



experimental station

building independent cultural infrastructure

A Decade of Good Food and Community

For ten years now, the 61st Street Farmers Market has brought fresh, locally and sustainably grown foods to Chicago's South Side! Over the years, the Market has fostered a vibrant and devoted community of farmers, food artisans, and customers. And this community has grown—we now average 1,300 customers per week (from more than forty different zip codes) and have 30 vendors a year. We've accordingly earned a reputation for our hospitality and an “unparalleled community atmosphere.”

Over the years, the Market has also gained a reputation for innovation. To make our market more accessible and affordable, we began to accept SNAP benefits (called 'Link' in Illinois). We were among the first farmers markets in Chicago to do so. In 2009, the 61st Street Farmers Market was the first in Illinois to match Link purchases. This enabled our customers receiving Link to double the value of their benefits. In 2011, partnering with University of Chicago Medicine, the Market was an early adopter of the Fruit & Vegetable Rx program. In this program doctors prescribe market fruits and vegetables to their patients. In 2014, the Market started the Eat Up program. Eat Up rewards Link customers for measuring and tracking their blood pressure, heart rate, and BMI.

The Market's growth and longevity are no accident; they're the result of the dedication of our market community. We appreciate every contribution from our farmers, customers, staff, volunteers, and funders. As we move into our second decade, we hope to see you at the Market!



Taking advantage of a CPS closure day and extended bike shop programming, Isaac earned 4 mechanical skills! This brought him to a new apron level and his first program bike. Isaac was so thrilled about his new bike that he put his new skills to use. He immediately replaced his brakes and cleaned off at least 20 years of city grime. When Isaac and his bike were featured on our Instagram, all quickly realized Isaac had refurbished a true gem—dozens of BMX enthusiasts admired his museum-quality vintage Kuwahara BMX!

From Here to the World

What do you do when you have a youth program that kids don't want to leave? At Blackstone Bicycle Works, we offer opportunities and pathways that help our youth get from 'here to the world'! (Sometimes these pathways might take them through a muddy cyclocross course.) Because of these opportunities, more than a third of our youths spend 3 to 8 years in our program.

Increasingly, Blackstone aims to prepare our youth for life beyond the bike shop and their neighborhood. The externships and internships we offer help them practice responsibility, teamwork, and professionalism. This summer five 11-15-year-olds were Summer Interns, learning more

about fixing bikes and running a business. Advanced 'black aprons' Wanya and Christian also started their year-long Senior Internships in July. Meanwhile our three externs discovered what it's like to work in another bike shop. Desiree and Aaron did so well in their externships that Kozy's hired them!

This past year, our college advisor Stacy Fox guided 20 of our youths in their choices about careers, colleges, and vocational schools. With Stacy's help through the college application process, Nayla and Albert started college this fall. Their studies are even funded with Greer Foundation scholarships through the bike shop!

Letter from the Executive Director

"It's not time to make a change, just relax, take it easy,..." (Cat Stevens)

Dear friend,

For some of us, the laws of physics remain as inscrutable as a modernist poem. Still, we come to our own understanding of Newton's law of inertia—objects keep on doing what they are doing, unless acted upon by some external force. We have also learned that people are a lot like objects; they tend toward stasis, unable to make big changes, unless some thing or event forces their hand. History has shown that our aversion to risk and to giving up current comforts leaves us exposed to great harm from great injustice. We wait and watch, believing and hoping that things cannot get worse. Those moved to act or change course are our survivors and our heroes.

We've seen many calamities this past year. Falsehood, injustice, corruption, disdain, and destruction have become our daily fare. We must ask 'What force will shake us from our personal inertia?' Then, 'What force must we bring to change our course?' And finally, 'How can we redirect our world toward greater truth, greater justice, greater beauty, and greater care for the vulnerable?'

