**Jane’s Dance**

In the middle of a breezy, pleasant spring afternoon, a cross-section of Chicago—small children, college students, retired grandparents—gathered under the dappled sunlight reflected off the South Loop’s towering skyscrapers. It was Chicago’s first-ever Jane’s Walk, held in honor of Jane Jacobs, an urban reform activist and author of “The Death and Life of Great American Cities.” Over the weekend, groups such as this one convened for community-centered architectural tours in Humboldt Park, Hyde Park, and over one hundred cities in twenty-two countries around the world, from Slovenia to Mexico. The walk is meant to connect these thousands of individuals across the globe through conversation, exploration, and celebration of their respective cities.

Jane Jacobs spent her life advocating urban planning that fosters the natural evolution of communities and a healthy turnover of populations. For Jacobs, street activity best works as an intricate “ballet,” with distinct parts coming together to form a unique whole. “Cities have the capability of providing something for everybody, only because, and only when, they are created by everybody,” she wrote.

The tour guide began by noting how the South Loop’s street environment has drastically changed over time. While it is now a diverse, largely residential community, the South Loop used to be an epicenter of railroads. Before that, it was home to a cluster of printing houses. Before that, it was one of the most notorious red-light districts in the city. Architecture in the South Loop speaks to this patchworked past: old printing houses now serve as apartments, Dearborn Station has been converted into a retail center, and benches are adorned with printing-type letters and mosaics.

As the participants walked the streets from the South Loop to Printer’s Row, they added their own improvisations to the ballet, discussing the ways they could create a better living space. At a small park—an oasis of green grass and trees nestled between two busy streets—they stopped to talk about how to make it safer and more accessible. “My children learned how to walk here,” said one father, while his small son clung shyly to his legs. “I want other children to be safe, too.”

Their contributions embodied Jane Jacobs’ belief that a city lives with its own distinct voices and visions—one concert hall playing host to a chorus of sidewalk let’s. (Amelia Dimowska)

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**Disarming Feminism**

For Angela Davis, the phrase “the personal is political” is not mere rhetoric. Her name and image have become inextricably linked to the radical left wing of civil rights activism in the late sixties and early seventies, yet Davis seems eager to dispel the myth that they were utopian times for activism. Speaking before a packed audience at Rockefeller Chapel on the topic of “Feminism and Abolition in the 21st Century,” the now sixty-nine-year-old Davis, professor emerita of the History of Consciousness at UC Santa Cruz, critiqued the feminist activism of that tumultuous period as “too white...too middle class, too bourgeois.” She noted the particularly aggressive exclusion of transgender women, citing the case of a transgender sound engineer, who, in 1974, was attacked for bringing “male energy” to the women’s music collective Olivia Records.

“Davis’ talk called for a new, expanded conception of feminism that would incorporate more inclusive imaginings of gender and race and challenge systems of mass incarceration. At times, however, Davis’ enthusiasm for expansion threatened to dilute the force of her speech. As she hit several divergent points of abolition—the case of Trayvon Martin, the Sandy Hook shootings, “apartheid” incarceration of Palestinians by the State of Israel, and the FBI’s renewed pursuit of political prisoner Assatta Shakur—the connecting thread of feminism wound thin.

Yet when Davis wove in themes from her personal narrative, her speech took on a bold coherence. In responding to a question asked by a King College Prep student about her recently and tragically gunned-down classmate and friend, Hadiya Pendleton, Davis paused before answering.

“You may know that I was accused of murder, kidnapping and conspiracy because I was a gun owner. My father [also] had guns...they were deemed necessary to defend ourselves from the Ku Klux Klan.” While Davis omits all critique of the arming of African Americans in the Jim Crow South, she is unmistakable in her call for the world to be “rid of all guns” today. It was in this moment that Davis, as well as the hundreds who had gathered to hear her speak, were forced to face a troubling reality: few people today would support the armed revolutionary actions that were called for in the seventies. How, then, can we continue to support and build upon the legacy of this activist while still moving toward the arms-free society that she calls for today? Davis leaves this question thoughtfully unresolved. (Zach Goldhammer)
THE ACTORS AT PROVISION THEATER PLAYED FAST AND LOOSE WITH MORTALITY. After a lone violinist had paced the stage, musically bowing into our minds images of pensive frontiersmen and spectral shacks, the ten-member cast rose from the set pieces and populated the stage with a pageant of unquiet spirits. The actors played ghosts—some resentful, few blissful—each bringing his or her own comedy, travail, scandal, or wasting regret. They worked from Edgar Lee Masters’s seminal poetry cycle, “Spoon River Anthology,” written in 1915 and now adapted and directed by Provision’s Timothy Gregory. These murmuring men and women—singing in ensemble, chanting in unison, bouncing the speaking roles stages left and right—assumed identities of deceased residents from the titular and fictional nineteenth century Illinois boom-town. Spoon River’s inhabitants broke ranks and rushed forward, barking out details about their respective deaths, almost jutting into and crowding out the audience, wide-eyed and eager to announce their follies in sometimes sorrowful, but uniformly morbid monologues.

