INSIDE

Where the Nation eats
A vintage guitar bazaar
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CW Notes

Once the South Side's reining political dynasty, the fall of the House of Jackson has been swift. Adding insult to self-inflicted family injury last Thursday, Rahm Emanuel waved a meat-sliced digit in Sandi Jackson's general direction. For decades, Mayor Daley maintained that abruptly resigning Aldermen could essentially hand a seat off to whoever they wanted. Sandi Jackson, Alderman and wife of erstwhile Congressman Jesse Jackson Jr., recently resigned from City Council to tend to "very painful family matters." She was clear about one thing, though. "Mayor Rahm may say he wants to have interviews. The people he will interview will be the people I am suggesting," she said to supporters. The mayor didn't hold his peace for long. Referring to the system that installed Sandi Jackson in the first place as "negotiation at its unfinest," the Mayor said he wanted a decisive break with the past. Asked whether he would give any special weight to Jackson's input, Emanuel directed her to the city's online application system: "She has a computer with an Internet connection."

For $32 and hour, it's Business Time

Rather than collapsing into off-blue chairs swathed in leftover Cinnabon, Chicago's airline customers will soon have the option of purchasing an extended-stay 62 square-foot cube for $32 an hour. According to the sponsoring company, named Minute Suite, O'Hare will soon provide a "private oasis," permitting draining passengers to "relax, conduct business and even sleep in spacious private suites between flights." The scheme, in conjunction with other concessions, is set to raise $5.6 million annually for the city, but the plan is also raising eyebrows. Might such close quarters provok a rattle of Terminal testing, putting the 0 in back in O'Hare? "People don't pay for that. They don't even think about it. Honest to God, they don't," a representative of Minute Suite responded to a Sun-Times query. Meanwhile, the Mayor's Office also told the Sun-Times "We will work diligently in preventing illegal behavior." Apparently, votes aren't the only things Rahm can block.

Above the twitter noise

Although your only Twitter followers might be your mom and a slew of pornobots, somebody is reading your angry tirade against red line closures. A trio of researchers at Purdue University has developed a system of "sentiment analyists" that uses geo-tagged tweets to assess the satisfaction of public transit riders. The pilot city? Chicago. This month, after analyzing tweets from summer 2012, researcher Samual Hasan presented the team's findings at the annual Transportation Research Board conference in D.C. "The most interesting thing we found," he noted, "is that transit riders do not give any positive sentiment[s]... Unexpected? Or just another ride on the CIA... unansweringsuggestions.

Dazed and confused

When Chicago's City Council voted to decriminalize the possession of small amounts of marijuana last July—giving officers on the street the option to ticket, rather than arrest, for the possession of under 30 grams of cannabis—the city, fiscally speaking, looked to make a killing. Instead of paying to lock up small-time possessors, the government would be able to tap into the steady stream of income that pours from Chicago's long-standing love of Mary Jane. It sounded foolproof to city council, which approved it 42 to three. While arrests for pot possession have dropped precipitously, WBEZ reports that the corresponding uptick in ticket money has failed to materialize. The law was riddled with exceptions. Getting caught possessing weed in a park, school, or beach, or smoking it anywhere, all still require arrest. Politicians' claims that the law as written would net lawmakers an extra seven million bucks a year and allow the police to refocus on violence have been exposed as hot air; in six months the tickets have pulled in a measly $98,000 and Chicago's murder rate continues to climb. Setting the larger pot politics aside, looks like the city could've spent some time hashing out the details.

Community R.A.G.E.

Lights spill out of Ogden Park's lone field house into the barely-lit parking lot in Englewood. "There's a lot of great people who grew up here, everyone says 'I learned to swim here!'" says local resident Jeanette Foreman, looking out into the dark. But Ogden Park, a multi-purpose indoor and outdoor sporting facility, is not exempt from the many problems that plague the Englewood area, problems that range from a high turnover in residents to a murder rate receiving global attention. "Ogden Park has an image problem," says Oak Summers, another resident. "You don't really hear about the positive things, only the negatives. We just want to give the residents' perspective." adds Asiya Butler, co-founder and Interim President of R.A.G.E., the Resident Association of Greater Englewood. On a shoestring annual budget, the community activist group pursues resident-driven initiatives in education and economic development. "We try to look at Englewood as having assets not deficits, and to use those to do things that are impactful in the community," says Butler. "Our members have social media skills, web design skills, and they're pushing R.A.G.E. to another level."

On the docket at the Ogden Park meeting was the Green Healthy Neighborhood Land Use Plan, a comprehensive project led by the City of Chicago's Department of Housing and Economic Development. The plan seeks to address the issues of declining population, food security, green space, and historic preservations. "R.A.G.E. has been involved since the beginning. At the community meetings, lots of stuff was going over the residents' heads, so we did some training that can really help us understand the lay of the land," says Butler. "We really needed more detailed information about urban planning and zoning, so we brought 10 or so residents together with CMAP [Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning] to understand the plan, how to participate, and what needs to change.

