

BRONZEVILLE

CENTER FOR THE ARTS

Presentation to Bronzeville Advisory Committee
January 10, 2022



Gallery 507 West North Avenue Milwaukee, WI 53212



BCA: Project overview

- Blight remediation in Bronzeville Cultural and Entertainment District
- Building redevelopment project (.18 acres, 6,550 SF)
- Estimated budget \$1M to \$1.5M (construction, soft costs, FFE, art installations)
- Building to be gifted by anonymous donor to BCA for its planning office

BRONZEVILLE

CENTER FOR THE ARTS

BOARD MEMBERS | PLANNING COMMITTEE



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DELLA WELLS
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TESFAGIORGIS**
Board Member



MUTÓPE J. JOHNSON
Project Manager



JONATHON PROWN
Project Support



ROSE CAMARA
Research Assistant



Kristen Hardy, President

- Resident of Halyard Park
- Local attorney
- Milwaukee Times Black Excellence honoree
- Past-president Wisconsin Association of African American Lawyers
- Wisconsin Supreme Court Lawyer appointee

Kristen D. Hardy is an attorney and community volunteer based in the Halyard Park neighborhood of Milwaukee, Wisconsin. Hardy works as the Assistant General Counsel & Assistant Secretary at a Fortune 100 life insurance and financial services company, where she specializes in legal matters related to risk-based products and other related operations and transactions. She previously worked as legal counsel and global integrity manager at various international manufacturing organizations — leveraging her expertise in global corporate compliance, training and policy development, internal investigations, anti-bribery, and project management to promote ethical company cultures.

In 2021, Hardy stepped into her leadership role with the BCA, after moving to the Halyard Park neighborhood situated within Bronzeville. With a strong interest in Black culture, art, and Bronzeville’s history, Hardy’s work with the Center focuses on building an educational hub, community center, and space for growth opportunities. As the BCA’s Board President, Hardy leverages her diplomatic problem solving and negotiation skills to connect and collaborate with members of the Milwaukee community, strengthen the BCA’s recruitment efforts, and pinpoint local leaders and partners to actualize the organization’s mission.

Deeply involved in her local community, Hardy is a past-president of the Wisconsin Association of African-American lawyers; and in 2015, she founded Brunch of Professionals, a networking organization to forge meaningful connections between women that spur professional and personal development.

In 2019, Hardy was appointed by Wisconsin Governor Tony Evers to the Judicial Selection Advisory Committee, and she is currently a Wisconsin Supreme Court appointee to the Wisconsin Lawyer Regulation System’s Preliminary Review Committee. In this role, she reviews complaints against attorneys to ensure they’re following best practices and upholding the court’s ethical guidelines.

Hardy’s professional experiences and personal pursuits have earned her distinctions such as Milwaukee Business Journal 40 Under 40 honoree, Top Corporate Counsel: Rising Star, Wisconsin Law Journal’s Up & Coming Lawyer, and a Milwaukee Times Black Excellence honoree. Hardy holds a B.A. from Seton Hall University and a J.D. from Marquette University Law School.

BIOGRAPHY



Della Wells, Vice President

- Born and raised in Bronzeville
- Self taught visual artist with 30 years’ experience
- Founding member of ABEA artists group
- Bronzeville Artwalk organizer with Historic King Drive BID #8
- Has art in Public and Private collections nationwide and internationally

Della Wells, born in Milwaukee in 1951, is a self-taught artist and the BCA’s Board Vice President. Wells’ work with the BCA stems from a desire to educate the public about the art of African diaspora. An advocate for African American artists and intergenerational mentorship, the BCA builds upon Wells’ previous work with African American Artists Beginning To Educate Americans About African American Art (ABEA).

Wells started her visual art practice seriously at age 42 and has since grown a body of work in mixed media that is collected and exhibited throughout the United States and abroad. Her collage, paintings, drawings, quilts, and hand-sewn dolls explore the historical, social, and political layers of African American women characters through complex visual storytelling. In addition to her own family history, Wells takes inspiration from the popular culture she grew up with, such as television shows, fairy tales and mythology, and more recently, cable news. Her work comes alive as visual folklore, carrying personal and collective meaning.

Wells is represented by the Portrait Society Gallery in Milwaukee, Mainstreet Gallery in Clayton, GA, Mason Fine Arts in Atlanta, GA, and Marcia Webber in Wetumpka, AL. Her art appears in over 100 private and corporate collections and her dolls, cards, and collages are sold at The Smithsonian’s National African Museum of History and Culture and the Intuit Center for Outsider Art in Chicago.

