring the next generation has the resources, respect and reverence to take up the work he's doing. He says, "The CRA won't be here forever. I started my business to create generational wealth for my children's children."

Quinn has noticed less and less trash to pick up each month. He hopes that his company's consistent presence will begin to transform the culture of negligence that has existed over the last 15-20 years. Quinn says, "What I'm doing is more than a business, it's the foundation for a blueprint for the future."

Quinn Family Landscaping joining the CRA's Block Crew Initiative is a perfect representation of where entrepreneurship, community development, and opportunity meet!



HEADED IN THE RIGHT DIRECTION

Article by CRA Director of Community Vision & Planning, April Simmons

We are excited to share more about the long overdue park and trail development for North Memphis residents. **The North Memphis Greenline Connector and Park** will extend the city’s Chelsea Greenline ending in Washington Park. The trail will continue through a newly created park that will incorporate an art tunnel (curated by local artists, hopefully some artists from North Memphis), workout amenities, event lawn, new lighting, and a pedestrian bridge with a nature overlook.

This project was born out of our community plan. The community urged the consultant team to plan for recreational use beyond the existing facilities. It was a long shot considering the trail and park included acquiring an old railroad property. They rarely sell property, but when they did, we were first in line to acquire the land for the community’s vision. We performed virtual and in person engagement that included neighbors and stakeholders to flesh out the community’s vision for the park.



This month’s Man on Fire is Octavius Nickson, Co-Founder of Nickson General Contractors (along with Chris Hendrix) and a lifetime resident of Binghampton, the location of CRA’s new TIF District.

The CRA and Octavius have mutual interests in the redevelopment and longevity of Binghampton. “Much of the development would not be feasible if not for the CRA’s funding and support” says Octavius, “their presence in Binghampton means there is opportunity and value here.”

Octavius started NGC in 2015 with a focus on people more so than projects. In a city where African Americans make up more than 70% of the population, Octavius commented on how the longevity of

Binghampton depends on keeping people of color connected to redevelopment. “What good would it do to develop all these spaces and still have 40% of African Americans in the city under the poverty line?” said Octavius. “Redevelopment must include and connect everyone, not just as laborers, but also as attorneys, accountants and developers.”

Octavius believes that keeping Binghampton accessible to bus routes, investing in the local community center and a grocery store will put the community in a position to thrive for years to come, “We must merge higher income communities with lower income ones without displacement,” says Octavius. He believes that the CRA

The connector and park will be ideal for cyclists, pedestrians, families looking for a playground, readers or friends grabbing a beer at Grind City Brewery, located adjacent to the park. Many, if not all of these amenities are at Shelby Farms, so to bring these recreational elements to North Memphis is a pivotal moment.

There is a culture in Memphis to provide these amenities to people in certain tax brackets and have others travel to them. It is important to invest in our anchor neighborhoods’ infrastructure and recreation. There is no place in Memphis where you can enjoy all of these amenities in one space. I’m thrilled that the CRA can be a steward of bringing a social and environmental opportunity to North Memphis.



MAN ON FIRE OCTAVIUS NICKSON

has the leadership and plan to support and set Binghampton residents up for a successful future.

In just 6 years NGC has completed well over a dozen major building projects for entities like the Shelby County Health Department, City of Memphis, and Shelby Farms Conservatory to name a few.

In 2020, the CRA teamed up with Nickson to complete the patio, utilities and site improvements for the Grind City Brewery located in Bearwater. But for Octavius, the most important thing is creating opportunities for all Memphians, “I love Memphis,” Octavius said, “there is no place I’d rather be, but if we don’t provide opportunities for everyone, we will continue to lose our best and brightest.”