

The deteriorating facade of the Lyric Theater, on the corner of E. 3rd Street and Elm Tree Lane in Lexington. Photo: Lisa Schroot.

The East End

Does the past improve the present?

By Andrew Battista

The Third Street Corridor, which intersects Lexington's East End Neighborhood, is a place where people are negotiating what it means to commemorate a community's historical legacy. At one end of the Corridor sits the Lyric Theatre, a derelict structure that operated from 1948-1963 and hosted performances by Redd Foxx, Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, and other African American icons. Several blocks down Third Street, near the corner of Race Street, sits a vacant lot. A sign tells passers-by that the plot is the future home of the Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden.

In the three years that I have lived in Lexington's East End, I have seen activists, local residents, and council representatives approach the project of revitalizing Lexington's poorest neighborhood by injecting it with some historical significance. Or, more accurately, we have tried to highlight the significant lives, events, and traditions that have always been attached to the neighborhoods adjacent to Third Street and place them within Lexington's larger historical heritage.

However, as the Lyric Theatre and the Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden suggest, savoring the past may not be the most appropriate way to address the concerns of the present. I wonder at times if these projects really do make the quality of life in the East End better, or if they are merely gauges by which community activists can judge the "progress" of our neighborhood.

Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden

The Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden is an ongoing project made possible by a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and it seeks to recognize African Americans' contribution to Lexington's thoroughbred industry and the sport of horse racing in general. Not many people realize that thoroughbred racing's most successful jockeys are black, or that Third Street is but a stone's throw away from the Kentucky Association Race Track's original site. There Isaac Murphy, whom the African American scholar Anne Butler calls the Michael Jordan of jockeys, dominated racing more than anyone in any era.

The garden starts the proposed Legacy Trail, which will run along Third Street, continue to cross through

downtown, and eventually terminate at the Kentucky Horse Park. The trail is part of a funding initiative geared toward celebrating the lasting legacy of the 2010 World Equestrian Games in ways that will have a restorative effect on Lexington well after the two week equine festivities have come and gone.

I find it remarkable that Murphy's success mostly has gone unnoticed by Bluegrass citizens who pridefully inhabit the "horse capital of the world." A rider who revolutionized his sport, Murphy won three Kentucky Derby races from 1884 to 1891 (and so became the first person ever to accomplish a Derby three-peat). He won 44 percent of the time he raced, a rate that sport aficionados say will never be eclipsed. And, Murphy was inducted with the Horse Racing Hall of Fame's first cohort.

During his career, horseracing fans praised Murphy by calling him the "Colored Archer," after a successful English jockey who raced contemporaneously. Murphy lived at a time when many sections of society could only recognize him in terms of what his white colleagues could accomplish. He died in Lexington in 1896 without fanfare. Several years ago, after a lengthy search, several historians located his grave in the nondescript African Cemetery No. 2, a few blocks from the proposed garden.

continued on page 8

Affordable housing is a public good

By Beth Connors-Manke

The sanctuary was large. The choir was small but earnest. The crowd, large, earnest, and disciplined. If the group's requests were denied, they had been instructed to give a resounding silence to show disappointment. No booing, no tittering. Stern silence. Church folk know how to take cues in church. When Mayor Jim Newberry did deliver his "No," there was silence. It did not feel good.

On Monday, March 23, 2009, BUILD (Building a United Interfaith Lexington through Direct Action) had its Nehemiah Action Assembly at Immanuel Baptist Church on Tates Creek Road. BUILD's Action Assembly was at Immanuel Baptist because the group needed space: more than 1,300 people were to show up in support of two causes. The first cause—an agenda item that went smoothly and garnered applause rather than silence—regarded a health care consortium BUILD was advocating in Lexington. The interfaith social justice organization wanted more health care for adults with little or no insurance. It was the second cause that quieted the crowd.

BUILD wanted Mayor Newberry to commit revenue to an Affordable Housing Trust Fund (AHTF). This pool of money would go towards rental, transitional, and emergency housing assistance. As well, the fund would allow other entities to develop affordable permanent housing projects.

In particular, BUILD asked the mayor, "Will you, consulting with the Urban County Council, recommend a funding source for the AHTF recommended by your Commission, with this plan totaling at least \$3 - \$5 million of dedicated annual revenue?"

"Not at this time," said Newberry.

I was at this meeting, I heard the mayor's answer. I sat uncomfortably in silence with everyone else. If my memory serves me correctly, Mayor Newberry then rattled off the city's current deficit, a long number that I think he had memorized. He was ready to say this number.

Part of me sympathized. I wouldn't want to be any elected official in this current economic crisis. But, as Reverend Ron Luckey, co-chair of BUILD and pastor of Faith Lutheran Church, said, "it is more difficult to be Tina

Whitlock in these times." Tina Whitlock had just given her personal testimony about the difficulties of being on the bottom rung of Lexington's economic ladder. This is a bottom rung on which a working adult struggles to pay her rent and afford groceries.

In short, it's harder to be a poor and marginally housed citizen than it is to be the mayor.

A Complex Picture

The complexity of the moment extended beyond the economic constraints weighing on the city. Last spring at BUILD's request, Mayor Newberry agreed to put together a taskforce on an AHTF. The commission, quick on its feet, issued a report by September 2008. In effect the mayor was saying "no" to his own committee's recommendations.

As its yardstick, the AHTF Commission defined affordable housing as "housing that requires families and individuals to pay no more than thirty percent (30%) of their income for housing and housing related costs." Rent has increased twice as fast as wages, and rental costs will grow by 33% in the second half of this decade, according to the report. To put this in perspective: rents increased by 9% from 2000-2005.

In its research, the AHTF Commission found that a two bedroom apartment in Lexington on the average cost \$533 in 2001. This year, the two bedroom average is \$727. By next year, the report projects that cost will increase to \$775.

Of the rental households in Fayette County, nearly 40% pay more than 30% of their gross household income on rent. This means that these households are not affordably housed. Worse yet, 18% of renter households pay more than 50% of their income for housing. These neighbors and citizens are in danger of being homeless if anything upsets their budgets.

As a 2003 report by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) notes, many of the households in the most dire straits have problems with housing despite being fully employed. The stress on this demographic is exacerbated by

continued on page 2



The South End Park Redevelopment. Photo: Lisa Schroot.

Contents

The Neighborhood	2	Film & Media	4	Sports	6
<i>Misadventures in gardening</i>		<i>A talk with George Maranville</i>		<i>Bike Polo and more! Grass-roots athletics</i>	
Education	3	Culture	5	Opinion	7
<i>The End of Tenure</i>		<i>Lexington, post-Dame</i>		<i>The Who and the Why</i>	

In the next issue

Brian Rich speaks to NoC on immigrant detention.
Beth Connors-Manke follows Ana Romero's story.
Michael Benton tells us how he values violent films.

The Neighborhood

North of Center is a periodical, a place, and a perspective. Keep reading to find out what that means.

Editor & Publisher
Danny Mayer

Features
Beth Connors-Manke

Film & Media
Colleen Glenn

Culture
Nick Kidd

Sports, Layout
Keith Halladay

Contributors
Andrew Batista
Michael Benton
Brian Connors-Manke
Lisa Schroot
Brian Turner

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Misadventures

On someone else's land

By Beth Connors-Manke

I don't know all that much about plants. I know enough to water my house plants weekly so they won't die and that I should be grateful for trees (I love trees) and all things green because they make it possible for me to be alive. Sometimes, when I'm forced to, I read nature poetry; you know, the kind in which the poet lists all kinds of names for all kinds of plants until you are—I am—bored to death. Truth be told, I could care less about singing the literary praises of the world green. Mostly what I want from a garden is something pretty to look at—COLOR!—and food to eat.

I know plenty of naturalists and local food movement advocates who would bemoan or disparage my anti-intellectual attitude toward plants and gardening. That's fine. I'm aware of my weakness and not ashamed because I still go play in the dirt. The organizers of the London Ferrell Community Garden on Third Street, despite my stubborn ineptitude, have graciously allowed me to spend some of my Saturdays hauling dirt and pulling weeds at the garden. In this column, I'll be chronicling my misadventures on someone else's land.

First, a prelude about the advent of the garden: it was "a pipe dream," conceived of by Sherry and Geoff Maddock, born of their walking around their neighborhood. They had eyed the space and wanted to see it yield food and community. Their hope, now a reality, was to develop an allotment-style garden allowing those without their own space to grow food and join with others. Because of geography and class, this area of the city has little access to fresh, healthy produce; gardening here is an act of social justice.

The creation of the garden required many partnerships, two of which are with Bob Voll of Christ Church Cathedral (which owns the land) and Ryan Koch of Seedleaf, a local non-profit. I expect to write more about these partnerships and London Ferrell, the namesake of the garden, in future missives. For now, you've been introduced to the main players in my chronicles. And I'm Beth.