Much of the plan focuses on finding uses for the existing vacant lots which pepper the Englewood streetscape. One of the major initiatives will allow residents to buy neighboring vacant land from the city. Those residents will then assume responsibility for its upkeep, but without being saddled with steep tax hikes. Larger parcels can be converted to parks or community gardens, and there are plans for a walking track along the former Englewood El Line. The hope is to provide residents with access to green spaces and to spur local investments. As the project continues to move forward, R.A.G.E intends to be right there with it. Says Butler, "What [we] wanted to do is make sure that we were involved in discussions at the beginning, in the middle, and in the end." (Taro Matsuno)

The experimental grocer

Grand Crossing is parched. However, an oasis stands among dilapidated businesses and a motel that still proudly proclaims color TV. Louis' Groceries is ready to flood the sprawling South Side food desert with health food, washing urban food problems away one purchase at a time.

Louis' Groceries has three main goals in its project to irrigate Chicago's largest food desert. As a non-profit, these aims are the bread and butter of Louis' existence. The first in the trinity is to provide the community with fresh fruits and vegetables; the second to search for a viable and sustainable business model for a local grocery store; and the third to study economic incentives that may be effective in changing people's purchasing and eating habits.

Teri Zhu is the program director of Louis' Groceries. She wears a "Louis' Groceries" apron and stands proudly behind a stainless steel kitchen counter. The low, thundering hum of industrial refrigerators surrounds the combination demo kitchen, classroom, and community center that aims to change how people think about food.

"The problem with food desert initiatives is that they're supply-focused. The idea is that 'Oh, just need to bring fresh foods and vegetables into this area and people will just start eating stuff overnight.' It's really not the case," says Zhu.

Partnered with the UofC and University of Wisconsin-Madison researchers, the non-profit investigates different methods of incentivizing healthy food choices. Depending on the day, 50-75% of sales come from food stamp purchases, an indicator of the lower income patrons who inhabit this portion of the South Side. One of Louis' first economic experiments is a simple side-by-side comparison of consumer options. The first step into the compact space confronts patrons with a Coca-Cola machine and a rack of Frito-Lay chips standing across from an abundance of bunched vegetables and an assortment of fruit.

The basic idea is of choice...the consumer has full access to everything. And through whatever incentives, we want you to choose the healthier items. It's not about taking away junk food, it's about encouraging people to make healthy choices," says Zhu.

Louis' Groceries intends to change the game of food desert policy. With some time, the grocery hopes that the data collected from a growing base of customers and economic experiments will shift the approaches to a more efficient and permanent solutions. For now, an apple a day will suffice. (Jason Huang)
Solo Stuff

The South Side's vintage guitar outpost
by Osita Nwanevu

IT'S A STRANGE THING TO STAND IN A room full of instruments without music. Thankfully, near closing time at 312 Vintage Guitars in Bridgeport, two inquisitive girls stroll in, shuddering from the cold, and ask if they can try out an acoustic sitting on a stand near the door.

"Feel free," owner Robert Dain, a Chicago native, says warmly. His voice carries a bit in the humble but brightly lit room. Moments later, one of the girls starts strumming. The music fills and completes the space.

"It's amazing to come into work every day," Dain tells me with a youthful, broad "aw-shucks" smile. "I'm giddy as a kid. You'll see me skipping down the street to work because I get to come to this everyday."

I didn't witness any skipping firsthand during my time at 312, but it's easy to imagine he really does. He gives off all the positive energy one might expect from a kid who owns and operates his own candy store. And 312 is a candy store of sorts—gumball red, licorice black, and lemon-drop yellow are among the many colors that shade the dozens of guitars on the store's walls.

312, though open for just over a month, is a place that has existed in the heart and mind of Dain for years. His introduction to guitars as a teen and classic rockfan at Carl Sandburg High School was typical enough: a friend played, sparked a bit of adolescent envy, and led to him picking up a Fender Squier Stratocaster—the first guitar of many favorite pieces. Over the years of exchanges and conversations with fellow guitarists, Dain recognized early on that his relationship with the guitar extended beyond just playing and performing.

"I just kind of had a vision all along of what I wanted to do and I just loved music—and even if I couldn't be a rock star or go out professionally or be a studio musician, I wanted to be involved with guitars and equipment. It's always just been a passion of mine."

Having spent half a lifetime as a walking, talking local guitar shop, Dain started putting together plans to open 312 about three or four years ago. He was partly inspired by Player's Guitars, a small shop on 95th Street he'd visit when he was younger. For Dain, Player's was more than a model for how a shop of 312's size could work as a community by bringing together people—young and old—a community by bringing together people—young and old—animated by a common passion.