Though rooted in our seats, we kicked up ashes over the fallen gravestones of the uncertainly dead. A jittery townsman confronted us about the local bats and their erratic beauty, a disgraced newspaper potentate voiced the self-disgust and inward loathing he carried to the grave, a slandered doctor regretted his mistrial and pneumatic jail death. Each actor traveled through multiple personalities, each soul given its turn and allowed to speak its piece. The monologists were often joined by their fellow spirits. Sometimes the voices of several poems intersected as different actors voiced a main narrative’s quoted dialogue. Vaguely Greek choruses informed other stories, a gaggle of townspeople shrugged with horrifically comedic indifference at the empty potential of the town’s failed, Edison-esque machinist. Actors functioned as living props. An undiscovered murderer brutally reenacted the chloroform-assisted suffocation of a conveniently wealthy relative. Her unlit and stage-backwards struggles, her serving-bell’s faltering rings, the heavy thud as it slipped to the floor—it all lent an immediacy and shocking presence to a well-traveled, almost archetypal story.

The cast froze in a frenzy of readers clutching, grasping, and haggling for hot-off-the-press broadsheets as a socialite came on stage, twirling her parasol and weaving around the figures. She suggested her suicide in such a classily circuitous way that we only realized she had killed herself after the crowd exploded back into action. These tableaux vivants intensified the emotion of individual accounts. A local representative’s arrested politicking deepened the exclusion of the neglected, immigrant fraulein who illegitimately mothered him. As the scene resumed, it was painfully clear it was not the man’s sententious rhetoric that moved his mother to tears. She cried for the cover-up, for the fabricated illusory bloodline her boy fed to the cheering voters below.

“Spoon River” was unified and not unpleasantly sentimentalized by the original score, composed and arranged by Michael Mahler and Alaric Jans. Solo violinist Alyssa Tong was a perpetual presence—punctuating scenes with thoughtfully low melodies, becoming a character in her own right as she fiddled away under the harvest moon, itself fittingly revealed as another wandering soul. The actors themselves furnished additional accompaniments: guitar, cello, tambourine. Impressive onstage vocals from Victoria Blade, Alex Weisman, and the rest of the cast in choir elevated what might have been a distressingly dark pastiche into sweet melancholy.

That melancholia underpinned every second of the show, as every light, romantic, or hilarious scene eventually wandered back to the grave. Even in monologues that never mentioned death, the fact that you were listening to the words of the departed undercut the warm-heartedness that might otherwise be found in a couple’s gooey meditations on their first-sight love. We smiled benignly at a little boy’s flustered search for the friend that shot a pop-cap slug beneath his finger, right up until the tiny wound infected into lockjaw. Ghostly choruses singing “This Little Light of Mine” in celebration of immortality were ferociously silenced by a jolting transition and savagely apoplectic screams from a soul who ultimately fell to his knees, exhaustedly requesting oblivion.

“Spoon River” leaves you feeling like the town’s atheist—ambushed by an unexpected spirituality, left raising fingers to lips in an unforgettable gesture of smirking half-wonder at something far beyond the theater. The production began as a kind of historical voyeurism—immersively narrating the private lives, doubts, and sorrows of a single town. It was sustained and reinforced by a busy cast of passionate shades. But by the finale, the adaptation had separated itself into two threads. The dramatic pensiveness evoked by the opening violin was made genuine, asking the audience to ponder the quality of their own lives and the unknowable looming beyond.
At the Englewood intersection of Normal and Garfield, the southern end of the Norfolk Southern rail yard has no entrance sign. Instead, Normal opens up to a rocky expense of dirt, gravel, and freight containers, boxes carried in and out by truck to be serviced by the yard’s rail lines. The only thing marking the site is a handwritten notice tacked to the Garfield Boulevard traffic light: “WE BUY HOUSES,” with a 1-800 number attached below.

