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North Omaha Begins a New Chapter

By
Preston Love Jr.

July 4, of this year, I turn 80 years old. I have lived, witnessed, experienced, and even studied, the evolution of my beloved North Omaha, for my entire years. I have studied the fact that we have had two lynching's in Omaha, we've experienced the devastating effects, of racism, discriminatory practices, redlining, segregated schools, lack of access to public and private accommodations, because of race, the killing of 14-year-old Vivian Strong, by police in 1969. Yet despite that., I've witnessed the glory of North Omaha, and its wonderful history, heritage and culture. We have produced, some of the greatest people in America, in every aspect of life: athletics, (God Bless our beloved, the late Marlin Briscoe), professions, the arts, music, and in business, all, of which are too numerous to mention, but worthy to be noted in the aggregate.

In the past, North Omaha was vibrant in every way: in church, in commerce and community. While we were a



poverty-stricken community, we were rich in our culture and in our social fiber and family. When discriminated against, in most areas within our community, we produced our own alternatives. Two examples: when white mortuaries refused to bury Blacks, we created generationally successful mortuaries of our own, and when the daily newspaper produced only bad and bias news, about African Americans in North Omaha, we created our own, evidenced by the long-standing, Black Newspaper, known as the Omaha Star.

The focus of this article is the historical economic devastation, that this community experienced for generations, and surely in my lifetime. My

generation, in large percentages, left Nebraska as soon as we were mature enough or we had completed our high school or college educations. We left Nebraska to seek opportunities that were not available to us in our hometown. I could be counted in that number. But when we left, we drained our beloved North Omaha of our valuable brain power, our financial potential, our talents and skills, from our community: the community was destroyed repeatedly, in reaction to the many reactions we experienced from the killings of Vivian Strong, to the tumultuous times in the '60s, and more. These destructive events devastated our community, and its vibrancy; the north freeway cut a slice through north Omaha and cause unrepairable damage to our culture and economics. The resulting accumulation of these facts left North Omaha economically devastated. Evidence of that devastation that can still be seen in North Omaha.

I provide a service, called the North Omaha Legacy Tours, where I tour our key corridors and teach about our culture and history, and part of that education involves the residual, and currently present remains, from years of economic devastation. That story is made more horrible, by the fact that, in spite of all of the wonderful people and history and culture, there has been 40-50 years of economic neglect and disinvestment.

I submit to you that today North Omaha is turning the pages of history and beginning a new chapter. That chapter promises the long-awaited, thoughtful, and substantial, albeit not yet comprehensive, development of

North Omaha. I submit the evidence of this new chapter, 10 wonderful, small to large, economic development projects, that are at different stages, but begin the new chapter of development in North Omaha:

- The total renovation of the North-West corner sector, of 24th and Lake, where the organization **Fabric Spark**, has totally renovated and upgraded the buildings on the North-West corner sector, from Lake Street to Ohio Street and a new music and arts venue called North Omaha Music and Arts (NOMA)
- The Union for Contemporary Arts, which provides wonderful programming related to the arts and more, on the South-East corner of 24th and Lake.
- On the South-West corner of 24th and Lake, is the new and exciting Revive Center, which includes a place for meetings, Lunch and events.
- On the North-East corner of 24th and Lake, is the exciting and dramatic plan for an \$40 million dollar multi-use complex, built by African-American businesswoman Carmen **Tapio's Forever North Development**.
- The planned, new, Black Box Theater Complex, to be named after Shirley Tyree, being built by the Union for Contemporary Arts, and will provide a **new** live Theater, **on** North 24th Street.
- The newly established financial institution, in the historic Carver Savings and Loans building space, that will provide, a new community-owned financial institution, half a block off 24th Street. from a partnership of the Willie and Yolanda Barney, Martin and Lynnell Williams and American National Bank
- The Small Business Complex, developed by the Omaha Economic Development Corporation, that includes small spaces for businesses, a restaurant, and more, in the newly developed Fair Deal Village, at 24th and Burdette.
- The unannounced developer, but potential, new and wonderful development. in the Omaha OIC building, which has sat empty for nearly 20 years, and is now promised to provide a new and exciting venue.
- Three significant renovations that include both the completed renovation of the old Carnation Ballroom at 24th and Miami, and to be completed, the renovation of the historical Spencer Street Barber Shop, at 24th and Spencer, and the new and exciting Culxr House, at 24th off Wirt
- Notwithstanding, great, new developments, that are off the 24th Street corridor, but worth mentioning, are the potential of the expansion, and visionary implementation, at Malcolm X Foundation, at 34th and Evans, the exciting, and responsible, boxing gym, developed by Bud Crawford, at Sprague and John Creighton Boulevard, and the potential new development of the Ernie Chambers Museum on 20th and Ames Streets and **The North Omaha Trail which is currently under construction.**

We celebrate all of these segments of a wonderful subchapters led by the Carmen Tapio's **Development**. Together they represent wonderful new components, that make up what is becoming North Omaha's new and exciting chapter of development. There are still many needs still unaddressed. Hopefully our progress will be joined by recognition, and respect, of the greater community to provide comprehensive, but thoughtful, major investment, as partners and collaborators in this new chapter.