Saturday #1: 25 April 2009

Today Sherry and Ryan were capturing the might of perhaps 30 volunteers who had come out to help plant trees and various berry bushes (names I heard: black and red currants, blue-

berries, blackberries, elderberry; some of these things are evidently brambles). During the time I was there, two jobs were available: back-breaking removal of turf and slightly less back-breaking running of the sod in wheelbarrows to another part of the garden. Lesson numero uno about gardening: it's bad for the back. Keep that in mind the next time you feel too idyllic about moving earth. It's hard and that's why we created machines.

I don't like machines all that much, though, so I was happy with the traditional, simple shovel and wheelbarrow method. The other volunteers almost immediately evoked shame in me (which I quickly hid) with their superior zeal and brawn. I'm a skinny girl with a bad back; however, I could manage the wheelbarrows (if they weren't overloaded) so I spent an hour rolling sod back and forth, occasionally getting sprayed with dirt as the real workers tossed the turf my way.

Saturday #2, 2 May 2009

Rained out. I lolled in bed instead.

Look for more of Beth's updates from the London Ferrell Community Garden in future issues.

Affordable housing (cont.)

continued from page 1

the shift in federal outlays for housing from affordable housing initiatives to policies such as federal tax deductions that benefit middle and upper income property owners.

The picture the AHTF commission limns is a complex picture of economic growth, federal subsidies, and local need. It is also unquestionably clear about one thing: Fayette County needs more mechanisms to deal with the increasing housing stress on low-income families and renters.

Case Study: Ingleside Mobile Home Park

In 2007 the private owners of Ingleside Mobile Home Park decided to sell the land to be redeveloped. On the west side of Broadway and between Red Mile and Mason Headley, the mobile home park's location made it a convenient spot for a student housing complex. The result: a displacement that taxed the resources of many of the park's residents, especially those who owned their mobile home but could not afford to move it.

Pastor Adam Jones was in the trenches with the residents of Ingleside, some of whom were his parishioners. Open Door Church, which Jones shepherds, is a small church nestled into a neighborhood of modest homes. Addison Avenue sits between The Red Mile and Picadome Golf Course. When I met with Jones early on a Wednesday morning, he was "putting out fires." There had been a snafu with keys, and there was a petitioner waiting for a check.

Also the co-chair of BUILD's housing committee, Jones brought his church's advocacy together with BUILD's organizational action. Through the church's community center in the mobile home park, Jones came to know the Ingleside residents and their plight: "Many of them were going to lose quite a bit of their investment," Jones said, because of the constraints on moving or placing a mobile home in Fayette County. "They were going to lose their mobile homes."

The dilemma for residents of Ingleside is illustrative. It highlights the bind in which low-income residents (in particular renters) find themselves here in Fayette County. Some of the most affordable housing in the city is being lost to redevelopment, some of which is fueled by the 2010 World Equestrian Games. The other issue seems to be

that private development has little—or feels little—responsibility to low-income residents. In the Ingleside case, Jones says residents felt "they weren't well informed about the change at all."

When Ingleside residents needed help, the Urban County Government had little ability to intervene in what was a private sale of land. Jones sees the AHTF as a bid for a stable, collective protection against the damage done by a lack of affordable housing.

"The thing I would say to Lexington residents," Jones said as our discussion came to a close, "is that the people who need affordable housing are citizens of our city. There are lots of citizens, over 8700 households, that pay over half their income for their rent, which means they are at high risk of being homeless."

"Often times people distanced from the problem will see the affordable housing problem for bums or people who are on welfare. That's just not the case. It's a problem affecting the person that is working at McDonald's; they work 40 hours a week but can't make enough money to pay their \$400-\$500 rent."

The Economics: Pushing People into the Margins

Those advocating for the AHTF often frame the issue as one of neighborly care and economics. The lack of affordable housing hurts the county economically. Without reliable, low-wage workers who can live near their jobs, local economic growth faces an "impediment," according to the AHTF Commission's report. Also cited in the report is the benefit to families who receive housing subsidies. Families can find and keep employment, creating more stability and, in the long run, exposing those families to "better employment opportunities."

In addition, for people with tight budgets and limited transportation options, location matters. Pushing low-wage workers farther from job opportunities or punctual public transportation threatens their ability to work.

There's yet another aspect to the issue of affordable housing: the tendency of high property and rental prices to push people out of the county. Jones saw a few Ingleside residents forced to re-settle their mobile homes outside Fayette County. But mobile home residents aren't unique in being shuttled out of the city.

Like Jones, Father John List of St. Peter Catholic Church serves on

BUILD's housing committee. List said that "this issue became concrete to me when I knew this couple who were both working; they had professional positions. When they started having a family, they looked around and said 'We can't afford anything in Lexington.' So they bought a house in Georgetown. I began to see this is how it costs Lexington." From their home in Georgetown, the wife must commute to Lexington and the husband to Frankfort.

Not only did Lexington lose a couple whom List respects and admires, but, in the priest's view, the city lost the couple's economic contribution to the community. "When they go to the store, they don't drive down to Lexington. There's a perfectly good Kroger, a perfectly good Wal-Mart in Georgetown. Why would they spend their money in Lexington?"

When List spoke at the BUILD action in front of the mayor and the assembled BUILD members, he linked care, economics, and justice.

"The plea that I put before the major at the Nehemiah Action was that churches are stand-ready to charity. Charity is a very important part of what churches are about. But justice is the striving for an equitable system. Justice is the construction of an equitable socio-economic system, and that's not something a church can do. That's something that public authorities are called to do."

Here's how much justice will cost Fayette County residents according to the commission's report: a 1% insurance premium tax increase that would yield approximately \$4 million in annual revenues for the AHTF. This premium tax would, on average, translate into about \$7.60 on homeowners insurance and \$7.42 on automobile insurance.

The commission considered a broad range of funding streams, giving city officials many dedicated public revenue sources to consider. After the Nehemiah Action Assembly, Mayor Newberry told Tom Eblen of the Herald-Leader that "he dislikes dedicated sources of funding for programs." Here's the argument that BUILD and the many other affordable housing organizations make for a dedicated revenue stream: it's reliable.

Reliable support for affordable housing can be seen in the long run as a legacy bequeathed to future generations of Lexington residents. It's a value we take up as a city and pay forward. It's also something we need right

now, in this moment, for people like Tina Whitlock and many others who are currently struggling.

Case Study: Davistown

The Davistown neighborhood in Lexington has very consciously considered its affordable housing legacy—but not without some pain, sacrifice, and belief. At a recent gathering of the Social Innovation Forum, Dorothy Coleman spoke of the Community Land Trust established in Southend Park area. A community liaison helping residents prepare for the Newtown Pike extension, Coleman told the audience at the forum, "I couldn't help residents believe in the Community Land Trust until I believed in it. It's a hard issue, especially since it has historically been so hard for African Americans to own land."

After the Civil War the area was home to freed slaves. Now, Davistown is one of the most distressed neighborhoods in the city, according to Coleman. Nonetheless, its members want to protect the fabric of their community. The biggest threat is the effect of the Newtown Pike extension, which will increase the value of the land near the new road, tempting developers.

While considering options for keeping the neighborhood intact, The Newtown Pike Extension Project Team lit on a community land trust as the best option for Davistown. In essence, the mechanism holds the 25 acres of the neighborhood in trust, making it unavailable to developers. A community board governs the trust, involving residents in the decisions made about their neighborhood.

The more innovative—and, for some, hard-to-swallow—aspects of the community land trust are that homeowners will not own the land under their homes and that a resale formula governs the selling price of the home. According to Newtown Pike Extension promotional literature, the "resale formula that is agreed to at the time of purchase [provides] a way for the homes to stay affordable for years to come and [serves] more limited-income families with fewer public dollars."

The same literature also claims that the community land trust can provide support services to its homeowners, will restrict absentee ownership, and allow "families who would otherwise not be able to purchase a home to do so."

continued on the next page

Education

The untenured academic

On the Board of Regents decision to end tenure at all KY community colleges

By Michael Dean Benton

Last April, I sat uncomfortably in my auditorium seat, listening to Bluegrass Community and Technical College President Augusta Julian joking about being warned, when she was initially hired, that when Kentucky Community and Technical College System President Michael McCall arrives in a helicopter it signals that a college president is about to be fired. My discomfort registered on multiple levels:

First, I understood my President's visible anxiety to be a clear manifestation of the uneasy relationship of an untenured professional in an intellectual environment. We, the faculty, had requested this meeting to discuss and debate the KCTCS Board of Regents recent decision to end tenure and deny health insurance for new faculty hires and she was making jokes about being unexpectedly fired? If the President of a college exhibits these professional anxieties, then what kind of intellectual freedom could we expect for an untenured, year-by-year, contract professor?