At the Experimental Station, we believe that it is a virtue to quarrel with the world as it is, and that every individual can be a force in making it better. As you will see in these pages, a handful of individuals have been able to do some extraordinary things. With the support of many, they have made our world a little more truthful, a little more just, a little more beautiful, and a little more caring. We hope that by reading about what a small group of us have accomplished this year, you will be moved to become a supporter, a participant, a hero.

*Sincerely,
Connie Spreen
Executive Director*



Above: After getting hired from Kozy's from one of our externships, AD is now back in our shop helping out with production!

Right: Garden classes with Carnegie School 3rd graders.



Matching Link Beyond the Farmers Market

This summer the Experimental Station won a second USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentive grant, this time for \$487,000. This grant will enable us to continue helping farmers and farmers markets implement our Link Match incentive program. It will also enable us to expand the program to storefronts and health providers.

We're partnering with two Illinois food cooperatives for our entry

into retail spaces. They are the Neighborhood Co-Op in Carbondale and Green Top Grocery in Bloomington. Both co-ops source many of their products from local farmers. Their commitment to local aligns well with our mission of supporting local farmers as well as SNAP participants. Each co-op will work in tandem with a nearby farmers market to cross-promote our Link Match program. This will help SNAP participants to gain access to farm fresh products

year round.

Link Up has also partnered with the Cook County Health & Hospitals System (CCHHS) and Black Oaks Center. Food insecure SNAP recipients living in the southwest suburbs can now buy fresh and healthy foods with their Link cards every week. More, their purchases will be matched at all three CCHHS community clinics, located in Ford Heights, Robbins, and Oak Forest!

Healthy Food Incentives Fund Still a Good Idea

On January 20th, 2017, Gov. Rauner signed into law Illinois SB 1367, the SNAP Healthy Local Food Incentives Fund bill. This law creates a \$500,000 fund to support a healthy food incentive pilot. This pilot would test the efficacy of programs like Link Up Illinois, which incentivize SNAP customers to buy and eat more fruits and vegetables at farmers markets. We were very disappointed that the money was not appropriated for the Fund in the current state budget. Experimental Station, along with coalition partners (Illinois Alliance to Prevent Obesity, CLOCC, American Heart Association, Illinois Stewardship Alliance, Illinois Farmers Market Association, and others), is working to get this initiative funded in 2018.

Top: The 61st Street Farmers Market Link and info tent was busy as always. The 61st Street Farmers Market processes more Link and Link Match than any other market in Illinois!

Center left: Our Link Up City EBT team once again broke Link and Link Match records!

Center right: The last garden class of the summer.

Bottom: Work Study intern Brady leading a Market School on seasonal apple varieties.



New Staff



Charlie Rifenburg became our Customer Services Coordinator and Head Mechanic in March 2017. He came to Blackstone after eight years of working as a mechanic in professional bike shops. Most recently he managed customer repairs and services for a shop in Wilmington, North Carolina. Charlie brings a wealth of knowledge about bikes and shop operations, as well as a calm, patient demeanor that puts customers and youths at ease.



We are thrilled to welcome our new 61st Street Farmers Market Manager, **Wendy Zeldin**, to the Experimental Station team. Originally from Columbus, Ohio, Wendy has been a Chicago dweller for over 10 years. Wendy comes to us with years of experience teaching young people about gardening and healthy eating. Before, she was a lead educator at Sugar Beet Schoolhouse and managed a rooftop farm at Chicago Botanic Gardens. Additionally, she has cooked and baked vegan cuisine in cafes throughout the city. If you didn't meet her during the final weeks of the outdoor market, be sure to say hello when you visit the indoor market!



DJ Fish came on board as Blackstone's Youth Services Coordinator and Head Instructor in May. He comes with a passion for bicycles, several years experience as a mechanic, and a lot of crazy socks. Before joining us, DJ developed alternative curricula. At Hackstudio, DJ helped youth develop "dream projects," like writing novels and building skateboard ramps. DJ has also offered health education programming for all ages. With a background in improv, DJ's incredible energy, positivity, and humor draws youths to our program's many offerings.