Sometime in 2009—the company hasn’t made clear exactly when—Norfolk Southern decided it needed to expand its Englewood rail yard. The yard is an “intermodal facility,” an exchange point between truck and rail, and services about half of the company’s Chicago traffic across its 140 acres, between 47th and Garfield just west of the Dan Ryan. Still, the rail yard felt small, incapable of comfortably handling the volume of freight traffic coming into the city. Searching for a place to expand, the company didn’t have to look far: the plot of land directly south of their current location seemed the perfect fit, filled with vacant, city-owned lots.

Alongside vacant lots, however, were over 400 families, a tight-knit community of small houses with large porches that sprawled across the parcel’s eighty-four acres. When Norfolk Southern’s plans finally became public to the community in September of 2011, the neighborhood went up in arms, leading 20th Ward Alderman Willie Cochran—whose ward contains all of the yard’s expansion, between Garfield and 61st Street—to join 3rd Ward Alderman Pat Dowell in holding a meeting between residents and a Norfolk Southern representative. As community organizer Asiaha Butler, president of the Resident Association of Greater Englewood (R.A.G.E.), remembers, the meeting was not very helpful.

“The mere disrespect of how they said in the first meeting, ‘You guys probably want to leave this area anyway,’ not even considering the fact that people have been there for generations,” she says, shaking her head, “It’s ridiculous, what they’ve done. Have you been over there? It looks like a bomb has hit the area.”

Englewood has long been contracting. The neighborhood’s population—just over 30,000 in 2010—is a third of what it was in 1960. A steadily declining population, high unemployment rate, and concomitant empty lots have attracted projects aimed at economic revival.

After Mayor Daley announced a $256 million revitalization plan for Englewood in 1999, many residents believed the neighborhood was coming back. The cornerstone of that plan—the relocation of Kennedy-King College to the commercial heart of the neighborhood, at 63rd and Halsted—was finished in 2007, but since then change has been relatively scant. As of 2010, over forty percent of households are below the poverty level, and unemployment rate is 21.3 percent.

All this made it relatively easy for Norfolk Southern to expand its rail yard south on the argument that economic benefits far outweigh the costs of pushing residents out. The company will be a primary beneficiary of the Chicago Region Environmental and Transportation Efficiency Program (CREATE), a $3.2 billion project born out of a public-private partnership between the U.S. Department of Transportation, the State of Illinois, the City of Chicago, Metra, and Amtrak. Anticipating a dramatic increase in Chicago rail traffic, the project is working to push through rail improvements across the city.
“[The expansion] will allow for more efficient operations, [and] enable businesses in the area to expand,” says Robin Chapman, a representative for Norfolk Southern. With the ability to move larger amounts of goods in and out on a more economical scale, Norfolk Southern argues, expansion is good for business and good for Chicago. In a February 13 press release, Mayor Emanuel advocated for the expansion on the same grounds, writing that “this project will help local manufacturers, distributors, and other companies that depend on cost-effective and convenient options to ship and receive goods.” Additionally, he expressed his readiness to sell city-owned vacant lots to Norfolk Southern, many of which have long lain empty. The office of Alderman Cochran anticipates that this expansion, by 2030, will directly create 396 new jobs and will offer an additional $101.3 million to Chicago in cumulative tax revenue, in addition to the existing facility’s contribution of $104.9 million. This talk of changes that are wrought in the pursuit of economic growth and more jobs.

Chapman said that the donation would be “for the area served by [the new] terminal,” even before they started going to individual houses. Norfolk Southern never publicly announced their intention to take over those eighty-four acres of Englewood until they were about thirty percent done acquiring the land on the company’s behalf by calling up non-resident landowners and visiting individual houses. Norfolk Southern never publicly announced their intention to take over those eighty-four acres of Englewood until they were about thirty percent done acquiring the property—at which point Alderman Cochran set up the September 2011 meeting between residents and the company.

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Robin Chapman mounts an articulate defense of the way Norfolk Southern went about acquiring the land, lot by lot, explaining that this was simply designed to avoid the sort of real estate speculation which would otherwise plague the entire enterprise. If the expansion were public, someone would start buying the property to sell it back to Norfolk Southern at a higher price. It makes good business sense, but Butler alleges there’s a great deal of cynicism about how much these efforts are likely to alleviate the wrenching displacement process of the construction of the rail yard.