Second, I knew that KCTCS President Michael McCall was the highest paid community college system president in the nation and that he had a lavish benefit package with a very generous health package for his family, but did he really have a helicopter? I wondered was the helicopter a part of his benefit package; or, was it simply a KCTCS myth that engaged the helicopter as a symbolic representation of his swift discipline meted out to those that think differently?

Adding to my general discomfort at the inappropriate joke was my anger at President Julian's previous claim that we really didn't want a union at our college because they are single-minded in their pursuit of wages and benefits. She stated that this would be harmful to our overall college culture. Let me be clear, I am a member of one of the lowest paid community college faculties in the nation, so I would welcome anyone that pursued equitable wages and benefits for the staff and faculty. But what angered me was that I knew the statement about union influence on

college cultures to be at best misinformed and at worst a bald-faced lie.

My mother was the union representative for staff in the San Diego Community College system, at the time the largest community college system in the nation. I worked for a time as a union staff member in the same system and later I was a student at a unionized community college. My understanding of college culture, as a former community college staff member, paying student, and current professor, was that the cultivation of a healthy college culture is a primary responsibility of the college president working with administration, staff, faculty and students.

My personal experience with unions demonstrated to me that they definitely are not a detriment to the broader college environment; in fact, they increase the productivity of the workers. Unions provide security for the workers that allow them to concentrate on their direct professional responsibilities and goals. In the case of academia, the security of a decent wage, humane health care and incremental cost-of-living increases provides faculty with the security to devote their lives to researching their subjects, teaching their classes, advising their students, serving on system committees, and developing beneficial relationships with the local community.

Furthermore, in each and every unionized college community that I belonged to they were extremely competitive in recruiting faculty members. As a college student I took calculus classes with the professor who wrote the textbooks used by UCLA/Michigan University/Ohio State University, I took history and philosophy classes taught by Jesuit university professors from St. Louis University, and communication and accounting courses taught by professionals in those fields. All of them described the wonderful opportunities of teaching in their unionized community college. When I was a roofer for the San Diego Community College system I was amazed by the professionalism, courtesy and collegiality of the staff and faculty. As a Ph'D student I witnessed firsthand the success of the University of Illinois-Champaign grad-

uate students campaign to unionize. It transformed that college as it became a mecca for topflight graduate students because they knew that they would receive livable wages and health benefits while working for the University.

Contemporary unions, like the American Federation of Teachers (AFT), also directly engage the curricular, pedagogical and cultural concerns of college staff and faculty. Visit AFT's publication list online where you will come across American Educator (http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/american_educator/index.htm), along with journals on health issues, retirement issues and educational policy (<http://www.aft.org/pubs-reports/index.htm>). True, they have a strong emphasis on workplace advocacy—after all, they are a union—but a simple perusal of the content pages of these publications will demonstrate that they seek to contribute to the overall educational culture.

The KCTCS Board of Regents, in defiance of overwhelming KCTCS faculty opposition, a KCTCS Faculty Senate pro-tenure resolution, and state legislative questioning, voted to end tenure and health benefits for faculty hired after July 1, 2009. Currently 15 of 16 colleges in the Kentucky Community and Technical College System have overwhelmingly approved resolutions of no confidence in the Board of Regents and President McCall. The no confidence votes are not knee-jerk faculty disapproval of the ending of tenure and denial of health insurance to new hires, instead, the no confidence is a result of the process in which misleading information was used to justify ending tenure and the lack of public debate about the issue (<http://www.kentucky.com/591/story/790877.html>).

The Modern Language Association (MLA), The Chronicle of Higher Education, and Higher-Ed, leading professional associations/publications for graduate students and young professors have spoken out against the KCTCS BOR's decision and their online comments reflect that new professionals will not apply for KCTCS faculty positions (For example: <http://chronicle.com/forums/index.php?topic=58657.0>). The MLA

stated that the decision to end tenure will “undermine faculty governance and peer review, forestall curricular innovation, and impede the academic advancement of students.” The opponents against KCTCS BOR decision recently extended to an editorial in the Lariat at Baylor University, a Baptist university in Waco, TX, which argued that without tenure it will be difficult for KCTCS to hire quality educators and that what might appear as a “financial move” will actually cost the system's colleges as they cease to be places “of diverse learning.”

As a tweener, a tenure-track professor in a system that has ended tenure for future hires, there are many reasons for me to be concerned. What will be the future opportunities for students in a college system that will not be able to compete on the open-market for quality professors? What will happen to the overall faculty body as it becomes a highly migratory and mutable collection of professors looking to go somewhere else that provides better opportunities? How will the here-today, gone-tomorrow faculty problem affect professor-student and college-community relationships? How will I be able to interest the future professors we do manage to hire to get involved in community projects and volunteer activities? How will we deal with an increasingly marginalized faculty voice because untenured professors will always fear speaking honestly about institutional problems?

Yes, there were many reasons I felt uncomfortable during that presentation and why I worry about the future of my college. I decided to settle in Lexington, KY because I wanted to contribute to the community. I saw this as a great place to live and as a place that had potential for creative growth. I always wanted to teach at a community college. I applied at many colleges in different states. I accepted the position at BCTC because of the strong college community and the potential for regional growth. If I was faced with this college system that ended tenure and denied health insurance for new hires, I would never have applied at BCTC and I would have moved to another state.

Affordable housing (cont.)

continued from the previous page

It has become a traditional notion for Americans that the most accessible and reliable way for families to build wealth is to own a home and the land it stands on. Some research suggests that subsidizing the family who buys a home, rather than the home itself, helps the family but has little impact on affordable housing issues in the long run. This conundrum—help a family build wealth or maintain a horizon of affordable housing—is at the heart of the community land trust in Davistown. The neighborhood will be shielded from market forces to a degree, keeping the neighborhood affordable. But, it will also limit individual homeowner's wealth-building.

The community land trust must feel like uncharted waters for the residents of Davistown. The neighborhood is forging a new path in urban housing. The path is one of community cohesion and investment in place. If you start talking to people involved in rejuvenating—not necessarily redeveloping—neglected parts of the city, you begin to hear phrases like “a new sense of place,” “place-making,” (two terms Barry McNeas used at the recent Social Innovation Forum) or “living against hypermobility.”

This last phrase was voiced by Sherry Maddock as we chatted at Third Street Coffee. Maddock lives downtown and was invited to be part of the AHTF Commission because of

her position as president of the Martin Luther King Neighborhood Association. In talking about her and her husband Geoff's commitment to the downtown area, Maddock said, “We feel that there is longevity and fidelity that bears a lot of good things. A lot of good things come out of being unwilling to be hypermobile, which we're trying to live against. Hypermobility is devastating to the fabric of our society; we just tear up and move and move.”

The Costs of “Not at this time.”

Mayor Newberry's answer “Not at this time” has costs both economic and social for Fayette County.

The fact is, *not* having an adequate number of inexpensive housing units in Lexington costs the city money. According to the AHTF Commission's report, it costs the county approximately \$149 million each year. This comes in the way of “lost economic opportunity, stressed transportation infrastructure, and the direct and indirect social costs related to education and health care.” The report projects that the AHTF will in fact create jobs (448 in the first year and 176 each year after) and bring in additional local revenue in the millions.

The fact is, *not* having affordable housing rends the fabric of community that Maddock talks about. List, whose parish sits on Barr Street downtown, echoes the same sentiment: “If the economic system is geared toward merely having, only having, or primarily hav-

ing the well-to-do or those of greater resources, then in the long run it is harmful to the community as a whole.”

Sipping his tea as we finished our conversation, List said “Housing is more than just a private good.” I mulled that over as the priest escorted me out of the maze-like interior of the rectory. A small gaggle of kids in church clothes hung on the rail outside and were greeted with a boisterous “Hey, kiddos!” from the pastor.

If homes are our most private spaces, how is it that housing can be made into a public good?

In *Gone With the Wind*, Scarlett O'Hara's Irish immigrant father stands

against the horizon of their Southern, slave-holding plantation named Tara. On the eve of the Civil War, he passionately enjoins her to believe that it's just the land that matters: “Land is the only thing in the world worth working for, worth fighting for, dying for—it's the only thing that lasts.”

That's one Southern sense of place. Lexington has the potential to craft another sense of place, still southern, but also urban and more collective. An understanding that a vibrant community has the tenacity—even when the economic situation is difficult (and for some dire)—to commit strongly to a public good.



Plywood boards cover the windows of this Lexington property. Photo: Lisa Schroot.