Stay In Your Lane

In June, Experimental Station's Blackstone Bicycle Works launched 'Stay In Your Lane', a bike safety rap video. Grammy Award-winning Che 'Rhymefest' Smith and young people from Donda's House collaborated with us to produce 'Stay in Your Lane'. Having nothing to do with LaVar Ball, our 'Stay In Your Lane' shares the cycling rules of the road in a catchy, musical, hiphop style! The song and video feature Experimental Station's talented George Mikell, Adarah Hale, Maalik Gardner, a handful of Blackstone's young dancers and cyclists, and the very creative Rio, our new friend from Donda's House. We invite you to check it out on YouTube at exp.st/staylane and to share it widely!



We performed a live rendition of "Stay in Your Lane" at Daley Plaza for Active Trans' Chicago Bike Week Rally.



Two Buses for Fresh Peas

Since 2010, Experimental Station has provided SNAP/Link service for the City of Chicago. This year, our experienced, well-oiled team (Keith, Zaneta, Will, George, and Corey) welcomed thousands of Link users and processed record SNAP and Link Match sales at 15 City markets—for a total of \$99,589! One senior even took two buses to buy the fresh shelling peas sold at the West Humboldt Park Market. Located in a ‘food desert’ neighborhood, their commitment shows how important the program is.

Top: Summer intern Sarah leading a summer bike ride.

Center: Assistant Director, Matthew, going over hours sheets with bike shop youths.

Bottom left: Senior Interns Christian and Wanya’ have been quite the tandem.

Bottom Right: University of Chicago Physics students testing the strength of our youths’ egg protectors.

Below: A scene from the 61st Street indoor market!

Building Bikes and Earning Aprons

Blackstone Bicycle Works’ youth program and community bike shop has had its most active year yet! Blackstone’s summer program was full of kids and bikes, community rides, beach trips, controlled chaos at the pool, bike physics and engineering workshops (taught by University of Chicago physics grad students), free summer meals, the celebration of newly donated parts, homemade bike part fidget spinners, and the

Bud Billiken Parade. The whirlwind of activity culminated with a trip to the ‘Art of the Bicycle’ exhibit at the Museum of Science and Industry. We’re especially grateful for the contributions of our tremendous interns, Remy and Sarah. Following a successful summer, Blackstone’s fall after-school program is flourishing! The program’s many new participants have brought with them incredible energy and passion.



Experimental Station Tenants

Experimental Station's **Small Business Incubation** program provides discounted rents, technological and administrative assistance, and a broad network of relationships to a number of fledgling non-profits and small businesses each year. In 2017, we provided discounted rent for office and retail space to the Invisible Institute, City Bureau, South Side Weekly, Build Coffee and Civic Projects, as well as fiscal sponsorship to City Bureau, South Side Weekly and Creative Chicago Reuse Exchange.

Invisible Institute

The Invisible Institute has continued their work with City Bureau. Their civic tracker project tracks the Chicago Police Department's use of force documents, the police accountability task force report, and the independent police review authority. They also updated their Citizens Police Data Project (which tracks police misconduct reports). They reviewed the legal, tech, data, and design challenges behind this update for one of City Bureaus weekly public newsrooms.

Jamie Kalven led a community discussion with the head of the Independent Review Police Authority (IRPA) on the future of police accountability. Jamie also held a conversation with Norm Stamper, former head of

the Seattle Police Department and police reform advocate. Jamie Kalven's "Code of Silence," a deep investigation into the culture of corruption and protection in the Chicago Police Department, won numerous awards and even more praise. A follow up piece was published in the Intercept in May. They've contributed to five exonerations of people wrongfully convicted due to false arrests by Sgt. Watts and his team.