At 312, beginners can come in for lessons, to get a string replaced for free, or for advice on what kind of gear best suits their desired "tone," that elusive personal sound many electric guitarists spend years trying to perfect. Old hands and collectors can browse the walls for some of Dain's rarer pieces. There is something for everyone—Dain even keeps snare drums and keyboards in stock. It is this mix of accessibility and expertise that makes 312 an inviting space, built with an understanding that the relationships between a guitarist and his guitar—and between that guitar and the musician's chosen music—are highly personal.

It's a well-soundtracked story, a story in which the proprietor of a guitar shop can be a peripheral character or a major figure: perhaps a mentor or a friend. As such, Dain is a big fan of that guitar there," he says, indicating a shiny guitar up on the wall with a gradient of red-to-yellow wood grain. "That's a '66 Gibson all-original ES-125 TD. The 1 stands for thinline, the C stands for cutaway, so easier access to the higher frets. Original P90, which just grows and howls when you put a little overdrive or distortion behind it and it sounds like B.B. and it sounds like Howlin' Wolf, you know...."

Dain, like many local musicians, had long been frustrated by the paucity of shops catering to guitarists in the area.

"It just blew my mind how—Pilsen, McKinley Park, Hyde Park, Canaryville, South Loop—there are no guitar stores—or music stores, period," he says. "If you want to go get a pack of strings or a set of picks or something simple, you know? Unfortunately somebody decided along the way that the South Side shouldn't have any music stores."

Ultimately, he feels major chains should der a lot of the blame. "A lot of the big-box stores have made it hard for small businesses—obviously—to compete. You have Guitar Center and Sam Ash which cater to high volume and lower prices but...the service and quality of vintage instruments and selection is just not there."

After a while the strumming stops. One of the girls has her eyes on an acoustic up on the wall. "Is it cool if she takes one of these down and tries it out?" her companion asks.

"Yeah, feel free!" Dain repeats. "And if you need a tuner, just shout."

Soon enough, the strumming starts up again and Dain smiles throughout—delighted, at perhaps not merely the prospect of a new sale, but at the sound of the music he's brought to an underserved community. 

JANUARY 24 2013 | CHICAGO WEEKLY
BILLED BY FOUNDER LOUIS FARRAKHAN (ACCOMP LISHED violinist and leader of the syncretic movement the Nation of Islam) as “The Palace of the People,” Salaam Restaurant—with its smoky black windows, per -oxide-white walls, and artfully carved edifice—is pretty hard to miss. First opened in 1995 to cater to the South Side’s Halal-observing Nation of Islam members, the restau rant promised to promote community building and eco -nomic rejuvenation across a swath of largely neglected neighborhoods on the South Side. “We place this in the heart of the quota-uno-phone ‘ghetto’ to say to black peo -ple, ‘We love you and you are worth every dime we in vest in you,’” Farrakhan promised at the restaurant’s grand opening. In 2000, however, after barely five years in busi -ness, Salaam closed its doors to the public for reasons undisclosed. It’s impossible to know if Farrakhan’s con -troversial personal views—his alleged anti-Semitism and homophobia, and his incendiary stances on various foreign policy issues—may have somehow contributed to the closure of the establishment. Salaam’s reputation as “a Nation of Islam restaurant,” where clientele unas -wel come, may have also played a role. Such a notion was rejected by Farrakhan, who at the 1995 opening affirmed that “that star and that crescent says that all of the world and its people are welcome in this estab -lishment and all will be treated with the highest digni -ty and quality.” Others, like server Latavia Brown, believe that the marginalized market that Salaam found itself catering to—strictly observant Muslims and mem -bers of the Nation of Islam—meant that on the whole, the venture simply was not profitable enough. “They were losing money,” she ruminated. “It just didn’t make sense to keep it going.” Twelve years can make a world of a difference, though. In a move spearheaded by former club owner Calvin Hollis and Farrakhan himself, Salaam opened its doors to the South Side once again, responding to an overwhelm ing demand for a return. “We built the Salaam restaurant with steel and concrete; that’s why we could close it for twelve years and come back and find it still here! Because brothers and sisters: For you, there is nothing too good!” proclaimed Farrakhan at the restaurant’s invitation-only opening reception. Despite the restoration work, the dining room is gloomily lit and eerily isolated at lunchtime, so I decide to sit in the restaurant’s more intimate Crescent Cafe. Service is excellent, and my waiter recommends I try the classic whitefish sandwich, a side of fries and coleslaw, and Salaam’s special navy bean pie. My food arrives reasonably quickly and looks, rather unnervingly, exactly as it is pictured on the menu. The sandwich, despite its immaculate construc -tion, falls well short of its glowing reputation: the fish itself is crisp and flaky, but bland; the vegetables (thickly chopped onions, tomatoes, and lettuce) are dry and fail to complement the fish in any conceivable way or form; and the only semi-solid accompaniment comes in the form of three deflated packets of patty tartar sauce. The bun, however, is a completely different story. Occupying the much-needed territory between bun and baguette, the soft, slightly sweet bread is nothing short of phenomenal. Farrakhan himself speaks highly of it, referring to it as “your daily bread: fresh-baked bread made of the finest ingredients!” A great number of these “finest ingredients” have been locally sourced from farmers and butchers on the South Side. Like the bread, the sweet navy bean pie also deserves special praise. With its crisp well-structured crust contrasting wonderfully with the soft, doughy filling, the pie defi -nitely takes the cake. It is hard, of course, to separate the politics from the food, and while Farrakhan has repeatedly attempt -ed to refute charges of homophobia and anti-Semitism, critics of the Nation of Islam and its leader remain vocal. As a restaurant, however, Salaam—which means “peace” in Arabic—has largely lived up to Farrakhan’s 1995 assertion of openness. The regulars are mostly Halal-observing, and “Assalamu alaykum” (“Peace be upon you”) is a frequent greeting. But the atmosphere is friendly and inclusive, and there is the hope that despite any political or religious differences, the food is something to be shared—and enjoyed—by all.