The devil is in the details

Lexington filmmaker George Maranville sits down with North of Center to talk "B" movies, playing the game in Hollywood, and his latest projects in Kentucky

By Colleen Glenn

"I never wanted to be that guy," says George Maranville, referring to directors of Hollywood big-budget, blockbuster films. "I never really had a desire to get a studio job in Hollywood." A native of Lexington, Kentucky, Maranville is a jack-of-all-trades when it comes to filmmaking, alternating between directing, producing, writing, and editing. "What I'm trying to do more of is direct," he says.

Maranville is drawn to low-budget, independent movies, both in terms of the kinds of projects he takes on and what he likes to watch on his own time. Low budget films, according to Maranville, afford a greater degree of freedom to be "genuine to the material." And that sometimes means a greater license for eccentricity. "I've always had a fondness for weird films," Maranville admits, citing B film directors such as Richard Rush, Michael Ritchie, John Cassavetes, and H.G. Lewis as artists he admires. "I have a passion for the guys who reach out beyond their grasp and don't make it but are still happy with what they've got."

The influence of B films is undoubtedly partly responsible for the dark sense of humor and campy sensibility that shows up in Maranville's

"I have a passion for the guys who don't make it but are happy with what they've got."

movies. Yet, Maranville has a style that is uniquely his own. Part Southern Gothic, part urban grit, and part postmodern ironic, Maranville's work conjures the unsettling sensation that occurs when what is familiar suddenly appears strange.

Take, for example, Maranville's 2004 comedy, *Yeti Vengeance*. The seventeen-minute short, Maranville's self-described "homage to the cult film," centers around the power struggles of a few relatively powerless people to complete a B horror flick. The cast of characters—the frazzled film school geek director, the smarmy Hollywood producer, and the emotional leading actress—is made of stock types we have all seen before. But their intentional flatness becomes all the more hilarious in moments when Maranville reveals they are hardly less absurd when *not* acting. Only when all egos are stroked sufficiently will their movie be completed, and the climactic ending proves that in Hollywood a good take trumps any questionable efforts to secure it. Featured in the Official Selection of acclaimed film festivals such



Yeti Vengeance (2004), Maranville's "homage to the cult film," celebrates the seediness of the B horror flick. Photo courtesy George Maranville.

as the Los Angeles International, the Short Film Festival, and the Silverlake Film Festival, *Yeti Vengeance* reveals the grimy veneer on the movie business—and revels in it.

Reveling in movies—good, bad, and otherwise—is exactly what Maranville's current project is all about. "Brains on Film," a cable-access television program he and Larry Treadway pioneered (the show ran off and on from 1995-2002 until it, according to Maranville, "self-destructed") has been recently resurrected as a web program. The comedy show is dedicated to the critique and review of genre movies, with particular emphasis on cult, indie, exploitation, and horror flicks. Maranville and new co-host Jumpin' Joe Turner take turns choosing the show's theme—say, the war film—and each must argue his case for why his choice of film is the epitome of that genre.

Don't hold your breath waiting to hear much discussion about studio films like *Saving Private Ryan* or *Full Metal Jacket*. Operating under their shared consensus that "Hollywood sucks," Maranville and Turner are more likely to try to win you over on obscure films like *Deathdream* and *The Exterminator*, movies you likely haven't heard of but won't soon forget. Currently taping new episodes to be aired this summer, Maranville promises banter—delivered in costume that matches the show's theme, no less—that will entertain and support "underdog" movies.

It might be that Maranville's origins help explain his dedication to underdog film. Though his easy manner and self-confidence make him fit for LA, his quick wit and self-deprecating humor seem to spring from his humbler and more authentic hometown. Growing up in Lexington, Maranville remembers his older brother sneaking him into drive-in movies. After graduating from UK with a degree in telecommunications, Maranville worked for the Public Information Office in the Lexington-Fayette Urban County

Government and experimented with film projects in his spare time.

"I got interested [in making movies] in the age of what I would call the second-wave of independent film, about three or four years prior to *Clerks* and *Slacker* and all that," Maranville says. Describing the indie-friendly film market in the early 90s as "punk rock," Maranville notes that starting his career in that era inspired his "do-it-yourself approach" to filmmaking. Though he'd always hoped he could pursue filmmaking full time, he didn't think it would be possible, even when he began working on the feature film *100 Proof* (1997).

Producing and editing *100 Proof*, however, proved to be a full-time gig, prompting Maranville to quit his day job and focus entirely on film. Written and directed by Jeremy Horton, *100 Proof* is loosely based on the true story of five grisly murders committed in

go there again." "It was too dark to be palatable," he concedes. "The most passionate criticism we got of the film was that we condoned what they did," but Horton and Maranville felt their job was to represent the story realistically, not to pass judgment on the characters for their crimes. "It's inherent that murder is wrong. We don't have to judge," Maranville says, speaking to these criticisms. An early reviewer recognized the value of the film, but warned them, "Be careful about numbing your audience." At the time, Maranville remembers, he didn't quite understand what she meant, but now sees her point: "That's exactly what [*100 Proof*] did."

Working on the successful feature film, however, taught him a lesson that has become a kind of cardinal rule for Maranville: "Don't make anything that can't make its money back." Knowing the realities of the business better now than he did when he was starting out, Maranville feels a strong sense of responsibility to his investors to guarantee a profit. "Right now, I can't help but be conscious of the responsibilities I have as a filmmaker," Maranville says, describing how the faltering economy has only bolstered his pragmatic approach. And while making money off a movie is difficult, especially for an indie director, that problem can be resolved by making an inexpensive film. "As bad as the economy is," Maranville muses, "it's better [for filmmaking] than it was ten years ago. Distributors don't have all the power."

That shift in power has opened the market for independent film projects and opened up other locations for filmmaking as well. While there is no doubt that Hollywood remains the locus of the American film industry, several states have recognized that attracting filmmakers is a sure way to stimulate the local economy. The powers-that-be in Kentucky, Maranville hopes, will see the benefits of enticing filmmakers to shoot here. "They have to look at it as something that brings jobs," he comments. While the state government is supportive of local film efforts, "the incentives are not yet here to bring the industry. We gotta keep swimming upstream."

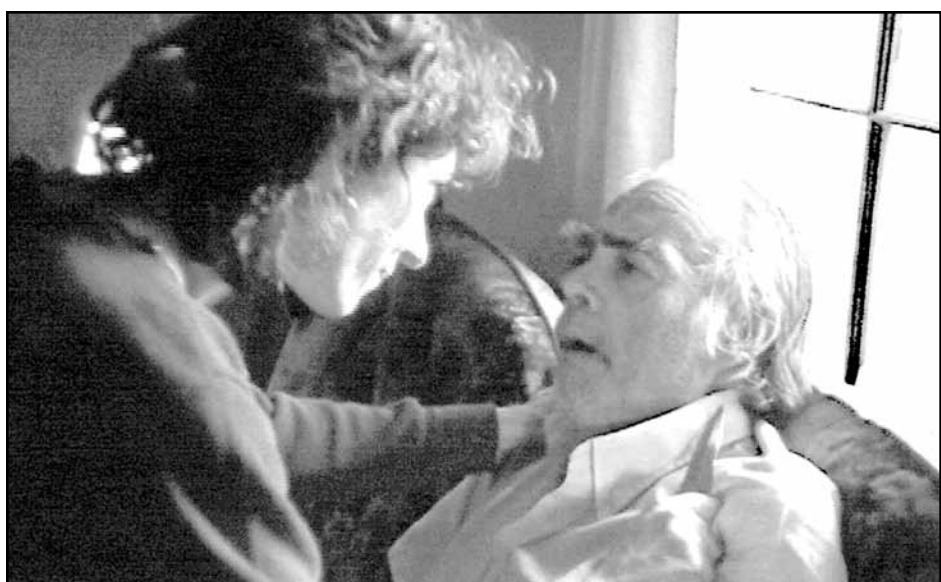
One of the states that grants tax incentives to filmmakers is Iowa, and Maranville is heading there this summer to finish his latest project, editing the feature film, *Sam Steele and the Junior Detective Agency*. The family film, starring Luke Perry and M. Emmet Walsh, draws on classic film noir tropes but boasts kid-friendly content. "It's a real cute script," Maranville says of the movie that is built for a series. "It's like a 'Hardy Boys' franchise." After making *Matchmaker Mary* in Kansas City last year with

100 Proof has a haunting effect on anyone who knows Lexington, as streets and storefronts become sites of shocking violence.

Lexington by LaFonda Fay Foster and her friend in 1986. The feeling of dread amasses, due in large part to Maranville's methodical and gradual scene transitions, until it finally erupts at the startling conclusion of the movie. Shot in Lexington, the film has a haunting effect on anyone who knows the town, as familiar streets and storefronts become transformed into sites of shocking violence.