Looking forward, the Invisible Institute is co-producing a feature-length documentary—The Blue Wall: Killing Laquan McDonald. They're also developing a podcast series! The central voice is a bereaved mother who's investigating her son's mysterious death and the police encounter surrounding it.

City Bureau

City Bureau, a civic journalism project where community members and journalists collaborate, has had quite a year. A 50k grant from the Knight Foundation helped them hire Andrea and Darryl full-time. City Bureau also sold out their first fundraiser, the Soap Box Ball. That same week, they submitted their 501c3 application! Their fellowship teams have reported on segregation, 911 calls, police reform, and South Side development. Their reporting on lead even won a Lisagor award! Their Documenters Program has continued to pay community members to inform and engage their communities, they continue to hold weekly public newsrooms—discussions and workshops on local issues and journalism practices.

Build Coffee

After nearly a year of serving cold brew concoctions at the 61st Street Farmers Market, and months of zoning limbo, Build Coffee finally opened in June! The shop now offers a full coffee menu from HalfWit Coffee Roasters and light food from local partners like Justice of the Pies, Publican Quality Bread, and Fabiana's Bakery.

Since opening, Build has hosted over 60 events, including a weekly Public Newsroom with City Bureau, monthly story times at the 61st Street Market, and monthly game nights with Game Changer Chicago. The shop's bookstore has grown to include hundreds of used books and a curated selection of zines, art books, and chapbooks from mostly-local presses and independent artists.

South Side Weekly & Common Ops

The South Side Weekly just celebrated its fifth year publishing arts, culture, and politics journalism on Chicago's South Side. In celebration, the Weekly hired its first business manager, Jason!

Some highlights from the Weekly's past year of investigations include: a piece on vacant lots across the South Side; a photo essay on a lowrider festival; a history of chess on the South Side; an in depth report on the redevelopment of the State Street corridor; a proposal for South Side transit; and an investigation into Theaster Gates' nonprofits – as well as their annual nature, food, arts, housing, holiday, and Best of the South Side issues.

The Weekly also has ramped up its audio, thanks in large part to new

radio producer Erisa Apantaku. They host a weekly radio show every Tuesday at 3 on WHPK, and their archive is on SoundCloud.

2017 also saw the South Side Weekly start a new program! Common Ops provides administrative support to independent civic and cultural projects. Common Ops helps small nonprofits and businesses operate by pooling resources. Together they can operate as efficiently as larger organizations with a dedicated back office team. Common Ops doubles as a training program for young people to learn bookkeeping, project management, and professional writing skills. The Invisible Institute, South Side Weekly, and City Bureau all currently use Common Ops to manage their back office work!



Top left: Build Coffee hosting a City Bureau public newsroom on reproductive rights.
Top right: City Bureau's fundraiser, the Soap Box Ball, came the same night that DNA Info, a vital local news source, closed.

Center left: Market volunteer RJ leading a chef demo on making kimchi with Market cabbage!

Center right: Selling veggies at the Lincoln Square Farmers Market, a Link Up partner.
Bottom left: Maxwell after winning the category 4/5 race at the Illinois State Cyclocross Championships!

Bottom Right: Former Justice Minister of France, Christiane Taubira, visiting the shop.



Arts and Events at the Experimental Station

This past year showcased collaborations between our bike shop youth and artists. In May, we hosted our inaugural **Bike Shop Art Show**. Instructional zines, handpainted signs, and photo-documentary projects made with teaching artist, Tita Thomas, were all on display. The show also featured the drawings and the lovingly adorned bicycle of our deceased friend and volunteer, Tommie Hollins. In September, **The Seldoms** contemporary dance company

performed a work in progress, preceded by a bike shop talent show. The Seldoms show featured backdrops produced by artist **Faheem Majeed** with bike shop youth. They made these backdrops, which doubled as dance props, by modifying bicycles to print paint onto 80 foot sheets of fabric.