Wells illustrated the children’s book *The Electric Train* by Nanci Mortimer. Her work also appears in many print publications including *Permission To Paint Please: A 150 Year History of African American Artists* in Wisconsin by Evelyn Patricia Terry and *Self Taught, Outsider and Fold Art: A Guide to American Artists, Locations and Resources* by Betty-Carol Sellen, and the forthcoming book *Black Collagists* by Teri Hendreson. Recent exhibitions include *Her Story, My Dreams: The Images of Della Wells* at Loyola University Museum of Art, Chicago and *Another Happy Mambo Day: The Invented Worlds of Della Wells* at the Wright Museum, Beloit, WI.

Wells’ life inspired the play *Don’t Tell Me I Can’t Fly*, commissioned by First Stage Children’s Theater in Milwaukee and written by Y. York. The play was selected to receive a staged reading at the New Visions New Voices festival at The Kennedy Center in Washington, D.C. It is also published by Dramatic Publishing Company and continues to be produced at venues throughout the country.

BIOGRAPHY



Mutòpe J. Johnson, Project Manager

- Born and raised in Bronzeville
- Bronzeville mural installed in 324 West North Avenue
- Visual artists for 30 years' experience
- Art and Design Lecturer at UW – Whitewater
- Co-founder of Strive Media Institute
- Dave Project Gallery permanent exhibit at Milwaukee Art Museum

Mutòpe j. johnson, born and raised in Milwaukee’s Bronzeville Neighborhood in 1954, has been deeply involved in the arts and museum community in the region since he won a scholarship from the Milwaukee Art Museum as a child. Johnson serves as project manager on the BCA’s Planning Committee, helping to shape the organization as an artist and cultural leader. A nationally recognized figurative painter, Johnson’s body of work elevates historical traces of African American individuals and culture through imagination, archival research, and creative storytelling. He is also an esteemed arts educator devoted to a legacy of generosity, and currently teaches at the University of Wisconsin Whitewater – Arts & Communication Department.

Johnson’s paintings have been collected and commissioned by corporate, private, and museum entities and exhibited widely at museums and galleries. He notably employs indigo pigment as the skin tone for the African American figures in his paintings. The use of the color blue embodies dignity and connects centuries of symbolic meaning between American craft traditions developed by Black artisans, indigo’s history as a cash crop, and the Blues, one of America’s great original art forms.

In 2015, the Chipstone Foundation commissioned Johnson to create a series of paintings for *The Dave Project Gallery: Exploring African American Material Culture* at the Milwaukee Art Museum. Johnson’s contribution illuminates deeply researched and imagined portrayals of the African American artisans and craftspeople whose work has shaped American material culture and been collected by museums without attribution. This series emerged from his relationship with the Chipstone Foundation during the planning stages of artist Theaster Gates’ MAM exhibition, “*To Speculate Darkly*,” an exploration of the prolific African American ceramicist Dave the Potter.

Johnson is a distinguished Imagining America P.A.G.E. Fellow Scholar and a 2014 Dedalus Foundation Award nominee. In addition to his career as a painter and educator, Johnson has worked in advertising and design communications as a creative director and senior art director. Johnson holds an M.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, Peck School of the Arts – Department of Art & Design and a B.F.A. from the University of Wisconsin Whitewater – Art & Design Department.

MISSION

Operate an arts and cultural center rooted in the African diaspora that nurtures the next generation of artists and arts professionals and invites the public to explore their inherent creativity through exhibitions, education, and immersive artistic programming.

VISION

Elevate the human capacity for creativity and knowledge, expand Bronzeville's legacy as a vibrant artistic hub of the Midwest, and make art of the African diaspora a central focus in the cultural consciousness of present and future generations.

BCA PROMISES...

- Deliver programming that centers the art, culture, and history of the African diaspora.
- Provide an inviting and accessible space for learning and cultural exchange.
- Enthusiastically receive and respond to feedback from our audience.
- Contribute to the cultural and economic growth of Bronzeville.



BRONZEVILLE
CENTER FOR THE ARTS

BCA Zine Project



Zine Cover



Inside spread

BCA Zine Project

BRONZEVILLE CENTER FOR THE ARTS

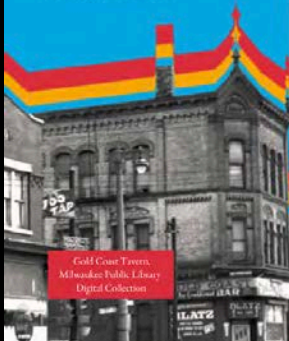
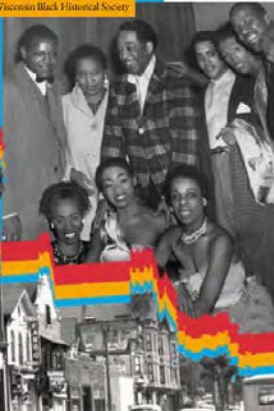
THE ENTERTAINMENT DISTRICT

During the Jim Crow era, early 1900s to mid 1950s, African-Americans were not allowed in the white clubs and hotels downtown. Thus, African Americans created their own vibrant entertainment district in Bronzeville, the neighborhood between Brewer's Hill/Halyard Park and Haymarket was the center of Milwaukee's jazz district.