The film, which premiered at the Kentucky Theater, received national critical acclaim—including Official Selection at the Sundance Film Festival in 1997 and screenings at South by Southwest Film Festival. *100 Proof* deserves serious props for its remarkable verisimilitude. Pamela Stewart, Jack S. Johnson, and Lexington's own Jim Varney (best known for his roles in the *Ernest* film series), deliver breathtakingly raw performances that continue to haunt the viewer long after the credits run.

But the persistent bleakness of *100 Proof* taxes its audience, a fact of which Maranville is aware. Looking back, Maranville admits he "wouldn't



A desperate Rae (Pamela Stewart) threatens Arco (Jack S. Johnson) in 100 Proof (1997), filmed in Lexington. Photo courtesy George Maranville.

continued on the next page

Culture

Lexington music, PDB

Surveying the musical landscape AC (*After Centerpointe*)

By Nick Kidd

Many Lexingtonians will flock downtown this summer for their nightlife fix—past an empty eyesore, once a nightlife nexus—to a transformed entertainment landscape. In the months since The Dame block's demolition, several businesses have jockeyed to capture crowds that once converged on the corner of Main Street and Upper. Today's column charts some of your options for catching live music in the Post-Dame Block (PDB) era.

Last June, I remember thinking that Lexington would be very boring during the PDB era. Where would I go for live music? (We'd lost Mecca, The Icehouse, and The Dame block in an 18-month span.) What would Lexington do at night without the faithful block? And who would make up for those lost venues? Fortunately, Lexington's nightlife options have proven themselves far more persistent than run-of-the-mill, shadowy foreign financiers. There's hardly been a lull in the action as a slew of downtown bars have sprung up since the ol' block crumbled.

Al's and The Green Lantern have taken up much of the PDB era slack. They modestly coexisted with the old block but now provide surrogate sanctuary for PDB refugees like me. How have these two northside haunts inherited PDB patronage? For starters, they provide the former block's essentials like savvy band booking and a relaxed environment (featuring decorum heavy on tacky beeraphernalia, throwback Americana, and plebian luxuries like pool and Pac Man). Both feel like taverns your dad would feel at home in; neither smacks of concert hall austerity.

Al's has prospered enough to open The Sidecar, the northside's answer to The Chevy Chase Inn, just around its corner. The Sidecar provides meager but precious performance space for up and coming bands and DJs while boasting a few delicious craft beers on tap. Behind Al's and The Sidecar sits CPR, a consignment shop and all-ages music venue that regularly features three or more acts a night. CPR gets music lovers in around 7pm and out around 10, giving them a chance to check out acts at Al's and The Sidecar without having to leave the block.

Maranville (cont.)

continued from the previous page

director Tom Whitus, the two decided to reunite for *Sam Steele* and chose Des Moines as an ideal shooting location. As an editor, Maranville is on set, cutting as they shoot. "It's amazingly helpful because you can make suggestions to the director as you go. Tom's a great director and a very collaborative person. My goal is to have this movie almost completely assembled—which means the scenes sort of laid out—before we get back and then I can cut it all summer."

When directing a film himself, Maranville relies on others for the same kind of collaborative criticism. "I might make a first cut," Maranville says. "I might assemble it, like this is a director's cut, this is how I see it, and then I'd let somebody tear it up. I put some stuff in my short film [*Yeti Vengeance*] that the producer wisely let me keep until the very eleventh hour when he finally sat me down and said George, 'these jokes aren't working,' and I was like, 'you know what you're right.' I was in love with what was on the page, and it didn't work."

Maranville seems to take the inevitable changes between script and screen in stride. Having worked in movies for a while now, he takes a no-nonsense approach to filmmaking that shows an awareness that most completed films probably owe more to successful nego-

Just a few blocks from nothing, er, the old Dame block, sits Victorian Square, a diverse collection of bars and restaurants in a convenient downtown hub. Daylighting as a museum of what was once considered "the mall," Victorian Square seeks to accommodate bar-hoppers and window shoppers by allowing drinks to be carried from venue to venue this summer. You can catch live music and DJ's at Lower 48, DeVassa, and The Loft nightclub, but if they don't tickle your fancy you can always take your drink into the Square's corridors and mull the irony of carousing in a failed Webb brothers development made possible by Centrepointe.

Move closer to campus and you'll find The Boiler Room and Tin Roof, two venues aiding UK's stressed-out student body by keeping classrooms and taprooms in close proximity. The pair makes complimentary bookends to the South Limestone block—the former by focusing on live rock bands, and the latter by offering nightly cover acts. The Boiler Room will add diversity to a block heavy on popped-collar patrons, while Tin Roof boasts one of the best patios in town and relieves the, um, tragic loss of Huddle House.

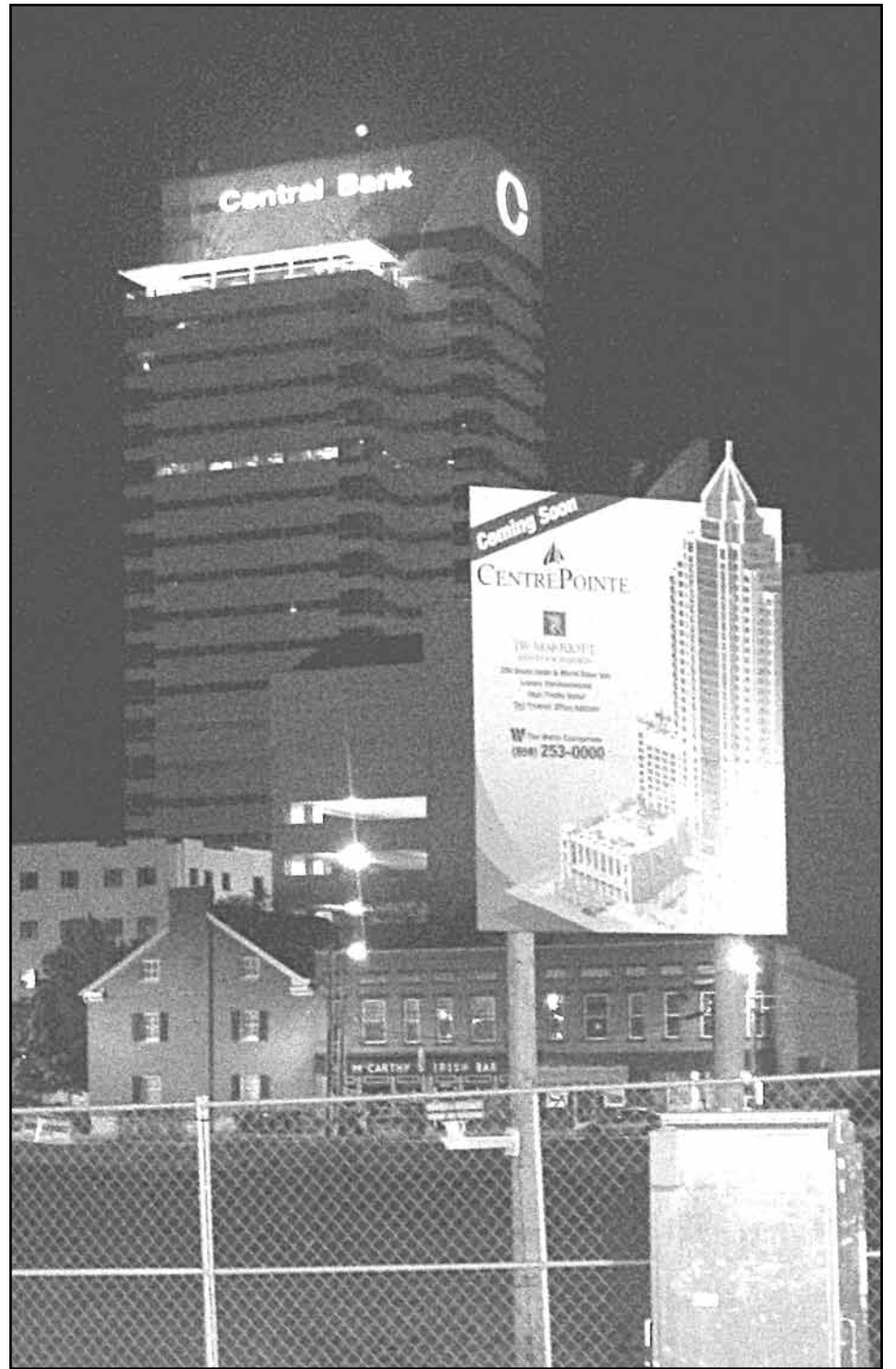
And let's not forget about The Dame, still kicking on downtown's eastern edge. Though the spirit of its former self apparently missed the relocation memo, The Dame is in a league of its own in terms of sound guys, audio equipment, and spaciousness. It's still pulling acts too big for the venues mentioned above, and it's still Lexington's most capable music hall. Here's hoping they rekindle some of their old magic by booking a few house-packing summer shows to fill its roomy interior. (Eighties Night doesn't count.)