Experimental Station hosted two events in response to the heightened focus on South Side develop-

ment. In January we hosted "**Promising Developments: Designing Presents and Futures for the South Side**," a day-long conference and conversation produced with Terreform. The event brought together 16 activists, planners, and doers to share challenges and best practices. In July, we hosted a community conversation for questions, criticisms, and ideas about South Side development (including the Obama Library).



Intergenerational Perspectives Series

Our Intergenerational Perspectives Series amplified the everyday intergenerational experiences of the building. These events exploring youth, parenting, support networks, mentorship, and activity were open to all ages. The teenage girls of **Youth for Black Lives** produced a "Youth Teach-in," sharing their skills and research with peers and guests. Artist,

mother, and activist, **Wisdom Baty**, hosted a workshop and exhibition focusing on women of color makers and their support. International music ensemble, **Saffron Caravan**, spoke of their musician mentors from their youth. **Little Brothers — Friends of the Elderly** hosted a gathering connecting elders and youth over food and artmaking. **The South Side**

Home Movie Project screened vintage home movies, as well as a film produced by local high schoolers from the same footage. **Selina Trepp** offered an artist talk about integrating her artist practice with parenthood. An all-ages performance with her partner, Dan Bitney, as **Spectralina**, followed!

Food Education: From the Ground Up

How old were you when you first planted or harvested a vegetable? When you learned knife skills? When you cooked your own meal from scratch? At the Experimental Station we know how vital it is to introduce kids to these experiences. This exposure instills an ongoing enthusiasm for healthy eating and sustainability. 2017 marked our 10th year providing food education curriculum for 2nd, 3rd, and 4th graders from the neighboring Andrew Carnegie Elementary! From healthy eating workshops to gardening in our hoop house, students learn that growing and consuming fresh fruits and veggies benefits our bodies and the environment. Our hands-on afterschool cooking classes complete the farm to table cycle. This experience empowers youth with a full understanding of where food comes from, and they get to eat delicious, seasonal creations. This year, they learned to prepare recipes like beet

and sweet potato chips and roasted asparagus salad!

We've also expanded our relationship with our neighbors at Jackson Park Terrace (JPT) apartments. We continue our work with the hoop house-hosting harvest parties and workshops, and providing space for residents to grow their own food. In addition, we led a series of successful crockpot cooking classes for JPT adults. Each resident who completed the class got their own crockpot, cutting board, and knife. This way they can use their new knowledge and skills in their homes. Participants learned (and tasted!) 7 recipes in all, gathered together in the first JPT Slow Cooker Cookbook.

Our new Market Manager, Wendy, is eager to continue these special relationships. She looks forward to helping learners young and old stay passionate about vegetables!



First Cyclocross Overnight Trip

This November, the Blackstone cyclocross team had its first ever overnight! Two days of racing hosted by Pheasant Run Resort gave the team the opportunity to hit the road. Our U-haul filled with bikes, bags, and snacks, we set out for a great weekend.

Although the weather and riding conditions weren't ideal, it wouldn't be Midwest cyclocross without freezing winds and pits of mud. Spirits remained high despite the temps being down. It's hard not to have fun when huddled around a propane heater swapping stories of falls or advice about what line to take on the next pre-ride.

We've had a terrific community coalesce around the Blackstone Team this season, allowing Blackstone to field our largest team ever. We are grateful to everyone who made the cyclocross season so successful. Cut Cats Couriers and Comrade Cycles have always shared their tents, heat, and good vibes. We're especially thankful for Maria Larkin, Sam Scipio, and Aaron Swanton for their leadership, guidance, and chaperone help throughout the season.

We depend on the community to be able to provide opportunities like the cross team. Based on the generosity of so many this year, we're hopeful that we can offer many more opportunities for years to come.

—DJ, Youth Program Coordinator



Above: Madeline rewarding a young slowcooker with a crockpot after attending all three classes.

Right: Miss Cathy picking lettuce with one of her students.

Bottom right: "Let us eat lettuce!"