According to Butler, many residents of Englewood believe that the funds will go elsewhere in the city, and that none of the 300 jobs will actually be offered to them. Furthermore, Robin Chapman could not provide more details on how exactly Norfolk Southern would ensure that these jobs went to locals. This suspicion runs much deeper than a worry about how funds are going to be doled out. Asiaha Butler worries that the entire process through which Norfolk Southern was able to contemplate its southward expansion was a deeply flawed one. When asked how Norfolk Southern approached the neighborhood in discussions, Butler laughs. “Approached Englewood? They didn’t. They approached [Willie Cochran,] the alderman of Englewood, talked about this project with the city and the alderman, and purchased city-owned lots from the area first.”

Conspicuously missing was any sense of a dialogue with residents. “What they’ve done,” says Butler, “is privately go through the alderman,” even before they started going to individual houses. Alderman Willie Cochran has played a controversial role in the expansion stage, with Butler and other residents voicing concerns over his dealings with Norfolk Southern. In 2010, Cochran touted the “public/private partnership” he facilitated between the rail company and John Foster Dulles Elementary, a 20th Ward school that neighbors Norfolk Southern tracks just east of the Dan Ryan. The company presented the school with a $15,000 donation, and is working to provide rail-related educational opportunities for its students. Cochran’s role in establishing the partnership suggests a close relationship between him and the company, one that locals like Asiaha Butler believe is a betrayal of those 20th Ward constituents who are being forced out of the neighborhood. According to Robin Chapman, the company asked a real estate agent to acquire land on the company’s behalf by calling up non-resident landowners and visiting individual houses. Norfolk Southern never publicly announced their intention to take over those eighty-four acres of Englewood until they were about thirty percent done acquiring the property—at which point Alderman Cochran set up the September 2011 meeting between residents and the company.

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“We’ll be monitoring them, giving feedback to the city. We expect to be good neighbors.”
that the neighborhood’s dramatic decline in the recent past is also due to a perfect-

ly sound business strategy for the company: Norfolk Southern’s practice of demolish-

ing homes soon after purchase inevitably decreases the market value of the sur-

rounding, extant properties, allowing them to acquire the remainder of these homes

at a reduced price.

“Well,” says Chapman, “that may be the effect.” But it’s for liability reasons,

“strictly an economic move” to protect property from vandals and make sure that

people did not get hurt on the often-decrepit property that now belongs to Norfolk

Southern.

Whatever the competing justifications, because of the way Norfolk Southern has

expanded southward, lived-in houses in the expansion area are now few and far

between. Empty lots are filled with weeds and trash, creating an unsightly and

uncomfortable atmosphere for any pedestrian, and a hostile environment for home-

owners. While real price offerings vary, many homeowners are offered market value

for their homes while the surrounding neighborhood makes them almost unlivable.

It’s a sad story of perseverance for those homeowners holding out.

According to the nonprofit Merck Childhood Asthma Network, Englewood has an

asthma-related hospitalization rate of sixty percent, double the city average.

The air problem is, some insist, the result of pollution from trains like those

running on the Norfolk Southern line.

“This expansion posed an opportunity to have a new conversation with Norfolk

Southern Railroad,” says John Paul Jones, president of the environmental group

Sustainable Englewood Initiatives. “It’s a leveraging piece.”

Jones and SEI are focused on reducing environmental carcinogens and diesel

emissions in the area, and have long been concerned with the impact of the nearby

freight company. Before the city’s recent sale of a large parcel of vacant lots to

Norfolk Southern—105 lots, approved in March—SEI wanted the city to ensure

Norfolk Southern wouldn’t cause Englewood to suffer any more environmental haz-

ards. They requested a buffer zone between freight facilities and the neighborhood,

and monitoring and mitigation of diesel and noise pollution through filters on loco-

motives and in high-occupancy buildings.

Some of those demands, say Chapman, were not practical, and “in part reflect-

ed an unclear understanding” of what would be built in Englewood. The new space

would consist of trucks (not owned by Norfolk Southern) coming in and dropping off

cargo, so “there’s no locomotive constantly running” to emit diesel fumes.