If The Dame can't reclaim the title of Lexington's favorite music hall, Buster's might be up to the task when it reopens on Manchester Street in the former Old Tarr Distillery this August. Buster's hopes to draw old patrons back with the familiar (pool tables, jukebox, darts) while luring a broader audience with its massive Backroom music hall—capacity 1,000. Buster's Backroom will be large enough to host national acts that had previously passed over Lexington (en-

tations than to high-minded notions of creative control. "The devil is in the details," says Maranville, reflecting on the myriad negotiable factors—casting, funding, rewriting, assembling—that comprise any film project.

"It's funny to me that Hollywood is considered this liberal bastion, because they're so conservative with movie ideas."

Sometimes being flexible results in ending up on the other side of the camera, as in the 2004 Archie Borders' comedy *Paper Cut*. Maranville, one of the producers, found himself playing a supporting role in the movie as a delightfully antagonistic record store clerk. Recently, when director Tom Whitus (of *Sam Steele*) called to ask how tall he was, Maranville immediately responded, "I know what you're going to ask me." "I have to be a stand-



The remains of The Dame. Photo: Keith Halladay.

route to Cincinnati, Louisville, and Nashville) due to a lack of mid-sized venue space.

I'm still concerned Buster's might miss the neighborly support it possessed at its old locale. While Manchester Street hopes to become the arts and entertainment hub of Lexington's future, the Distillery District remains undeveloped. Buster's sway would be strengthened if nearby venues (offering food or live music) were also in place. Hopefully Buster's can spark Manchester's emergent aspirations by pulling cross-town crowds

to the neighborhood and spurring its growth.

In the future, this page will track the above-mentioned venues, offering concert suggestions, interviews, commentary and more. We aim to provide an informative forum for info on local artists, musicians, and events to accompany an evolving discussion of the Lexington scene. As we all move ahead in the PDB era, hopefully toward something bigger and better, this column aims to keep you engaged and informed of great things happening in Lexington.

in for Luke Perry this summer," Maranville sighs.

When *North of Center* caught up with Maranville, he had just returned from LA where he had been pitching his new script, *Character Assassination*. Described as "a crime drama with shades of a Hitchcock film," the feature film tells the story of two brothers, low-level criminals, who are hired to assassinate a man. "The hit goes down, but there's a catch—they discover the dead man's baby in a stroller on the porch. One of the brothers becomes obsessed over what's happened, and eventually develops a relationship with the widow he's created." His intentions, however, are questionable, given the fact that somewhere in the house is over a million dollars in unmarked bills. The film will be shot in central Kentucky this fall, and Maranville has already begun scouting locations in Lexington and Louisville. "I haven't shot here since *100 Proof*," says Maranville, who seems eager to put his hometown onscreen again.

Making films outside of Hollywood presents certain challenges, especially in terms of securing the attention of agents and investors who tend to offer more support to filmmakers in town. But Hollywood offers immense resources, it tends to be limited in its scope, often giving the green light only to huge blockbusters. "It's so funny to me

that Hollywood is considered this liberal bastion because they're so conservative when you come to them with ideas for movies."

However, Maranville admits that things are slowly changing: "Hollywood is more open-minded now because projects are being done outside of LA." "I like going out there and pitching," Maranville says. "I was a little snobbier in earlier years, but I come up with ideas that are commercial sometimes, and I'll put them out there and see if they work."

Given the chance to direct a big commercial project, would he take it? In typical direct honesty, Maranville does not miss a beat. "Absolutely," he answers. Recently called out by a producer for "wanting to have his cake and eat it, too," Maranville replied, "Of course I do." For Maranville, that means being able to balance commercial projects with his own quirkier projects. Readily admitting that his Southern Gothic sensibility, inspired by writers like Flannery O'Connor and Larry Brown, doesn't clear an easy pathway to commercial success, Maranville plans to cast his net wide, and, for now, pull in a bit of everything.

Maranville, the guest host for the Cult Film Series at Al's Bar on May 13, took the B movie series to C level when he screened Donald Wolfe's 1969 camp-thriller Savage Intruder.

The return of the sandlot

A call to arms (and legs, bats, mallets, balls, discs, and...)

By Keith Halladay

John Calipari will be paid, to coach the University of Kentucky Wildcats men's basketball team over the next eight years, more than 30 million dollars in salary. You have a problem with that?

I don't. At least, I don't have a problem with Calipari. And I don't have a problem with the university athletic program for writing the check. No, no problem with the diehards who planted signs in yards, begging, imploring Calipari to leave Memphis for bluer environs.

For it seems that we decided, you and I, along with generations of American sports fans before us, that John Calipari is worth precisely what he's being paid, and probably even a bit more, in endorsements and incentives and the rest. We decided, collectively, that Calipari is worth a professional, NBA-sized contract.

He needs to win games in bunches, of course, but he has a track record of doing just that. He'll likely thrive in pressure-packed Rupp Arena, thus generating millions in revenue for UK Athletics, increasing the school's visibility and therefore enrollment, which means more tuition dollars in a time of slashed state education budgets, and other positives as well. Winning basketball is a good thing, and we'll pay NBA dollars to get it.

Craig Krenzel, the former Ohio State quarterback, remarked in a *USA Today* article sometime ago that he'd noticed little difference between the training routines and regimens of the professional football player and his counterparts at big-time football schools such as Krenzel's own. Nor much difference in facilities. Nor access to trainers or medical personnel. Nor the social perks. The only difference, according to Krenzel, is that NCAA scholar-athletes aren't paid like professionals.

But the coaches are, which is how we ended up with Calipari's contract, Ohio State's football facilities (better than those of many NFL teams, most say), and the varsity squads of the Southeastern Conference generally.

But I'd go further than Krenzel: we have entered an era in which there is increasingly little distinction in how we both perceive and fund the games played at the pro, college, and *high-school* levels: the big sports schools specialize in particular sports now, and they spend tens of millions on their athletic complexes—figures similar to what UK spent on the Joe Craft Center. And of course it's *been* a time in which the best gymnasts, soccer players, and tennis players are spirited away, pre-adolescence, to demanding training camps in sunny states. And it's a period in which Amazon's best-selling Easton youth-league baseball bat costs \$312.49.

This last item bugs me. One might wonder what competitive advantage might be gleaned by purchasing such a bat instead of the Easton bat in second place on Amazon's search results (at about \$160); I wondered that, briefly, until I considered that actually, yes, there probably are twelve-year-olds who are sufficiently refined in their swing mechanics and sensitive to their bat's response and feel that the difference between models is enormous to them. They achieved this through hours of work in the batting cage, after school

and on weekends, and they will dominate their age groups for years to come.

But the bat is bestselling, which means everybody, or at least a fair few willing parents, is buying it. Because it's what your child needs to compete. Or, if you're of the slowpitch-softball bent, you might pick up the Easton SSR1, for \$437.49, or *rent*, as some folks call that amount.

Sport scientists identify a litany of problems associated with the professionalization of youth sports, including, as Dr. Daniel Gould notes in the March 2009 issue of the *Clinical Journal of Sport Medicine*, the "manipulation of birth records to facilitate eligibility; parental abuse of officials, coaches, and children; subverting academic opportunities and programs to pursue sporting goals; violating rules to illegally video record and scout opponents; and the use of performance enhancing drugs."

We're a long way from the sandlot with this stuff. But that's all right, because despite the occasional overbearing parent or steroid-related suicide, the system works: it puts highly skilled athletes on the playing field and ball court, which is what we want. And in Lexington, we have John Calipari to coach them. I have no problem with this.

But we should want something else: sports for the rest of us, for those of us who don't feel the subtle differences in the feel of \$300 bats. There are people in Lexington like that, and they're playing sports (of which you may or may not have heard) in the parks and vacant lots—in the sandlots—around town. The equipment is usually cheap, the dress code is always casual, and the vibe is refreshingly *amateur*.

These are the sports we'll be covering in *North of Center*. They include bike polo (see below for an explanation), disc golf, roller derby, ultimate frisbee, and bocce, as well as more traditional sports, such as basketball, soccer, and tennis, that haven't quite left the playground altogether.

The problem, then, with the professionalization of youth and amateur sports is that in our rush to extract every last shred of performance from our sports heroes, whether they be all-stars from the American League or the tee-ball league, we've begun to forget that sports is for all of us. That's the problem we'd like to help solve.

And you can solve it too, by telling us what you're playing, where, and when. Send us a note and a picture or two. Professionals need not respond.

Suggestions? Email khalladay@yahoo.com.