A Return

by Arman Sayani

Salaam Restaurant, 706 W. 79th St. (773)324-6005. facebook.com/SalaamRestaurant
call it greasy. That's pork fat on your fingers, in all of its tantalizing glory. The rest of the sandwich isn't half bad, either: the spinach withs nicely nestled in with the warm bacon, and the flavorful aioli provides a welcome creamy touch. The whole thing is one very tasty mess, but it's a mess that brings nobility to the BLT genre.

The other sandwich mainstay is the apple-wood-smoked pulled pork. It's almost as messy and stuffed—and arguably just as tasty—as the BLT. Pickled red onions bring a touch of bitterness, homemade barbecue sauce a sweetness that befits pulled pork. Schultz also offers a different special sandwich every day—Sicilian sausage the day I tried it. The sausage came as the lavish hunk, and each bite offered a mouthful of tender, zesty meat. But the peppers and onions managed only a quiet presence, and they failed to produce the balance of flavors that made the other two sandwiches so satisfying. It didn't help that this particular bun was cold and hard, formidable to chew. After taking a first bite, I left the larger bottom half alone.

To accompany the sandwiches, Schultz offers sides of macaroni and cheese and root beer baked beans. The beans come cooked with bacon, but the flavor is surprisingly hard to dismiss. They yielded all of its tantalizing glory. The rest of the sandwich isn't half bad, either: the spinach withs nicely nestled in with the warm bacon, and the flavorful aioli provides a welcome creamy touch. The whole thing is one very tasty mess, but it's a mess that brings nobility to the BLT genre.

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The Future of Woodlawn’s Housing

by Patrick Leow

It’s an irresistible, seductive vision of Woodlawn’s future—a neighborhood reinventing itself anew as a place safe, immaculate, comfortable, and nothing like it was for the past couple of decades. No longer will neighborhood meetings be dominated by heated arguments over how to stem depopulation, crime, and failing schools. The community’s elders will not need to yearn for the days when 63rd Street had shops all the way down to the lake, when the Green Line ran all the way to Jackson Park; days when the Woodlawn Organization heroically beat back the University’s southward encroachment or when children could grow up in a neighborhood that wasn’t filled with vacant lots.

Giving a future to an entire neighborhood is a tall order for any edifice, let alone a couple of mid-sized apartments, but this particular version of housing has reignited passions while also polarizing a community. One camp among them sincerely believes that the heart of Woodlawn is permanently changed for the better because of these apartments, while the other wants nothing more than to see all this supposed progress shut down.

On a clear Friday morning, Bill Eager, the Chicago director of the Preservation of Affordable Housing (POAH), invites me into his car for a tour of the neighborhood. Eager is the mild-mannered public face and the Chicago leader of a national organization that is responsible for a radical overhaul of a cherished stretch of the neighborhood. Under his
guidance, a three block area starting from the furthest western reaches of the Midway Plaisance southward to the commercial heart of Woodlawn at the 63rd and Cottage Grove Green Line stop will become the poster child of a new kind of subsidized housing. Middle-aged, white, and with a nervous energy that came alive when he pointed out a crumbling building at he saw potential in, he was my gateway through the looking glass and into a world where Woodlawn was a neighborhood that could hope once again.

Pulling away from the pavement and onto Cottage Grove Ave., it seems nearly impossible not to fail for the changes he has wrought as a master builder working in minature. On one side of the street are the pastel orange and dark red exteriors, new playgrounds, the sprawling spaces perfect for a toddler’s birthday party, pristine laundry rooms, and card-controlled security systems of POAH’s Woodlawn Center South apartments. First opened in 2011, the 67-unit complex was only the first phase of a great change in the way residential Woodlawn is going to be, as POAH embarks on residential redevelop-

ment that Eager hopes will “change the face of Cottage Grove”.