This should perhaps offer some consolation to the persistent environmentalists

worried about the impact of diesel fumes on already long-suffering Englewood lungs,

but John Paul Jones is resolute in his belief that his group should continue to act as

a check on Norfolk Southern’s continued operations in the area. Chapman may believe

this expansion to have been a relatively easy one, but Jones maintains that the res-

idents are right to demand a seat at the negotiating table long-term. “We’ll be mon-

itoring them, giving feedback to the city. We expect to be good neighbors.”

And Norfolk Southern will be a close neighbor. The tip of the rail yard on 61st

Street will be just a few blocks from the economic heart of Englewood on 63rd and

Halsted. Although the precise nature of how the air that hangs above the neighbor-

hood will change remains ambiguous, the overall health of the community will like-

ly suffer from the expansion.

While most people have been able to stay relatively close by, in Englewood or

West Englewood, some residents of the area slated for expansion have moved

as far off as Alabama or Iowa to start a new life. Only forty residents remain,

unwilling to speak to the media. According to Butler, they don’t conceive of a future

relationship with Norfolk Southern; they only look forward to a “just and fair” con-

versation so they can go and “live in peace.” It is unclear what they hope to achieve

with this conversation, and what sort of closure they can attain at this point.

The reality is that trains play a huge role in transporting goods throughout the

country, and Chicago already handles about forty-six percent of all intermodal units

in the United States. The freight moving through the rail yard does not serve the

Englewood community; it serves Chicago, reducing the need for polluting diesel

trucks on America’s congested highway system. Unfortunately, such long-term think-

ing is not a consolation for these residents. They realize Englewood is being sacri-

ficed for the sake of Chicago.

Asiaha Butler said in a clear, flat voice, “I get it, it was a business decision. On

the backs of residents.”
How Far Will They Go

By Bess Cohen

The second community meeting on the proposed closure of Kate S. Buckingham Special Education Center felt more like a PTA meeting than the battle that it might have been. Only about twenty-five of the neon blue seats in Harlan Academy’s echoing auditorium were filled. Few spoke. Buckingham only has thirty-nine students, but even in the grand scheme of the Chicago Public School closings, its concerns are particularly compelling. All Buckingham students have been diagnosed with emotional disorders severe enough to pull them from general education classrooms. Yet if Buckingham is consolidated into Moses Montefiore Special Education Academy, as is proposed, those students will have to move fourteen miles from their old school—the furthest distance out of all schools slated for consolidation. More broadly, the school’s declining population and “underutilized” designation reflects a CPS-wide trend that Limits the system’s capacity for students with severe special needs.

Since CPS announced the consolidation of 114 schools in late March, affecting approximately 38,718 students, officials have held two community meetings and a public hearing for each school to be closed. At these meetings, three representatives from CPS typically sit patiently in front of a crowd of emotional parents, teachers, administrators, and students, each of whom may speak for a maximum of two minutes. The scene at these meetings is often heated, crowded, and chaotic.

Buckingham’s students, currently all boys, have been diagnosed with emotional disorders. These include, among others, anxiety disorders, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and psychotic disorders. These diagnoses are often coupled with ADHD, depression, and learning difficulties. Many students end up at Buckingham after disrupting classes, fighting, and being suspended from their schools.

One such student is Biantha Garcia’s son, an eleven-year-old student at Buckingham. “Before [my son] started to attend Buckingham [three years ago] he was fighting, he was all over the place, he was out of control,” she said at the community meeting. “There was nothing that a school system, in a regular classroom, could do for him.”

Garcia is the president of Buckingham’s local School Council, and she has been extremely vocal throughout the closure process. At the meeting she explained that her son was born with fetal alcohol syndrome and has been diagnosed with ADHD. Another four of her six adopted children also have special needs. As one of three therapeutic day schools in Chicago that go all the way up to eighth grade—the others are Montefiore and the Near North Special Education Center, in West Town—Buckingham is one of the few places that can provide for her children. Yet all three schools are slat-day schools in Chicago that go all the way up to eighth grade—the others are four of her six adopted children also have special needs. As one of three therapeutic schools, her son was born with fetal alcohol syndrome and has been diagnosed with ADHD. Another four of her six adopted children also have special needs. As one of three therapeutic day schools in Chicago that go all the way up to eighth grade—the others are Montefiore and the Near North Special Education Center, in West Town—Buckingham is one of the few places that can provide for her children. Yet all three schools are slat-day schools in Chicago that go all the way up to eighth grade. Buckingham provides the kind of stable, supportive environment that students can benefit from, and that some of them need.