Guerrilla kickball

Centerpointe off limits, says police; players, spectators cry foul, but peacefully relocate to Phoenix Park

NoC Staff reports

At 5:29 PM, between 10 and 12 kickballers stormed the N. Limestone entrance to the Centerpointe Parque to play a game of kickball. Their game was abruptly stopped four rolls in by three bike cops and one good ol' fashioned police sedan. Under the eyes of between 40 and 60 would-be ballers, interlopers, kite-flyers, baby-walkers, bikers, and various other all around fun-loving riff raff, the police quickly hustled off the sensible players.

By 5:35 PM the police bikers achieved their goal of forcing the players to desist and remove themselves to the sidewalk of Phoenix Park on North Limestone. Though rumors abounded as to the reason for the players getting removed: one participant opined that the rival team had forfeited the game and sent the cops merely to inform the players; yet another speculated that it was in fact the players themselves who, in consultation with the bikecops, deemed Centerpointe's unkept rocky grounds not yet kickball-ready—it appeared that this was yet another clear Webb Brothers LLC declaration of its right to tear, muddy, gravel, and section off the whole of Lexington, one failure at a time, at the expense of the rest of us.

After gathering together for a group photo, taken by no less than six local photographers, the group milled around on the corner of Main and North Limestone for the next half hour. Several revelers had a seedball throwing contest; some kickballers redirected into a spirited game of dodgeball in the park; another group started flying a kite; at least one person crossed Main for a dip in the fountain; and everyone laughed and jabbered and generally lapped in the sun and the hope that maybe next week they'll be able to play that kickball game.

Coming this June... Lexington Free Market

"It's even better than a steal!"

participants encouraged

5:00-7:00 Wednesdays
in Al's parking lot

Bike polo for beginners

By Brian Turner

Hardcourt Bike Polo, or simply "bike polo" has little in common with the effete equestrian sport with which it shares a name. In fact, it is more akin to ice hockey - with fast-paced breaks, well-timed passes, and the occasional, friendly shoulder-check. While the grass variety of bike polo has been around since the late 19th Century, the past two decades have seen a rise in the more urban, hardcourt variant, which is played in parking lots, garages, tennis courts or any location where the risk of getting kicked out is always a high probability. Here in Lexington, where bike polo has taken on an almost cult-like following in the three years since its inception, we now have the luxury and distinction of one of the only (and possibly the first) Parks Department-approved designated bike polo courts in the country.

For the uninitiated, here's a quick bike polo primer:

SETUP

Games consist of two teams of three players. Any type of bike is welcome; preferably one that wouldn't mind taking a scratch or two. Mallets are DIY, and typically made out of aluminum ski poles and plastic gas pipe for heads. Goals are spaced one bike length apart, and are usually orange traffic cones. The game begins with a "joust", in which all team members are positioned behind their goal line, and race to be the first to gain possession of the ball, which is placed at center-court. Games are played to either three, or five points.

GAME PLAY

The fundamental rule is that players' feet may not touch the ground at any time. This is referred to as a "foot down". A "foot down" requires a player to take themselves out of play immediately and touch a designated area or object before re-joining play. Goals are only counted if they originated as a hit from the small end of the mallet head - not the broad side. In terms of general game etiquette, there are a few strictly enforced rules: 1) NO mallet throwing of any kind is allowed during game play. 2) Only "Like Contact" is allowed; bike to bike, mallet to mallet, body to body, etc. 3) No grabbing, holding or pushing with hands is allowed.

Lexington bike polo is played every Wednesday evening and Sunday from late afternoon until after dark. All games are pick-ups, meaning there are no set teams or leagues. The court is located in Coolavin Park at the intersection of Jefferson and Sixth Street. All are welcome to come out and play, and we always enjoy spectators. July of 2009 will mark the inaugural addition of hardcourt bike polo to Kentucky's annual Bluegrass State Games, so now is a great time to get involved and start practicing. We guarantee you'll be hooked after your first time! For more information, Facebook: Lexington Bike Polo.

Brian Turner is the Bluegrass State Games Sports Commissioner for bike polo.



Two bike polo players compete on a sunny day at Coolavin Park. Photo courtesy Lexington Bike Polo.

North of Center is looking for writers and photographers to cover events worthy of reporting and commentary in north Lexington and elsewhere. Please contact Danny Mayer at mayer.danny@gmail.com if you're interested in contributing.

Opinion

North of Center: read all about it

“Who am I? Why am I here?” retired Admiral James Stockdale asked in what ranks as one of the more awkward moments in televised political debates. The vice-presidential running mate of 1992 third-party candidate Ross Perot, Stockdale is something of a punchline for politicians who care about such things. His punchdrunk speaking style and faulty hearing aid served to make even vice-presidential candidates Dan Quale and Al Gore look positively presidential in ‘92—a fairly incredible feat for any man, admiral or not.

Stockdale’s opening query—who am I? Why am I here?—has played in my head like a chorus of (punchdrunk, mostly tone-deaf) muses for the past several weeks as I have tried to explain to others what positive role a new local publication might serve in Lexington. Who might we be? Why might we be here? Below is the beginning of an answer to those questions, hopefully delivered in a better rambling manner than Mr. Stockdale.

Who are we?

This one’s simple. At the moment, we are mainly a group of friends I’ve tricked and cajoled into writing. Some of us have written, and will continue to write, for other good local publications; some haven’t and won’t. For the most part, we are academics in some fashion or another, though please don’t hold that against us. We’re graduate students, adjuncts, community college teachers, liquor store clerks—the shit upon dregs of the academic world.

By trade and profession, then, we are not journalists. We are not publishers. We are not layout/design people. We are not ad-men and women. But we are learning as we do.

Why are we here?

This one’s a bit more complex. Aside from the normal vanities and orgasmic release associated with seeing Your Name in a print byline read by untold hundreds, we feel that currently

there’s a need for different journalistic forms, centers of gravity, and perspectives in our local papers. Month after month, this need only grows as our flagship local rag, the Lexington Herald Leader, proceeds apace with its race to the bottom, one staff cut at a time. (One week before press time, and our modest start-up paper already had more newsprint than the Monday 11 May Leader.)

If there is to be a future in print journalism—and we here at NoC assert that there must be, or else we’re to imply that computer access, and not literacy, now defines the contours of our awareness of the world—it will reside predominantly in small, focused, community papers like *La Voz*, or *Ace*, or *Southsider*, or *Business Lexington*, or the *Chevy Chaser* that can operate more freely within the confines of limited budgets, limited writers, and limited ad space. As our free market world slowly begins splintering back into smaller, workable, and (hopefully) more humane communities, more nimble local papers such as these represent the future of print journalism.

With this in mind, we offer up our own nimble and localized paper, *North of Center*. We hope the name reflects both a geography (our place) and a politics (our perspective) that we may cultivate in future issues. In this and future issues, we aim to cultivate, engage, and converse with a demographic situated generally in the north side of town, one that houses immigrant communities, anarchists, unabashed drunks, free food collectives, bikers, working class stiffies, prostitutes and their johns, cults, bocce players, musicians, vagrants, gentrifiers and their victims, city hall fat cats, felons, printmakers, homeless, drunks, religious activists actually reading and practicing Jesus’ gospels, and other good and ill-natured freaks. At *NoC* we will work to present these groups as central to the many communities that comprise our world.

We hope to do so in a way that assumes that these groups—you, actually—are not so much separate as you are different aspects—faces—of a vibrant community. We know, for example, that any member of a free food collective might at the same time be homeless, that bikers are printmakers are bocce players, that prostitutes are often struggling against homelessness, that musicians can be gentrifiers, that city hall fat cats are just as shameless in their drinking as the working class stiffies currently being gentrified and harrassed off my street. We know, too, that being a city hall fatcat means less surveillance about such things, and that this state of affairs, put bluntly, sucks and is wrong.

There is an energy, a collection of vibes, that has lately sprung in this part of the world, and we aim to capture its history (for nothing appears out of nowhere), its tensions and possibilities, its successes and failures. Of course, capturing this energy is the wrong sentiment for all this. It suggests holding against one’s will. A better way to convey that might be to say that we will do our damndest to report and interpret—to publicly discuss—what we find to be important.

Covering the diverse, interconnected communities that thread north of the center requires something of us and you. For one, different communities have different ways of conversing. However close their interests may be, a member of Food Not Bombs, for example, reads and writes differently than a city council member. As budding journalists writing for this paper, we will cover and analyze a number of these communities, and we will do so by using a number of journalistic forms.