Headquartered in Boston, POAH was tasked in 2008 with taking charge of the fail-
ing Grove Parc complex along Cottage Grove, demolishing it and building in its place the forward-looking structure that stands there today. Up next for them is Woodlawn Center North, a construction site currently festooned with scaffolding touting the stringent envi-

ronmental standards obeyed by this particular crew, each recycling sign and LEED banner a reminder of their impeccable green creden-
tials. Tentatively slated to open in September 2013, Woodlawn Center North is designed to closely resemble its cousin a block south. It is also a part of the Choice Neighborhoods ini-
tiative, a federal program which has the express intention of making depressed areas like Woodlawn an attractive place to live. Before that happens, though, POAH will first have to deal with the last lingering reminders of the past.

Currently, the remnants of Grove Parc lie just across the street on 62nd and Cottage Grove, but it now looks so different next to these modern visions of subsidized housing that it might as well be in a completely differ-

ent world. Shabby and brown, faded signs out front state the now defunct number of the housing manager’s office, a parking lot of cracked-up tar. These portions of Grove Parc that have thus far been spared the dodge-
hammer have seen better days. It was once an architectural behemoth that housed upwards of a thousand people, dominating this stretch of Cottage Grove for the better part of three decades. In the mid-2000s, Grove Parc was threatened with foreclosure by the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) thanks to years of physi-

cal and financial neglect.

All that remains of it now are about five squat buildings, each completely anachronis-
tic next to its modern neighbor. In the light of day, its dirty walls seem like the last vesti-
ges of a poverty-stricken past, its dark cor-

ners where many hid unsighted from the busy main thoroughfare the last redundant of sense-

less crime and violence. Few tears will be shed, one expects, when Grove Parc finally meets its end later this year.

Yet, not everyone sees it this way, and there are significant pockets of opposition to POAH’s intervention in the community. A dis-

parate group of homeowners and residents who describe this construction as an imposi-
tion on the way their neighborhood is run lacks a coherent leadership, but is still no less vocal in their desire to see the end of subsi-
dized housing in the neighborhood. A laundry list of complaints about POAH crop up time and again when talking to this politically-

connected group of residents, a good propor-
tion of whom work in white-collar occupa-
tions and comprise a middle class that anyone lacking nuance may be surprised to find in Woodlawn.

A local resident who best embodies these criticisms, Corey Howard, is especially vehe-

ment in his desire to see POAH’s development of the Cottage Grove corridor halted. A man of strong libertarian leanings, he decries the huge amount of Section 8 housing in Woodlawn: “There’s just too much multi-fami-

ly housing—what we need are people with a steady income and a job in this neighbor-

hood.” Reliable figures are impossible to come by—he states that 54% of Woodlawn resi-
dents live in subsidized housing, while James Poole, another statesman of the community, approximates it at closer to 25%.

Regardless, the broad consensus is that this proportion is far too high, and that the great preponderance of the poor and jobless in Woodlawn is holding the neighborhood back. How were they meant to solve the intractable problems of crime and poor eco-

nomic prospects if organizations like POAH built more housing that catered to those that needed vouchers? To Howard, Bill Eager and his organization are doing little more than concentrating poverty: “He won’t create a utopia, he’ll create a housing project. If you think you’re building a utopia, why aren’t you moving your families to this neighborhood?”

This doesn’t necessarily constitute a great gulf between POAH on the one hand and these homeowners on the other, though. Even Bill Eager and POAH go to pains to point out that their organization had no intention of expanding the amount of Section 8 recipients, with the number of voucher recipients allowed capped at a level that was already living in Grove Parc before the process of its demoli-

tion began in 2008. Built into his objection to Howard’s characterization of his organiza-
tion’s efforts was an insistence that they did intend to increase the level of homeownership in the neighborhood. To that end, all of
Woodlawn Center is designed to be a "healthy" mix of subsidized and market-rate tenants, and POAH is also actively buying up individual distressed properties, rehabilitating them and selling them off to reliable home-owners.

Conspicuously missing in these arguments, however, is any sense of a deeper concern about where those least able to absorb the shocks to the housing system would go if the pool of housing available to Section 8 recipients was tightly capped, or even allowed to further dwindle. The stock of housing currently available to voucher holders is approximately 70 percent of what it was in 2000, and this broad agreement that increasing the number of Section 8 homes would represent an unambiguous negative for the neighborhood is not a good portent for those who would want to see the introduction of more affordable housing in Woodlawn.

In Cook County, the 2013 income limit to qualify for the most extensive Section 8 assistance for a four-person family is $36,800. In Woodlawn, the median household income currently stands at $27,413, and with that in mind it seems unsurprising that there should be so many residents who should rely on external assistance to keep a roof over their head. Considering these figures, it will take a huge increase in the neighborhood and even more development before subsidized housing is to disappear for good.

Opposition to this new development isn’t purely financial, of course, and present too is a sentimental attachment to the way Woodlawn once was, memories of the past that inform a rejection of the promises of offer by organizations like POAH. James Poole is a lifelong resident of Woodlawn, a self-termed citywide activist and a man with a seemingly endless supply of stories of the neighborhood. He lived in Grove Parc as a teenager in the 1980s, back when it was still called Woodlawn Gardens. As he remembers it, though, 30 years and a couple of name changes haven’t actually changed a great deal in the way these buildings looked.