Buckingham is a Level 3 school, indicating that it has the lowest academic standing by CPS standards, but because of the special population it serves, the school cannot be evaluated on these numbers alone. Based on the Urban Education Institute’s 5Essentials survey, Buckingham leapt from “weak” to “strong” and “very strong” in the categories of “Supportive environment” and “Ambitious instruction,” respectively, between 2011 and 2012 alone. Nine students are close to being reintegrated into a general education classroom, but Dr. Taylor assured me that “if we had sixty-five students, we’d do it the same way.”

The individual attention that students receive at Buckingham enables the school to operate as a small, relatively intimate community. Barbara McBride, a teacher at Buckingham, calls it “a team and a family.” Students have responsibilities, like cleaning the fish tank, and they attend free field trips, like one to Springfield last year. Sports events are scheduled to take place during school hours so that everyone can participate without having to stay late.

The school is located in Calumet Heights, a predominantly middle-class and African-American neighborhood. Tree-lined and full of well-maintained lawns, the location alone is more welcoming than some of the areas its students come from; ninety-five percent of them are from what CPS calls “low-income homes,” and some have parents with similar emotional disabilities. Buckingham provides the kind of stable, supportive environment that students can benefit from, and that some of them need.

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D r. Taylor is careful to point out that the proposed closing of Buckingham stands out even amidst the wider closures proposed by CPS. "We're not underutilized," he says. "We're not utilized." Therapeutic day schools, unlike other CPS schools, work on a referral basis. If a parent, teacher, or administrator suspects that a child has "special needs," an umbrella designation that includes emotional disorders, he or she must go through a referral process that takes three months in the most expe-
dient cases. If CPS determines that the student is eligible for a special education program, only then is an Individualized Education Program drawn up for them to determine the extent of school services they will receive.

According to Dr. Taylor, parents frequently call him directly to ask about place-
ment in Buckingham, but he has to refer them to CPS for processing. He rarely hears from those parents again. Where are these students going?

On its website, CPS’s Office of Special Education and Supports affirms a com-
mitment to educating children in the "least restrictive environment" possible, in ac-
cordance with the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). This means that every effort is made to incorporate students into general education environ-
ments wherever possible. Perhaps this is the reason why, for now, of 681 public schools in the city of Chicago, Buckingham, Montefiore, and Near North are the only schools that exclusively serve special needs students through eighth grade.

Beyond those schools, the options are limited for emotionally troubled students with special needs. In fact, there are currently no public high schools for students with emotional disorders to even matriculate to. Victoria Jackson, a seventh- and eighth-grade science teacher at Buckingham, explained that after eighth grade at Buckingham, students matriculate to private therapeutic high schools, a process organized by CPS, not the school. "It seems like they're trying to privatize this thing," Dr. Taylor told me. "If that's the case, just say it!"

But overall, private placement has almost halved in recent years. According to a 2012 article in Catalyst, CPS receives a grant from the state of Illinois to fund ser-
VICES and programs for students with special needs, to be spent as CPS sees fit. Placement in private day schools costs approximately $28,000 to $32,000 per stu-
dent, per year, and CPS reports that funding for these placements decreases every year. As placements have declined, the real trend has been toward incorporating stu-
dents with special needs into general education settings. In these classrooms, how-
ever, teachers are not always able to address the needs of students with emotional disorders, given the many other difficulties posed by a large classroom.

"There are a lot of questions that need to be answered, and these closings are adding complexity to the issues that already exist for students with disabilities," says Dr. Federico Wallace, a professor in the Special Education department at the University of Illinois at Chicago's College of Education.

When asked in mid-April what plans were underway for the transition, Dr. Anthony Chalmers, the principal of Montefiore, said, "We really haven't started. It's totally unutilized." Therapeutic day schools, unlike other CPS schools, work on a referral basis. If CPS determines that the student is eligible for a special education program, only then is an Individualized Education Program drawn up for them to determine the extent of school services they will receive.

According to Dr. Taylor, parents frequently call him directly to ask about place-
ment in Buckingham, but he has to refer them to CPS for processing. He rarely hears from those parents again. Where are these students going?

