



BLACKSTONE BICYCLE WORKS:

Youth gain confidence and independence

“The Blackstone Bicycle Works program is incredible,” said Rio, an 11-year-old youth who participated in the summer Earn-A-Bike program. Rio and 26 youths from Chicago’s south side participated in Blackstone Bicycle Works’ (BBW) summer program, where they learned bike mechanics and bike safety, and earned a free bike.

The summer program was rolled out in June, just two weeks after Aren Chynoweth and Cody Ciminillo took on the roles of program managers. “We had to hit the ground running, quickly developing a curriculum, programming, and salvaging usable bikes. Yet, it all felt seamless working with the youth and learning together,” said Aren.

Blackstone Bicycle continued on page 2 ▶



Blackstone Bicycle Works' Summer Camp ▶



61st Street Farmers Market ▶

RECORD BREAKING: 61st Street Farmers Market expands fresh food access

On September 9, the 61st Street Farmers Market marked the highest Link sales, Link transactions, and Link Match redemption in its 16-year history. That same month, the Market also saw record breaking attendance levels, with over 2,200 customers in one day.

Emily Cross, 61st Street Farmers Market Manager, said, “If you look at the numbers from when we started to now, it’s just wonderful how many folks are utilizing Link and how many new people are learning about the Market.”

61st Street Farmers Market continued on page 3 ▶

LINK MATCH AT GROCERY STORES: Making fresh food affordable

In March, Experimental Station launched Link Match at One Stop Foods, a local institution that has served the North Kenwood/Bronzeville neighborhood for over 53 years.

Link Up Illinois staff worked closely with store owners to integrate Link Match into their point-of-sale system and get the program up and running. This partnership is part of Link Up Illinois’ expansion into a growing number of small and mid-size grocery stores.

Link Match continued on page 4 ▶

Note from the Executive Director

Dear friend,

When asked what Experimental Station does, we say, “We build independent cultural infrastructure that responds to local needs.” As that may sound abstract to some, we offer below a breakdown of what we mean:

We = a small but mighty team of talented, creative, hard-working staff and volunteers

Build = create and support programs, initiatives, projects, and other organizations with good ideas and gumption behind them

Independent = adopting a DIY approach that allows for new and different ways of thinking about, engaging with, and solving problems

Cultural = embracing a broad range of practices including the arts, architecture and design, food and agriculture, cycling, alternative education, alternative media...

Infrastructure = physical and organizational structures that support cultural producers and improve the quality of life in our community and beyond.

We invite you to learn more in these pages about the ways Experimental Station builds independent cultural infrastructure. As you do, we hope that you will be inspired to support our work by making a tax-deductible year end gift!

Sincerely,

Connie Spreen



“I love coaches Cody and Aren. [With their support,] I could repair and earn my customized bike, along with a helmet, toolkit, and a lock.”

Blackstone Bicycle Works continued from page 1 ▶

Youth gain confidence and independence

“I love coaches Cody and Aren. [With their support,] I could repair and earn my customized bike, along with a helmet, toolkit, and a lock,” said Rio, a local Woodlawn youth.

Sky Vân, Rio’s mother, said, “The BBW program is giving more than I expected. The first thing we aimed for was to earn a free bike. But, actually, the camp helped Rio become more confident riding his bike. [...] The greatest thing is that he no longer needs me to walk to school with him since he can ride his bike to school.” The only student in his school to do so, both Rio and his mother attribute this newfound independence to his participation in the Blackstone Bicycle Works program.

Rio’s enthusiasm for cycling has inspired his mother to get involved in BBW. She is a member of the BBW Parent and Alumni Advisory Committee, a committee that provides feedback on the program, and also

participated in the Family-Earn-A-Bike program, an intergenerational activity encouraging parents and youths to ride bikes together.

Rio has also encouraged his best friend, K’Michelle, to join BBW’s program. The two friends are now participating in BBW’s after-school bike program together this fall.

“I can see him growing with practical skills from this program. I highly appreciate what your team has been doing for the community,” said Rio’s mother, adding that the program has also helped Rio to show empathy towards others, “which is of paramount importance in shaping his personality traits.”

Currently, Blackstone Bicycle Works offers After-School programming every Monday through Thursday from 4:00 - 6:00 PM, free of charge.

61st Street Farmers Market continued from page 1 ▶

61st Street Farmers Market expands fresh food access

Given the Market’s mission to address the availability, accessibility, and affordability of fresh food in Woodlawn and surrounding neighborhoods, the higher number means more community members have access to locally grown, fresh, and healthful foods. More purchases also mean more sales for a diverse group of 31 local farmers and vendors at the Market.