Looking Forward to 2018

From our start, we've aimed to fill the Experimental Station with people, projects, programs, and possibility. However, in the past couple of years, it's become clear that too many people, projects, and programs can yield diminishing returns. More, this abundance can leave no room for possibility—or for even making a phone call! Thus, with the help of IFF, we undertook an expansion feasibility study this past year. Out of that study, we applied to the City of Chicago to acquire a vacant fire station

and lot three blocks south. Our vision is to add a second location and to connect the two buildings and people in them. This connection would be physical (by a path) and programmatic (by links, collaborations, and exchanges). We're fortunate to have aldermanic and community support for the project. We hope that in 2018 we'll see City approval and a successful capital campaign, allowing us to rehabilitate a long-neglected community resource. We're excited by the promise of new possibilities!



Grants, Individual Donors, and Foundation Support

December 2016 - November 2017

\$450,000+

USDA Food Insecurity Nutrition Incentives (FINI) Program

\$75,000 - \$150,000

Anonymous Foundation
City of Chicago
The Chicago Community Trust
The Greer Foundation

\$20,000 - \$49,999

Anonymous Foundation
Clifford and LaVonne Graese Foundation
Leo S. Guthman Fund

Polk Bros. Foundation
Illinois Department of Agriculture

\$10,000 - \$19,999

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\$5,000 - \$9,999

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\$1,000 - \$4,999

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Lashana Jackson and Faheem Majeed

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Julie-Marie Lemon and Heinrich Jaeger
Joan and Jeff Matthews
Gail and Andrew Marks
Regency Home Health Care

Bruce Sagan and Bette Cerf Hill
T. Rowe Price Program for Charitable Giving
Lawrence and Sherian Washington Family Foundation

Support Our Work

Experimental Station is not only supported by financial gifts, but also the gift of time. We are deeply grateful for our volunteers, especially at our 61st Street Farmers Market and Blackstone Bicycle Works. Thank you for your hard work! If you would like to volunteer, learn more at experimentalstation.org/get-involved.

Many supporters have also given to Blackstone Bicycle Works in the form of in-kind donations. Whether it be a bike, parts, after school supplies, or even gear for our cyclocross team, your generosity has not gone unnoticed. Thank you for helping the bike shop continue!

Greer Challenge

As the end of year draws near, please consider donating to Experimental Station and its programs. You can do so at experimentalstation.org/donate, or via check to Experimental Station. **Thanks to a matching pledge from Greer Foundation, your end-of-year gift will be doubled!**



\$100 - \$499

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our mission

The Experimental Station is an independent, not-for-profit incubator of innovative cultural projects and small-scale enterprises. It seeks to maintain a diverse and interdisciplinary balance of participants and activities. Areas of primary interest include, but are not limited to, art, ecology, food culture, cultural criticism, independent publishing and alternative models of education.

In addition to the Experimental Station's own range of programs, its facilities provide essential resources enabling new, vulnerable initiatives to stabilize and flourish. These resources include: workspaces at discounted rents, information networks, tools and technical support.

support and donation

Please consider helping us build the Experimental Station into a more sustainable operation by making a financial contribution. More information and a credit card donation form can be found online at: www.experimentalstation.org.

Blackstone Bicycle Works accepts donations of used bicycles, parts, equipment, and tools. Drop off any donations at the shop during normal business hours: 1-6 PM, Tuesday-Friday; 12-5 PM, Saturday.

Volunteers are vital to the success of our programs. If you are interested in supporting our programs as a volunteer, contact us at info@experimentalstation.org.

visit the station

The Experimental Station is located at 6100 S Blackstone Ave, in the Woodlawn neighborhood, south of Hyde Park and the University of Chicago. We are located near Metra stations and CTA #2, #6, #59 buses. The building is wheelchair accessible. For more information contact us at:

773-241-6044

info@experimentalstation.org

www.experimentalstation.org