Over the phone in early May, LSC President Garcia said that she too is "holding
my breath." By then, she said, she would be on press photographs of Saudi Arabia, Syria, and Libya. "One of the problems with war," said Ruttan, speaking at the Hyde Park Art Center last Tuesday, "is that it's very inter-
esting. And after we've gotten our hands dirty, we're interested in it again.

The combination of morbid fascination, aw e, and numbfness we feel towards images of war is the subject of "A Bad Idea Seems Good Again," the latest installation in Ruttan's long-term project, which she calls "an investigation into human nature and human behavior."

Although ceramics are a relatively new medium for her, Ruttan achieves a wide vari-
ety of effects with a simple set of materials and processes. She usually builds the mod-
els whole before destroying them using "a combination of sharp blows to the building" with various tools, and, occasionally, a BB gun. Most of the pieces are glazed, or glazed and spray-painted, the rough edges of the broken clay smoothed out, evoking the sag-
ing, melting effect of a partially destroyed structure. In the unpainted pieces, the
edges of the rubble and the damaged buildings are harsh, razor sharp. If you had been there, your ears would still be ringing from the blast.

In an earlier project, Ruttan was struck by Jane Goodall's account of a civil war
between two groups of chimpanzees. Soon afterward, one group systematically hunted and killed every member of the other. For Ruttan, this incident raises the ques-
tion of whether war and violence are somehow engrained into our biology, and she finds the excessive brutality and bloodshed of civil conflict particularly troubling. "Is this something we will just never be able to find a better solution for?" she asked.

Ruttan also seemed to be concerned that the highly mediated way most Americans experience war today may have accelerated the already lamentable cycle of violence. We have been involved in Iraq and Afghanistan longer than in any other conflict in the last hundred years, she pointed out. "Most Americans don't even know anybody who has fought in either of these wars," she said.

Given the nature of her work, Ruttan's project is not to reveal, and not quite to reminder. "You've probably already seen these images," she says again and again. "Many of the pictures I use are straight from the pages of the New York Times." The pieces are small, "anti-monumental," she calls them, and influenced by the unobtrusive but evocative level of detail in Han Dynasty funerary models. The viewer is forced to get close to them, to lean in and peer into the half-shattered little boxes of the apart-
ments. Everything—the high-rise, modular apartment buildings, the various attitudes of ruin—is too familiar. You've seen this before. In fact, you see it almost every day. The pieces are titled simply—"Aleppe (upper left blast)," "Aleppe (roof and mid-
section blast)"—and the labels seem almost hidden on nearby walls or pillars. You expe-
rience the intimacy of the small-scale replicas before you know exactly where or when they're from, with an attitude of anonymity and distance. Afterwards, when you find the titles, they only make explicit what Ruttan's work has already told you: modern warfare is not an alien phenomenon, faceless force. Even widespread destruction occurs in thousands of little wounds.

By emphasizing specificity over comprehensiveness, intimacy over documentation, Ruttan means to complicate "the distance one feels to images of war as mediated through television and other media." This distance, the detachment of the modern con-
sumer of mass media, is Ruttan's primary target. "I want to fight against that numb-
ness," she said. "And I see these pieces as a way of showing that I am watching, and I'm trying to understand."

Hyde Park Art Center, 5020 S. Cornell Ave. Through May 19. Monday-Thursday, 10am-
6pm; Friday-Saturday, 10am-5pm; Sunday, noon-5pm. Free. (773)324-5520. hyde-
parkart.org

M A Y 9, 2013 | C H I C A G O W E E K L Y 9
Lifeways

By Jeanne Lieberman

“I HAD TO WAIT UNTIL I WAS OLD AS METHUSELAH TO LEARN HOW TO HAVE FUN,” declares Annie Robinson. The sequins that cover her black vest sparkle, her appearance congruent with her colorful personality. Like most people, Robinson says she used to see aging as a decline. “Now, however, she’s learned to look forward to growing old—‘it’s a sort of renaissance,’” she says.

Central to that renaissance is Robinson’s regular patronage of the Chatham location of Mather’s More Than a Café. It’s the café which she credits for her change in attitude, and she’s not the only South Side senior for whom Mather’s “Cafe Plus”-style community center is giving a renewed lease on life. First opened at 83rd and Wabash nine years ago, the nonprofit goes far beyond merely serving hot caffeine drinks, offering exercise, educational, and computer-use programming aimed at the fifty-years-and-older crowd.