Korbin Houston, a local resident in Woodlawn, shared the importance of shopping at the Market, “I’m supporting farmers and agricultural land that is becoming more and more necessary, but also more endangered.” For Korbin, coming to the Market is not just about making healthy food choices, but also about supporting a healthier local food system and being able to buy from the farmers directly.

The welcoming atmosphere, the friendliness of the vendors, the variety of fresh produce to choose from, and most of all, customers’ ability to have their Link purchases matched with funds to buy additional produce are key attributes of the 61st Street Farmers Market.

One Market customer, Joy Joshua, recently learned she could use Link and get her Link purchase matched when buying fresh produce. “It’s helped us a lot.” As a caregiver to her mother, the ability to shop for fresh produce at the Market utilizing Link Match has been a game-changer.

“It is perfect,” Joy said.

What other Market customers are saying about us:

“I love coming to the Market. I love the location. I like that they offer so many different foods. It [Link and Link Match] helps so much because I’m able to get a few things like bread, fruits, and vegetables, which are the freshest in the city. I’m able to get double what I would get if I went to the grocery store.”

**— Ashley Simmons
from South Shore, a seven-year
Market customer**

“It’s a very nice Market. Unlike other markets, this one has more to offer me. I also get the mushrooms here because they don’t normally sell them at the grocery store. Being able to Link Match helps me be able to buy the mushrooms and still be able to get vegetables.”

**— Lauren Michell
from Woodlawn,
a five-year Market customer**

61st Street Farmers Market ▼



Link Match continued from page 1 ▶

Making fresh food affordable

This effort aims to ensure that recipients of Link/SNAP benefits are better able to afford to put fruits and vegetables on their table no matter the season.

Now, One Stop Foods customers spending Link/SNAP benefits receive up to \$5 per day in Link Match toward the purchase of fresh fruits and vegetables. Upon learning that the store would match her purchase of canned goods, one customer excitedly placed a bag of potatoes and another of apples in her cart.

According to store manager, Thomas Kladis, thanks to Link Match, One Stop Foods “has been able to increase the quantity of fresh produce we sell, and—because the produce moves faster—also to improve the product offerings and reduce waste.”

When asked about the program at One Stop Foods, Matthew Ruffi, who leads the Link Up Illinois program at Experimental Station, noted, “I’m continually amazed by the program’s expansion into stores like One Stop Foods, where caring and passionate leaders like Tom and his dedicated staff embrace the Link Match program.”

“This partnership is a driving force in our mission to provide good, local, and healthy food to the communities that need it most. Witnessing the immediate impact it has on our communities and individual shoppers warms my heart every time,” Matthew continued.

Link Match will also be coming soon to selected Jewel-Osco, Cermak, and Pete’s Fresh Markets located in Black and Hispanic communities in and outside of Chicago.



One Stop Foods ▲

One Stop “has been able to increase the quantity of fresh produce we sell, and—because the produce moves faster—also to improve the product offerings and reduce waste.”

— Thomas Kladis
One Stop Store Manager

Growing City farmers markets

Since 2010, Experimental Station has partnered with the City of Chicago to address the lack of access to healthy food on Chicago’s south and west sides. Labeled ‘food deserts,’ these areas of the city have long struggled to attract grocery store investors. One remedy to this problem was for the City to create farmers markets in food-insecure neighborhoods.

Daley Plaza Farmers Market, Chicago ▼

Whether through a supermarket or a farmers market, creating a healthy food oasis in a food desert requires long-term investment and cultivation.

For more than a decade, the Experimental Station team has worked to cultivate and grow farmers markets in the Austin, Bronzeville, Garfield Park, West Humboldt Park, and

Englewood neighborhoods. Besides accepting Link and offering Link Match at these markets, year after year, the team has done extensive outreach to build relationships between community members and their market.

This year, the Austin Town Hall Farmers Market has especially grown, reaching record vendor participation. With fresh produce and market management now provided by Forty Acres, and with the participation of small local businesses, the Austin market grew to 15 vendors.

Leading the Experimental Station team, Program Manager Raja Baptiste commented, “Farmers markets play an essential role in the development of healthy communities. Providing a space for local business and healthy food options, Austin Town Hall Farmers Market demonstrated their ability to connect with farmers, vendors, and the community this season.”





BLACKSTONE BICYCLE WORKS

Open Shop builds a safe bike culture

Blackstone Bicycle Works hosts Open Shops for the community five days a week, ensuring the program remains a community asset. Between August and October, 186 community members have come to Open Shop to learn to repair and refurbish their bikes.

