

Opinion

Another Voice / Buffalo's renewal

Another Voice: Arts grant helps tell the story of Buffalo's Ferry street

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By Mark Goldman and Byron W. Brown

Community renewal is an organic process, rooted in heritage, nurtured through community engagement. Before we count the cranes we must first create a movement, and that is our goal. That belief led us and Young Audiences of Western New York to jointly apply for and receive a \$100,000 matching grant from the National Endowment for the Arts to implement the Ferry Street Corridor Project. Ours is a method that will work on Ferry Street and as a model that will serve the whole city.

Our project starts with stories, stories of the people who live along the corridor and stories about the history of it. Our project is grounded in community engagement, an eight-month process whereby our team will work closely with community members on both the West Side and East Side of Ferry. Our project is based on breaking down ancient barriers, on creating new relationships and strengthening old ones.

Our work is conducted in our public schools where children, working with "story catchers" and teaching artists, explore and discover their stories and express them in public art. Our work is conducted on the streets: at the Wash Project; at the West Side Bazaar at Grant and Ferry; with the Linwood Historic District, the business people at the corner of Main and Ferry; the members of the Hamlin Park Historic District; at mixers at the historic New Skateland; with the children and teachers at Lafayette and the Buffalo Visual and Performing Arts.

We fish at Broderick Park, shop at Dibble's and Doris Records. We buy gas at Mandela Market; we eat at Pho Value and with the Breakfast Club at Gigi's. We attend services at True Bethel Baptist Church and plays at the Paul Robeson Theatre. We are strengthening relationships and building bridges.

Our work will take place at the intersections, too, creating new kinds of bus shelters, filled with public art and historical content, created by an engaged citizenry. We're founding a summer theater camp at Buffalo Academy of Performing Arts, where students from schools and neighborhoods all over the city will come together for six weeks. There, drawing on stories they've found and artwork that they have done, we will create a theater piece rooted in the Ferry Street Story.

Then, we will create a commissioned sculpture. This sculpture, representing the Cold Spring, a well really, where people from all over early 19th century Buffalo came for water, will mark our past and point the way to a new future, one founded in heritage, strengthened by relationships and commemorated in art. And like Isaac before us, we will reopen that well and dedicate it to the people of our city. The future is just around the corner, the corner of Main and Ferry.

Mark Goldman is a member of Friends of the Buffalo Story. Byron W. Brown is mayor of Buffalo.