Robinson began coming to Mather’s to work with their “possibilities coach”—a fitness and lifestyle guru of sorts—after a night when she abruptly realized that she needed to turn her attitude toward aging on its head. Her only son took her out to dinner, and after a trip to the bathroom returned with red eyes. “He was crying because I was aging so poorly,” says Robinson. “He wanted to apply to Princeton to get his doctorate, but he had decided to stay in Chicago because I was not aging well. I was not going to rob the child of his dream.” She has been coming to Mather’s ever since, because she feels it is a place where she can continue to learn about herself within a community of life-long learners.

Her endorsement of Mather’s as more than a conventional senior center would have brought a grin to manager Beedie Jones’ face.

“Beedie could sell the mole off of your face,” Dr. Jean Reese, another Mather’s patron, tells me with a laugh. “She could convince someone else that it would look just great on them no matter how ugly it was.”

After only a few minutes with Jones, no one would contest that statement, and the devotion of her patrons will attest to her success in growing Mather’s. She is in her seventies, but an energetic seven-year-old would get worn out trying to follow her for a day. She is wearing a canary yellow shirt with a black and gold vest, and a graceful downward wave of her hand tends to punctuate the end of her mile-a-minute sentences. Her hourly routine seems to consist of darting between the front of the café, where she greets guests, to her office in the back to grab some papers, but certainly not to sit down, until one patron or another pulls her into a lively conversation.

One of those patrons is Chappia Fote, who catches Jones’ attention while exercising on the stationary bicycle. Jones approaches Fote to remind the ninety-three-year-old that the trainer had told her to be careful to give her muscles enough rest. Fote’s response is to tell Jones about her weekend: she passed her driving test and with the creation of the first ventilated railcar for cattle, turns 165 this year. He would call Mather’s—recently worked with Mather’s on a community health fair. He calls Mather’s services and $55 annual membership fee are accessible to residents. Reverend Jerry Taylor, pastor at Salvation Church of God on 83rd Street—a block east of Mather’s—recently worked with Mather’s on a community health fair. He calls Mather’s presence just a few blocks away.

The sentiment that Mather’s is an important asset to the wider Chatham community extends beyond its doors. Consensus on the streets of the neighborhood is that Mather’s services and $55 annual membership fee are accessible to residents. Reverend Jerry Taylor, pastor at Salvation Church of God on 83rd Street—a block east of Mather’s—recently worked with Mather’s on a community health fair. He calls Mather’s presence just a few blocks away.

Alonzo C. Mather, humanitarian and inventor, who advanced humane animal care with the creation of the first ventilated railcar for cattle, turns 165 this year. He would be smiling to see the community that bears his name in Chatham.

Fote, are retired women living in Chatham, looking for a way to stay busy. But the men keep coming too, though they are outnumbered. Jones tells me with a characteristic twinkle in her eye, “We designed some classes just for men. That’s because we women are making a contribution of substance to the community,” said Eric Williams, a CPS administrator, as he explained why he and a group of friends, hair still un-grayed, choose to have Saturday brunch at Mather’s.

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Incubator’s wider goal of bringing together artists and connecting them with the South Side. Washington Park Arts and Research Center celebrates the work of Viet Thanh Nguyen, author of “The Sympathizer,” as well as the work of Susan Stroman, director of the Tony Award-winning musical “Waitress.”

The Cru, a bar and music venue in the Ukrainian Village neighborhood, hosts a series of events this month, including an art installation and a panel discussion on the history and culture of Chicago’s Ukrainian immigrant community.

Chicago Opera Theater presents the world premiere of “The Dead” by John Murrell, a new opera based on James Joyce’s novel. The production features a cast of notable Chicago opera singers, including soprano Anna Maria Held and tenor Jonathan McCray.

The Museum of Contemporary Art presents “The Age of Taste,” an exhibition of works by contemporary artists exploring the role of taste in society. The exhibition includes works by Jeppe Hein, David Shrigley, and Olafur Eliasson.

The Renaissance Society hosts “The Science of Beauty,” an exhibition of photographs by photographer Hiroshi Sugimoto. The exhibition explores the aesthetics of scientific photography and the role of the photographer in shaping our understanding of the natural world.


The Smart Museum of Art presents “The Age of Taste,” an exhibition of works by contemporary artists exploring the role of taste in society. The exhibition includes works by Jeppe Hein, David Shrigley, and Olafur Eliasson.

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