Community members can drop in with their bicycles and use the tools and expertise offered at the workshop. “We want to empower community members with the knowledge, mechanical skills, and tools to repair their own bikes,” said Cody Ciminillo, Blackstone Bicycle Works’ Program Manager.

Leslye Long, a local community member, has been making use of Open Shop and tools to rebuild her bike for the past several weeks, transforming her rusted, unusable bicycle frame into an eye-catching piece of art. “Having the opportunity to learn the intricacies of bike repair for free with amazingly brilliant individuals is a godsend, seriously,” said Leslye about BBW’s Open Shop, “I loved it and will do it again!”

“Seeing a community member develop an idea into something tangible with the assistance we’re providing is a great example of how an open shop connects with and is of service to our neighbors here in Woodlawn,” said Aren.

Blackstone Bicycle Works’ mission to build a bicycle community among youth, their families, and the community extends beyond the walls of the shop. “We are trying to build a safer and active bike culture on Chicago’s south side, where we provide free bicycles to youth and families, teach them to make their own repairs, and create a community of riders that can enjoy the freedom of exploring the outdoors,” said Aren.

Every Saturday, Aren and Cody lead community bike rides. The routes vary in length and difficulty to meet the skill levels of participants. “Everyone is welcome, young or old, and we have various rides exploring different parts of the city—safe rides to great destinations,” said Cody.



“Having the opportunity to learn the intricacies of bike repair for free with amazingly brilliant individuals is a godsend, seriously.”

— Leslye Long

Open Shop Hours
Monday to Thursday
1:00 - 3:00 PM

Saturdays
10:00 AM - 12:00 PM

Community Group Rides
Saturdays
12:00 - 2:00 PM

Cultural Events

A critical community asset for cultural practitioners on the South Side, throughout 2023, Experimental Station provided free and discounted space for artists, videographers, choreographers, musicians, theater actors, and community groups to rehearse, perform, and meet. They, in turn, brought new and creative energies to our space and work.

High Concept Labs

LabE—a free year-long Experimental Station residency provided to High Concept Labs—addressed particular needs of disabled dance artists, such as studio access, development and production support, and platforms for promoting Chicago’s sick, deaf, and disabled dance artists.

Phoenix Poets Literary Festival

A day of conversations, readings, and a roundtable with ViJay Seshadri, Douglas Kearney, Katie Peterson, Rosa Alcalá, Srikanth Reddy, Alan Thomas, Dong Li, and Annelise Gelman. Organized by the University of Chicago Division of the Humanities and Creative Writing and The University of Chicago Press.

The Rooted Space and The Space Movement Project

During May 2023, The Rooted Space and The Space Movement Project presented an original, evening-length dance performance, full of creative energy at Experimental Station. Over 20 local performers and designers contributed to this production, which was open to the public.

CEC ArtsLink Assembly

Experimental Station hosted artists, educators, writers, and social justice advocates for a transnational conversation—both in-person and remotely—for the annual CEC ArtsLink Assembly “The Future Is Not What It Used to Be.” The Assembly featured perspectives from leading artists rooted in their communities around the world and key figures in cultural policy and practice, philanthropy, and social justice.



Performance of The Rooted Space and The Space Movement Project ▼

Business Incubation Residents

Since 2006, Experimental Station has provided discounted long-term rental space and resources to mission-aligned local businesses and journalism institutions. Current residents are:

Invisible Institute

The Invisible Institute is a Pulitzer Prize-winning journalism production company. They work to enhance the capacity of citizens to hold public institutions accountable.

The Invisible Institute is a former program of Experimental Station.

WWW.INVISIBLE.INSTITUTE

South Side Weekly

The South Side Weekly is a nonprofit newsprint magazine dedicated to supporting cultural and civic engagement on the South Side, and to providing educational opportunities for developing journalists, writers, and artists. In 2022, South Side Weekly merged with the Hyde Park Herald, who are now sharing our space.

WWW.SOUTHSIDEWEEKLY.COM

Build Coffee

Build Coffee is a coffee shop in the Experimental Station. Surrounded by community-driven nonprofits and civic journalism projects, Build is designed as a hub of great coffee and radical collaboration.

WWW.BUILDCOFFEE.ORG

Civic Projects

Civic Projects, a woman and minority-owned firm, is a hybrid architecture practice in Chicago. Their work includes architecture as well as community and strategic planning, grant writing, and small-scale revitalization.