Walking outside of his now vacant old apartment at the corner of 61st and Evans, he tells me that it looks just about the same as when a fire forced his family out of the complex in the early 40s. What has changed is the amount of people currently living on the block—once a hotbed of action, families and no hint of vacancies, today this old apartment of his is boarded up with plywood, and he doesn’t think anyone’s lived there for a while. This is hardly an isolated phenomenon. Pointing to an empty building next door, now with doors boarded up and long abandoned, he helpfully remembers the halcyon days of his childhood: “This right here used to be the community center. We used to come down here every day after school, all us kids in the neighborhood.”

He remembers too the sporting life, when Grove Parc used to be a haven for families and when it was a good place for children to grow up. Way back when, kids living in Grove Parc and the housing projects that dotted Woodlawn and Chatham participated in the Champlain Street Hockey League. “I knew all the kids. We had a neighborhood baseball team, we had a neighborhood street hockey league. I used to play for Champlain, and we’d play the 220s from the projects down at 63rd and Prairie.”

He continues to reminisce. “Back then, we had no vacant lots, and it was a real neighborhood. People knew each other, everyone went to the same grammar school over at [Austin J.] Sexton, everyone grew up together. They kept down gang activity, we broke bread together. Nearly all the stores were black-owned. This was maybe in 1980, when Woodlawn was at its peak. I was 20, and it really was a huge difference to what it is now.”

Later in the day, there’s a trip in his car, too, and it could scarcely have been more different to the one taken with Bill Eager just two days earlier. There’s an uncanny mirroring at work. Just as the man in charge of POAH was given to optimism about the neighborhood, excitedly pointing out a “gorgeous building” close to 62nd and Eberhart with stone exterior, ornate columns, immaculate carving above the door, and making a mental note to buy it, rehabilitate it and sell it out, Poole is moved to point out a rotten and shuttered street corner on the very same block. “You know, right there was McGowan’s bar. He provided jukeboxes and video game machines for the whole Chicagoland area.”

Half an hour in his car means being treated to an incessant list of businesses, mostly black-owned, that once were but are no more. The array was bewildering—a Church’s Chicken, the neighborhood’s biggest hardware store on a vacant lot with nothing more than weeds and an old hollowed-out couch today, a big Democratic office right across the street. An army surplus store, multiple instances of “I knew that guy who owned that building over there.” As we drive by deserted block after deserted block, past a huge house of operatic scale that collapsed earlier in the week into a mess of beams and shattered windows, it requires serious mental gymnastics to see these streets the way Poole does. He remembers how Woodlawn really was a place to be, but that neighborhood has now long vanished and he wistfully admits that he thinks it’s never coming back again.

He’s probably right. If POAH and Bill Eager have their way and carry out the grand plans they have for West Woodlawn, the neighborhood of James Poole and others old enough to remember Woodlawn in the 1980s will likely forever be lost. POAH has set its sights beyond merely building affordable housing, and potentially in the works is a hotel at 61st and Cottage Grove. Designed to serve visitors to the hospital, eager parents of University students, and academic luminaries here for a conference or a talk, it would go a long way in turning the gaze of this stretch of Cottage Grove northward, further bringing it into the orbit of Hyde Park and the University. Even if this particular idea doesn’t come to fruition, it’s hard to see how POAH doesn’t become the dominant player in this stretch of Woodlawn thanks to the great organizational impetus pushing them forward. With support coming from HUD Secretary Shaun Donovan, Mayor Emanuel and Ald. Willie Cochran, these men will have to hope that POAH’s great hopes for Woodlawn truly do revitalize the community.

Yet, no matter how strenuously each side tries to make good on their desire to change Woodlawn in a specific way, it will likely prove impossible to micromanage something as formless as a neighborhood. Corey Howard isn’t going to realize his dream of Woodlawn as a homeowner’s paradise, James Poole isn’t going to excavate the neighborhood of his youth from a buried time capsule, and even a corporation like POAH cannot impose its will on a street, set down housing, retail stores, a hotel, and in one fell swoop change the fortunes of a neighborhood for the better. It won’t be for a lack of trying that each of their ideal Woodlawns will never exist, but with more than 20,000 souls tightly packed into a neighborhood huddled by a great lake, the strength of each individual desire to mold their homes, their streets and their little slices of the world in a way that is just right for them will mean that Woodlawn, like any neighborhood, will prove impervious to being packaged by a single agenda.
Space Jam
ACRE artists address issues of space and possibility
by Alexandra Garfinkle

AT NIGHT, PILSEN IS BATHED IN A KIND OF URBAN YELLOW. THE LIGHT SLIDES OVER BUILDINGS, all either half-lit or dark. What makes Rosauboxen Exhibitions striking, then, are the red letters hanging in the window: “GOOD IV.” They read, in a font vaguely reminiscent of prison blocks. The venue opened an exhibition on Sunday called “Potentialities,” which showcases two performance-oriented artists—Milcah Bassel and Teruko Nimura—affiliated with Artists’ Cooperative Residency and Exhibitions (ACRE), an artist’s residency program based in rural Wisconsin.