When white patrons were attracted to the Jazz and Blues offered by Black clubs, the Bronzeville entertainment district became one of the few points of racial integration in Milwaukee in the first half of the 20th century. The few spots that did were referred to as Black and Tan clubs. Ironically white entertainment establishments did not often return the favor.

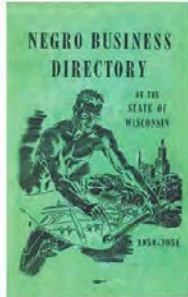
However, The Metropole was the first Bronzeville club to attain popularity in the 1920s, and the Flame 1352 N. 9th Street, and Moon Glow 1222 N. 7th Street, were two that lasted the longest. Other clubs included the Blue Room, the Chateau, the Celebrity Club, the Gold Coast Tavern, the Intrigue, the Milwaukee Club, Mr. Jimmy's Place, Morri's, the Pelican Club, the Polk A-Dot Ranchos, Savoy Tap 710 W. Walnut St., the 711 Club, T Joes, Thelma's Back Door, Trocadero, and the White House.

Dale Ellingson, Wisconsin Black Historical Society



Gold Coast Tavern, Milwaukee Public Library Digital Collection

The Bronzeville community contained inexpensive places to eat, tailor shops, and barbershops where a man could get a decent haircut. After hours, African American patronized nightclubs, taverns, and even funeral home services benefited from the population in and around Bronzeville.



The men worked heavy, physical jobs during the day in factories and then came home and worked the evening hours if they had a growing start-up business of their own. The women worked long hours as domestic workers to earn a precious living and support the family as well. Many of these Black owned businesses were listed in the Wisconsin version of the famously known "The Green Book, Negro Business Directory."



Image of Alvin Duns Shoppo, Milwaukee Greenbook

Inside spread

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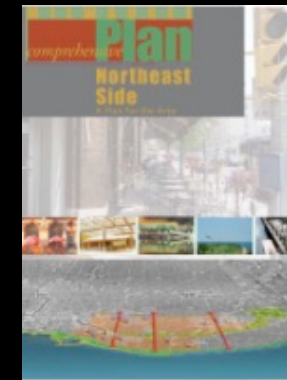
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Inside spread

BCA: Vision alignment with area plans

- The Bronzeville Cultural and Entertainment District Redevelopment Plan Amendment Number 2 (2005)
- Bronzeville Community Visioning Sessions (2007)
- Northeast Side Comprehensive Plan (2009)
- Bronzeville Area Redevelopment Charette (2013)
- Equitable Growth Through Transit Oriented Development



BCA: Gap Analysis & Conclusions

- Lack of knowledge about African American art, art history, and artists
- Lack of Black arts spaces in Milwaukee and Wisconsin
- Black institutions have difficulty maintaining financial sustainability
- BCA could coexist with any other arts organizations that help fulfill the vision of Bronzeville African American Arts and Cultural District

BCA: Research & Planning Partners

LORD CULTURAL RESOURCES (New York- based)

- Key informant workshops (Nationwide)
- MKE community workshop Interviews

OLU AND COMPANY (New York- based)

- Brand Positioning and Public Relations

CREATE FORWARD (Philadelphia- based)

- Operations and staff development

NEW YORK STATE COUNCIL ON THE ARTS, New York, NY



STUDIO MUSEUM IN HARLEM, New York, NY



NATIONAL MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY AND CULTURE, Washington, DC



BCA: Addressing findings for research


- Showcase art and culture from Black artists across the globe
- Offer opportunities for individuals to learn about art, art history, and artists of the African Diaspora
- Create an accessible space for gathering and cultural exchange
- Offer exhibitions, programming, workshops, and more that appeal to a wide range of audiences
- Enrich the Bronzeville community

BCA: Core Values

Truth Telling

Bronzeville Center for the Arts advances the art and culture of the African diaspora. The Center also devotes its resources to thinking critically about the historical context of African American art and culture as well as making this knowledge accessible to all.

- Intergenerational engagement
- Creativity
- Collaboration – looking forward to these opportunities with other area organizations
- Expansive Programming



QUESTIONS & ANSWERS

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