WWW.CIVIC-PROJECTS.COM



Building a healthy food culture

Every spring and fall, students of Andrew Carnegie Elementary School fill up the Experimental Station's kitchen with excitement and curiosity as they gather for their 4-week cooking class.

The students eagerly raise their hands to answer questions from the chef instructor, Chef Sebastian White. Chef Sebastian asks the children if they have tasted basil before, tried zucchini, or liked garlic.

While excited murmurs continue, the children begin to concentrate on cutting the vegetables that Chef Sebastian distributed to their cutting boards. He leads them through the steps of preparing a dish. Then, they taste their dishes and explore the flavors they helped to combine. ▶



In-school cooking class at Experimental Station's kitchen in Fall 2023 ▶

This class is part of the 61st Street Farmers Market's food education programming delivered in partnership with Andrew Carnegie Elementary School since 2013. This sequential program provides hands-on instruction to 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders covering healthy eating concepts, tastings, gardening, and kitchen skills. At the request of teachers and students alike, the cooking class has expanded to include in-school classes for 5th graders this fall. These classes focus on utilizing specialty crops, vegetables, and fruits that are available in the Midwest.

Among all these learning opportunities, students' favorite part of the program is to pick and taste different fruits and vegetables grown at the hoop house, a community garden of Jackson Park Terrace. Emily Cross, the Farmers Market Manager, has them taste sorrel, strawberries, peppers and herbs freshly picked from the garden.

With much excitement, the students exclaimed, "Where's the sorrel?," since sorrel is the class' favorite herb to taste in the hoop house.

Others said "I've never tried cilantro before," "That [sage] smells so good," "My grandma puts that [thyme] on spaghetti,"

Overhearing the students' comments and exclamations, Ms. Joyce Butler, Jackson Park Terrace resident and gardener at the hoop house, confirms, "Trust me, they love it. I can hear it [in their voices]."

In-school gardening class at the JPT's Hoop House ▾

61ST STREET FARMERS MARKET

Growing food and Community



The gardeners and the 61st Street Farmers Market team at the Hoop House

For 10 years, the hoop house at Jackson Park Terrace (JPT), maintained by the Experimental Station, has been a source of gardening knowledge and fresh vegetables for the residents.

Every Harvest Saturday, the community garden provides freshly harvested vegetables to around 20 residents of the JPT community housing complex in Chicago's Woodlawn neighborhood.

This spring and summer, the Experimental Station's Head Gardener, Lawrence Riley, grew and harvested tomatoes, eggplants, chives, carrots, collards, beets, peppers, and all varieties of herbs in the main garden to distribute to the residents.

This year, Lawrence also helped eight residents grow their own vegetables on individual raised beds.

Among them was Joy Joshua, a resident of JPT. With help from Lawrence, Joy, a first-year gardener, grew corn, beans, cucumbers, peppers, carrots, cabbage, and tomatoes. Her spring and summer crops have been producing so well that she "almost never" had to shop for vegetables from grocery stores.

"I haven't purchased tomatoes, because my tomato plants have been plentiful. And the beans are so good, still producing," says Joy.

With all the fresh produce Joy gets from her plot and through the Saturday distributions, she has been cooking more than ever and feels healthier. She is now spreading the knowledge to her family, especially to her mother.

As part of the mission to promote a healthy eating culture, Experimental Station's 61st Street Farmers Market offers pop-up events at the hoop house. There, local chefs share their cooking skills using fresh produce from the garden and pass out samples and recipes to the participating residents.

Beyond providing opportunities for residents to learn new recipes or taste new food, the pop-ups are also an opportunity for the JPT community members to connect with each other.

Joyce Butler, a JPT resident who has been gardening at the hoop house since the program's start, sees that the past 10 years of sustaining and cultivating the hoop house garden and growing participation have been essential in keeping community members healthy and connected.



November 2022 - October 2023

Grants, Individual Donors, and Foundation Support

\$500,000+

Illinois Department of Human Services
United States Department of
Agriculture

\$100,000 - \$499,999

City of Chicago

\$20,000 - \$99,999

The Chapin-May Foundation of Illinois
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Thank you

for your generous support of Experimental Station!

Your generosity has helped us empower youth in Chicago's South Side, increase fresh food access statewide, and support cultural practitioners and local business incubation. Please continue to support our efforts.



SCAN THE QR OR VISIT OUR WEBSITE TO DONATE.
www.experimentalstation.org/donate



The Experimental Station builds independent cultural infrastructure on the South Side of Chicago by providing essential resources that respond to local needs.

SUPPORT OUR WORK



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6100 S. Blackstone Avenue
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