The theme of the exhibition—possibilities—is tied to the venue itself. When Bassel conceived of the exhibition, she took Rosauboxen into account, even drawing on its former function as a funeral home. In particular, “Intimate Boundaries” utilized what is referred to as the “Coffin Chute,” a hallway that descends into a basement-like room from which coffins were ostensibly lifted before funerals. “Intimate Boundaries” situated spandex sheets of cloth along the hallway that visitors were encouraged to walk through; the spandex was blue on the descent and brown on the ascent. Bassel filmed visitors as they reached the bottom of the hallway, interacting with them as the camera rolled.

“The cloth is meant to split one space into two, with the possibility of a third,” Bassel said. “The body is the third, really. The spandex recalls clothing, skin.”

Bassel’s other piece, “Reconfigurations,” consisted of 100 photographs arranged in a rectangle on the wall, each held up with four thumbtacks. A woman dressed in black positioned her body in a variety of inventive ways within a similarly rectangular box. What is most surprising is that it is unclear which side of the box is the top and which is the bottom; the viewer is forced to question his or her sense of direction, particularly when the woman is positioned so she appears to be lying on the ceiling of the box. The work emphasizes possibilities in a limited space. “I love that an image can reorient and disorient us, making us question gravity, even,” Bassel said.

While Bassel’s work is focused on confined space, Nimura’s deals with open space. A series of photographs taken during her summer residency at ACRE line the walls of Rosauboxen, directly across the gallery from Bassel’s “Reconfigurations.” Nimura’s photographs, entitled “Ceremony at ACRE,” depict what appears to be a succession of rituals, involving, for instance, a large group sitting in a circle. The physical configuration of the gallery meant that the community evident in Nimura’s photographs was juxtaposed with Bassel’s lone woman in black. There’s also a vastness to nature that is addressed in Nimura’s photographs, a vastness that seems worlds away from the confines of Bassel’s boxed woman.

This theme carries over into Teruko Nimura’s primary work: a series of twelve wax hummingbirds ascending into pale yellow origami limbs, hung on the walls and the ceiling with yellow string. The limbs were predominantly made not by Nimura but by middle school students, whom she taught through a series of workshops. The hummingbirds are arranged so that they appear to rise to the ceiling and almost (though not quite) touch the origami lilies. “It’s really about the moment before contact, about what can happen in that space, good or bad,” Nimura said. “I had events where children made the lilies and we talked about origami lilies that results.”

The emphasis on community carried over into the evening as well. A table, small and white, and covered in translucent origami paper stood in the back corner of the gallery, where Nimura taught guests to make the same lilies that hung from the ceiling. She then collected them to utilize in her next installation, generating that same energy that comes from collaboration.

The sheer size of the works on display—the hummingbirds occupied much of the main gallery, and visitors were encouraged to walk through the “Coffin Chute”—forced viewers to contend with issues of space; the art is unavoidable and, by extension, viewers are forced to reckon with and react to the work, thereby engaging with the themes. “The physical size of the pieces is important,” curator Brian Gallagher said. “You have to really be in it.”

Rosauboxen Exhibitions, 2130 W. 21st St. Open Hours Saturday January 26, 12-3pm, Through February 1. Hours by appointment through roxboboxen.minicastle@gmail.com. Free.

Graffiti Graduates
Former graffiti artists branch out
by Spencer Mcavoy

Graffiti Writing is by Nature Eye-Catching, Designed to Capture the Pickle’s atten- tion of the passersby. “Has Beens & Wannabes” at the Zhou B. Arts Center certainly bears the imprint of this heritage. The show, curated by Mario Gonzalez Jr., brings together 21 Chicagoland artists with backgrounds in graffiti writing and the street art movement of the 80s and 90s.

Asked about the title of the exhibit, Gonzalez said, “Well, it’s very simple. We’re used to being graffiti writers, and now we’re artists, painters, sculptors, directors, producers, musicians, carpenters,” the list went on, and Gonzalez grew visibly excited each time he found another example of the diverse forms and media present. Though the opening of his own show, “Style Bombing,” was occurring simultaneously in an adjacent gallery, Gonzalez seemed just as enthused by the achievements of the other artists, some of whom he’s known since high school.

