

A THRIVING WESTSIDE: WESTSIDE CAN'S ROLE IN KANSAS CITY'S EVOLUTION

Kansas City has a storied history, acting as a Gateway to the West in the mid-1800s and witnessing the pivotal Civil War Battle of Westport in 1864. In the late 19th century, the Westside also saw an influx of Mexican immigrants. This wave of immigration had a profound influence on the neighborhood's identity. Today, the Westside is a vibrant community of diverse Latin cultures.

During the past 29 years, one organization has tirelessly dedicated itself to enhancing the quality of life in Kansas City's Westside, making it a safe, healthy, and thriving place for residents to live, play, and work. Westside Community Action Network (Westside CAN) has played a key role in preserving the heritage of the Westside while fostering a strong sense of community and civic engagement.

Culture, Art, and Comm
Mattie Rhodes Center's 2
Annual Day of the Dead
Celebration

Celebrating Hispanic He
Month with Habitacione
Latinos Association (HP
Charities)

Latinx Education Collab
The love story of Edgar

Kansas City Ballet – Rib
Cutting Ceremony

MOCSA – The 2023 Chi
Charity Game





Heading the charge at Westside CAN is Director Jorge Cormorac, who shared the benefits of their unique community policing program – a first of its kind in Kansas City. The program is focused on improving lives through a community engagement approach. “We do not believe that putting people in jail will fix crime,” Jorge said. “We do believe that with early intervention, and learning about the challenges people are living with, we are able to provide them better service, and better opportunities so we can work together to improve the lives of the people.”

With education, the policing program has earned the trust of local families and businesses, becoming their go-to resource for crime prevention. It isn’t merely about policing; it’s about fostering a proactive and engaged community. Residents engage in one-on-one conversations with officers and participate in neighborhood meetings.

In addition, Westside CAN uses the “broken window theory” to address neighborhood deterioration and its connection to crime. Recognizing the warning signs, the organization connects homeowners with city programs that aid in property updates.

Westside CAN also takes pride in managing an immigrant day labor center. Newcomers are welcomed with education, employment, and volunteer opportunities. They volunteer to remove graffiti, clean up overgrown grass, and combat other neighborhood blight, thus creating a safer environment and intervening in potential crime hotspots. “We equip those new immigrants to be successful in contributing,” Jorge said. “We connect them with OSHA and also with the Department of Labor. Everyone has the right to work. Everyone has the right to be safe in their work, and everyone has the right to be paid as they’re supposed to be.”

Monica V. Reynolds is an award-winning reporter who honed her skills at a daily newspaper in Northeast Louisiana. After spending a decade in Austin, Texas, she recently moved back to her hometown of New Orleans. Monica’s passion for journalism and documentary short filmmaking and photography led her to start her own business. She is the founder of Vox Pop Market, a marketing and web design firm that helps small businesses develop an authentic, meaningful, and online presence.



Meanwhile, with gentrification sweeping through Kansas City, concerns about rising tax rates weigh heavily on Westside families. Recently, Westside CAN has focused on assisting residents with enrollment in the Chapter 353 Program, which allows families to freeze escalating home taxes for a 25-year period. As the Chapter 353 Program enters its second year, it's poised to help even more families in lightening their tax burdens. At the time of this interview, 292 Westside families had already enrolled. Jorge said he anticipates many more families will apply within the next year.

In addition, collaboration is a cornerstone of Westside CAN's work. The organization connects the community with various institutions and agencies. For instance, University Health educates and provides the community with vaccines and boosters. Parks and Recreation works to benefit seniors, families, and children. Meanwhile, Rotary and the Hispanic Federation address food security needs.

Looking ahead as the Director of Westside CAN, Jorge envisions maintaining strong community ties as the city continues to expand. He recognizes that growth presents both challenges and opportunities. Westside CAN aims to persistently advocate for the community's interests and educate future leaders.



Moreover, affordable housing remains a top priority for Jorge, as do environmental initiatives, such as maintaining the Westside CAN orchard, Monarch butterfly garden, and bee colony, which sustain the environment and feed the community. With the challenges that inevitably come with increased visitors to the city, Westside CAN is strategically preparing to welcome them while ensuring the ongoing happiness and safety of its residents within the historic Westside district.

Featured in the September 30, 2023 issue of The Independent.
By Monica V. Reynolds



FEATURES



Culture, Art, and Community: Mattie Rhodes Center's 25th Annual Day of the Dead Celebration

In a tribute to culture, connection, and creativity, the Mattie Rhodes Center is gearing up to host its 25th annual Day of the Dead event. This eagerly anticipated celebration welcomes...



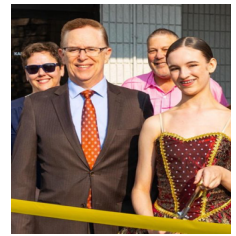
Celebrating Hispanic Heritage Month with Habitaciones Para Latinos Association (HPLA Charities)

The mission of Habitaciones Para Latinos Association (or HPLA, as it is commonly known) is to provide home repair services to low income homeowners at no cost. The more elaborate...



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Kansas City Ballet Cutting Cere

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