Northside Block Blitz in the Works

Residents and volunteers gathered at the Sunny Days thrift store in Highland Park on March 14, at 8 a.m. to begin stage one of the Northside Block Blitz. Staff from Virginia LISC, Storefront for Community Design, the Richmond Police Department and Boaz and Ruth worked alongside neighborhood residents and other volunteers to clean out Mr. Mike Simpson’s building, located at 3002 Meadowbridge Road. The building takes up an entire block, with Mr. Simpson using only one third of the building as a corner market.

“The block blitz strategy puts a new face on things and shows that work is being done and that movement is occurring,” said Ryan Rinn, the Executive Director of Storefront for Community Design, a design center that offers design and architecture planning resources to anyone in the Richmond metro area. The volunteers targeted Mr. Simpson’s building first due to its visibility and location on the corridor.
Better Housing Coalition and LISC: Partners for 25 Years

Virginia LISC is providing long-time housing partner, Better Housing Coalition with a construction loan for apartments along Cary Street.

The $2,317,040 loan, which includes participation by WoodForest National Bank as its first community development loan in the nation, will help finance rehabilitation construction on the Cary 2000 Apartments. The apartments are made up of 47 units split into two sections across from each other on Cary Street, near Meadow Street.

“The goal was to keep affordable housing in an area that has become an extremely high rent area,” said Jon Barrett, VP of Property Management at Better Housing Coalition.

The Cary 2000 Apartments are made up of the sites Cary I and Cary II, which were originally rehabilitated and constructed in the early 1990’s by Better Housing Coalition and supported by LISC.

Barrett said that the renovations will include energy efficient changes to the apartments. He also said that almost all of the residents plan to stay in the apartments and are excited about the changes.

“‘The area has become so trendy in the last 10 years and we want to make sure that our residents are able to grow with the area,” said Barrett.

John Bolton, the Virginia LISC Loan Officer said, “this project is important because it preserves one of the first investments by LISC in Richmond and demonstrates our long term commitment to our partners doing great work for the communities and residents we serve.”

Metzger Bar & Butchery, Restaurant of the Year in Style Weekly

Congratulations to our 2015 SEED winner, Metzger Bar and Butchery, on the recent Style Weekly award as Restaurant of the Year.

Owners Brad Hemp, Chef Brittany Anderson and Nathan Conway offer German cuisine in their restaurant, which is tucked away in Union Hill on 23rd Street. Anderson went to New York’s French Culinary Institute and worked as a chef in New York before returning home to Richmond to open her own restaurant.

They are using their SEED award to build a patio and purchase a walk-in cooler.

The 5th SEED round will begin on May 29, 2015. For those interested, the application will be posted on the Virginia LISC website www.virginialisc.org. Applications will be due the Friday before Labor Day, Friday, September 4, 2015. For any questions or for further information, contact John Bolton at 804.358.7602.
Northside Block Blitz Continued

“We started with Mike Simpson’s building because he has been one of the longest standing business owners in the community,” said Rinn. “His space, close to Six Points, is an iconic and beautiful building and his market is one of the most accessed by long term neighborhood residents."

The Block Blitz continued on Saturday, March 28, with volunteers scraping and beginning to paint Mr. Simpson’s building. Painting Mr. Simpson’s building was only one aspect of the blitz. Volunteers also went door-to-door to the businesses along the corridor installing door alarms for the business owners and asking the business owners to consider joining a merchant’s association.

“Being part of a merchant’s association has so many advantages,” explained Candice Streett, Executive Director of Virginia LISC. “Not only does it provide a way for the merchants on the corridor to share ideas and work compatibly, but it also opens up opportunities for the owners to participate in CARE funds, provided by the City,” she said.

CARE funding is a combination of loan and grant money provided by the city to merchants for safety improvements like surveillance cameras and exterior lighting. In order to qualify for CARE funding, a business must be part of a merchant’s association.

All of the business owners showed interest in the idea of a merchant’s association and some met for a meeting about starting an association on Tuesday, March 24.

The final part of the Block Blitz included general cleanup along the corridor.

Work has started, but there is more to do. There will be several more Block Blitz days coming up in the next few months.

“Highland Park’s best days are not behind it - they are coming, and with the engagement of merchants and residents alike, setting a vision and then carrying it out, this promise will be realized together--supporting current business owners first to set the stage for new business owners soon,” said Ryan Rinn.

LISC Financial Opportunity Centers Help Ex-Offenders Back on Track

LISC’s Financial Opportunity Centers were featured recently in The Wall Street Journal in an article about ex-convicts struggling with identity theft. The article explained the surging trend of identity theft in prison, making it that much harder for ex-convicts to get jobs once they are back out in the work force.

The article quoted a LISC spokeswoman, “The Local Initiatives Support Corp., which provided nearly 7,000 ex-offenders around the country with financial coaching and job training in 2014, found that more than 20% of prisoners had inconsistencies on their credit reports, a large portion of which were linked to identity theft.”

LISC FOCS help ex-offenders, who make up 30 percent of FOC clients, repair their credit scores, find jobs, gain financial stability and become part of their communities again.
Crews have begun clearing the lot where Stone Brewing Company will be located in Greater Fulton. What’s more, Stone Brewery personnel will be visiting Greater Fulton on April 27 and 28 to talk to residents about job opportunities that will be coming available. This visit is part of an ongoing collaboration between Stone Brewery, The Neighborhood Resource Center and Richmond’s Center for Workforce Innovation to make sure that neighborhood residents are kept in the loop about the 288 jobs that the brewery will create during the next several years.

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**YES, Virginia LISC is Celebrating 25 Years!**

*Featuring Keynote Speaker: Senator Tim Kaine*

**Date:** October 1, 2015  
**Time:** 5:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.  
**Location:** The Hippodrome  
**Address:** 528 N. 2nd Street, Richmond, VA 23219