The ongoing exhibition features a limestone statuette, a colorful Styrofoam couch hanging at a 45 degree angle from the wall, an unsettling goblin-like creature in multiple layers of wood and bright acrylics, and an installation that includes an old photograph of an American soldier, a twenty-dollar bill folded to read “Fits of America,” and a larger than life image of a woman in a bikini with a skull for a face under the words “Drug King.” To her left, in a tiny pencil scrawl a bathroom stall graffiti, someone had written “Jenny” followed by a phone number. Below, in pen, was the word “here” with an arrow looping up to Jenny. In the front room, a short film cycled through clips of two women dancing in short-shorts, a young boy struggling to build a fort in the snow, and skateboarders ollieing unsettling numbers of stairs, all overlaid with pulsing static and an electronic chirping noise.

Artist Tyrone Whiteside’s ethereal, swirling pieces in marker and spray paint on poster board capture the energy of tagging tempered by the elegance of calligraphy. Whiteside was ebullient on the subject of the place of graffiti writing in art, and sees a clear connection between the form and the “information age,” as the presence of writing within allows his art to “have a direct message rather than a cryptic one.” Although he admits that “some people say they lose the feel for it [their art] when they start to work on canvas in a studio,” Whiteside was grateful for the opportunity to expand his work into different media and environ- ments.

On the other hand, self-described abstract painter Victor Lopez marks a clear division between graffiti writing and the work he does now. “Graffiti writing and art,” he said, “they’re totally different things.” Still, though he now works in acrylic on canvas, his paintings are at least part of graffiti’s extended family. He described what he does now as “mark making.” There’s an urgency in the way the colorful markings twist and wrap around one another, and Lopez admits that his paintings come from “the same urges” as his tagging and graffiti writing.

Asked why he ultimately moved towards more traditional tools, Felix Maludano—the man responsible for two prominent portraits of fellow artists “Trixer” (Whitefield) and “Denz,” the largest and most striking pieces in the room—has a simple answer. “I’m forty-two years old,” he said. “Graffiti is a good thing, but I think as an artist you need to graduate from it. That’s how I think of graffiti: it’s a school of thought that I graduated from.”

Now, Maludano is focused on telling the history of graffiti. “I’m trying to document the lives of graffiti artists. I’m trying to teach a history lesson.” Maludano uses what he describes as “splatters and strokes” in vibrant spray enamel on canvas to capture the “aura” of the artists he’s painting. “I’m like, ‘Sorry, man, you’ve got green skin,’” he says of the portrait of Whitefield. “That’s just how I see you.”
Bombed Style
33 Contemporary displays the art of the tag by Meaghan Murphy

In his show "Style Bombing," Gonzalez brings that artistry to the gallery, expertly walking the line between fine art and street art. "Style Bombing" plays with texture and color over objects. In his show "Style Bombing," Gonzalez brings that artistry to the gallery, expertly walking the line between fine art and street art. "Style Bombing" plays with texture and color over objects. Gonzalez is clear on one point of style. He is as graffiti as they come. Gonzalez is clear on one point of style. He is as graffiti as they come. Gonzalez is clear on one point of style. He is as graffiti as they come. Gonzalez is clear on one point of style. He is as graffiti as they come. Gonzalez is clear on one point of style. He is as graffiti as they come. Gonzalez is clear on one point of style. He is as graffiti as they come.

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"You can't have any of this without the tag," Gonzalez says. And he means it. It's a tag like a stamp—not of intellectual property, but of identity. I created this. This is mine. But it's hard to tell if his works are tags or paintings). Yet his pieces are not simply reproductions of each other, but frequently artistic experiments that utilize paint over paint, visible from paint roller to paper, work. His pieces are not simply reproductions of each other, but frequently artistic experiments that utilize paint over paint, visible from paint roller to paper, work. His pieces are not simply reproductions of each other, but frequently artistic experiments that utilize paint over paint, visible from paint roller to paper, work. His pieces are not simply reproductions of each other, but frequently artistic experiments that utilize paint over paint, visible from paint roller to paper, work. 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Within weeks of the rampage on that July night, he said, mentions of the shooting disappeared from the city’s political debate, nor is the art cramming cynicism down your throat. "We look at cities like Chicago and New York that have a majority of minorities in it right away? We look at the city’s reputation seems unchanged—do we take pride in the fact that the weapons that appear daily on our streets serve as a “real-life” research tool for a country 7,000 miles away? (Zachary Goldhammer)

Larry Ward and the Gunsmith Cats

This Saturday, gun advocate Larry Ward sent out a rallying cry for Americans to celebrate “Gun Appreciation Day.” The newly-fabricated holiday was intended as a response to Obama’s proposed firearms restrictions. To those living in Chicago, a city experiencing one of the highest gun-related murder rates of the past decade and where the city’s former gun ban was overturned by the Supreme Court in 2010, Ward had this to say during a recent MSNBC appearance:

“We look at cities like Chicago and New York that have a majority of minorities in it right away.” Within weeks of the rampage on that July night, he said, mentions of the shooting disappeared from the city’s political debate, nor is the art cramping cynicism down your throat. “We look at cities like Chicago and New York that have a majority of minorities in it right away?” (Zachary Goldhammer)

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