Expect development. Longer ideas. Essays. Analysis. Foul language. Cheap political humor. Play. For you loyal Herald readers, expect sports that don’t use winning as a pretext to generate money for small groups of peo-

ple. Expect labor rather than business pages. Look for honest accounts of UK’s debilitating role in the city community. Think Eblen on acid, Alessi with a pair, Clay with a hard-on for community based sports disconnected from financial gain. Don’t expect twitter updates, bi-weekly pictures of white folk in black ties, or articles that give loving directions for throwing a successful tea party. Rightly or wrongly, we don’t see these as a need for our demographic, whatever it might be.

What this means to you, dear readers, is that we assume you have a discerning eye—one that can see that words like fuck and love can and should co-exist next to each other for the simple fact that different communities speak and converse differently. We recognize that we are taking a gamble of sorts with our approach in that we assume that bikers, anarchists, prostitutes, bar owners, gentrifiers, working stiffies, and others still like to read things that exceed 140 words, and that in conjunction with other smaller local papers, a vibrant print culture can lead to a more informed and democratic citizenry (one that we expect will include disenfranchised felons).

We at *NoC* have pinned our hopes on you misfits and establishment types still having a latent desire to read. To reflect. To laugh out loud. To be outraged. And hopefully, to write back to and with us in future issues.

Ultimately, these are the standards by which we hope you judge our paper: have we, to echo Wendell Berry, pushed Lexington’s center—its mayors, its domineering land-grant college to the south, its business leaders, its feel-good white liberals on Desha as well as on North Martin Luther King Jr.—to be less ignorant of the periphery? Have we empowered the many people and voices who, by hook or by crook, by choice or by happenstance, are north of center?

Danny Mayer

NoC to Webb Brothers: game on!

We have to admit, one of the zanier reasons we heard to explain why the police broke up the April 24 kickball game at Centerpointe Parque (CpP) was the corker we heard about the Webb Brothers canceling the game themselves for fear that they weren’t prepared as of yet to play.

To be fair, the line we gave on the sports page was in many ways a throw-away, an unfortunate byproduct of “objective” reporting that ends up distorting reality by trying to show all sides of it equally and without pretense to judgement. Surely, the Webb brothers did not cancel the game because they were afraid to play themselves. That’s nonsense, though someone did in fact offer this up as a possible reason for telling people to stop playing a kids game.

But, still, throw-away or not, we must confess a certain hunch that there is some kernel of truth to the idea that the Webbs One and Two are the ones who stopped that game. There’s a certain logic to the line of thinking that finds them dispatching a motorcade of bike cops to stop a kickball game because they felt a creeping sense of inadequacy, and needed, as it were, to evade and parry whilst they searched around for an Edge.

It somehow feels right in this story of pricked real estate bubbles, double secret dead financiers, a councilman handing out grass, and twelve dudes playing around with one round bouncy kickball. One gets the feeling that there’s a very real possibility that the Webbs, peering down from their last (not fully occupied) downtown high-rise onto something resembling not so much a center point as a central pit—a deep one—saw some commie pinko kiddos kicking balls and frolicking around under the adoring cheers of a growing crowd and felt the creeping

sensation of their manhood getting challenged.

A public facing like what may have happened at the sudden kickball game at CpP—on their turf, no less!—is a tough thing for any capitalist to swallow, but no doubt this was particularly tough on the Webbs, who have systematically bought, owned, sold, and developed the urban dead zone that is the Main/Vine corridor between Rose and Broadway for several decades now.

So yeah, why not? Them calling the game is certainly plausible. Besides, it’s safer to assume that they’re sitting, waiting, ready to pounce on us and kick our tails in a little friendly game of kickball.

To be prepared, we suggest a two-pronged attack. First, we must keep a watchful eye on the Webb workforce for the next several months. Given both ancient and recent history, we cannot assume that the Webbs will refrain from employing shady underhanded tactics to get whatever they want. Therefore, we cannot rule out that they haven’t spent these past four weeks since the Kickball game importing ringers: a Rickey Henderson, say, for leadoff and short-center, or a George Foreman or Kenny Sky Walker to kick clean-up.

But more importantly than the noble job of keeping a watchful eye on the Webb Brothers, we must begin developing our own skills—to play kickball, to occupy and celebrate public space, to get to know each other. Therefore, we call on the Lexolutionaries to continue to meet and recruit and publicize and practice as close to Centerpointe Parque as possible. We do not know when, or even if, the Webbs will take you up on your game. But this much we do know: if the Webbs do come with a challenge of kickball, they’ll come packing a ringer. You’ll need to

Slightly North of Center
takes on
THE PRISON SYSTEM

Thursdays, 6:00 PM
Late-spring talks with and by the community at Al’s Bar
Price of Admission: caring

May 21: Johnathan Hampton on *Addressing a Broken System through Communication/Arts/Activism*

Songwriter Wes Houpp performs after the talk

May 28: Brian Rich on *Ana Romero and Death Prisons for the Innocent*

June 4: Chuck Fields on *Pot, Prisons, and the War on Drugs in Kentucky*

June 11: KFTC and Neighborhood Residents on *Voting Rights for Former Felons*

be on your toes and in peak kicking condition, and this will require practice and leisured work outdoors with friends and neighbors.

To show our solidarity with the Lexolutionary kickballers, we at *NoC* hereby challenge the Webb Brothers to our game of choice: bocce ball. Specifically, a game of free range bocce on Centerpointe Parque. Games to eleven; best of five games. We, too, stand ready to meet and commence to practicing and cavorting in the parks surrounding CpP.

Indeed, to cover all our bases in case those shady venture real estate capitalists decide to change the game at the last second, we call on all you sports enthusiasts to challenge the Webbs to a game of your choice at CpP. We must take the offensive on this. Nothing says “dedicated community” like showing up ready to play..

anything! Bring your horseshoes, fungo bats, pro kadima paddles, badminton shuttlecocks, 4-square balls. Come on with your hula hoops, pogo sticks, croquet mallets. In numbers, our athletic prowess is great, diverse—and slap-your-leg fun. Just be respectful to the communities already putting Phoenix Park to good use.

We say game on! Do you?





Typewriter needed

The NoC News Bureau is issuing an All Points Bulletin, forthwith, for a non-electric typewriter. And not just any non-electric typewriter. No, it is the position of the Bureau that the non-electric typewriter must be in Good Working Condition.

The weather has recently kicked things up a shade or two. This predictable meteorological development has had serious repercussions. The intense afternoon light has played havoc with our laptop screens when we at the News Desk have brought them outdoors; our batteries are not near charged long enough to withstand the marathon key pounding to which they are regularly subjected out of doors and away from plug-ins. Physiologically, the effects have been worse. In short, our eyes, hands, ears, and minds instinctively reject the process of diode manipulation needed to make the laptop an acceptable fresh air tool.

Therefore, faced with a choice of writing indoors at the indoor table or outdoors at the outdoor table, the N. Bureau Decisions committee has decided collectively to solve the issue by issuing an APB for a good working condition typewriter. Non-electric. No dimming screens. Just a ribbon, the plink plunk plank of working keys, and the creamy delight of seeing words, on an actual page, right when we actually plank them. Color us old fashioned.

Typewriter donations accepted at 430 N. Martin Luther King Boulevard. Leave on the front porch. This is a community paper! The least you could do is help us write with the sun at our backs and the sky in our hair.

Growing in Spite Of (2009)

Crayon
Brian Connors-Manke

The East End (cont.)

continued from page 1

It's hard to say exactly how or why Murphy's legacy so thoroughly eluded the collective consciousness of a horse-centric culture like Lexington. I don't think it's unreasonable to say that Murphy is to jockeying what Adolph Rupp is to college basketball coaching or what Man O' War is to race horses. Yet Lexington's power elite enshrine the memories of the coach and the horse each time they enter the arena or cruise the boulevard that bears their respective names.

Does this incongruity matter? Is it yet another example of how African Americans and their history have been marginalized in Lexington?

If the answer to those questions is "yes," it is encouraging to me that the upcoming Equestrian Games has become the impetus to recognize the diverse racial and cultural heritage associated with the Third Street Corridor. The Knight Foundation Center for Legacy Initiatives grant steering committee chose the garden project, one of over 100 proposed ideas, to highlight an African American cultural heritage that the Lexington Fayette County Urban Government has thus far been reticent to value (at least in terms of financial support).

The Lyric

Those interested in the question of preserving a community legacy are all too familiar with the talk, speculation, promises, and gossip associated with the Lyric. Meanwhile, the theatre has evolved into a deteriorating edifice epitomizing Lexington's general apathy toward African American culture.

The Lyric has a back-story. In the mid-1990s, the Kentucky state legislature gave LFUCG \$7.2 million to purchase a piece of property, the Ben Snyder block, from its private owner. The gift, however, obligated the county to construct a cultural center project that would serve as a multi-purpose venue for all community members. Instead, Lexington leaders decided to erect a new courthouse.

Not surprisingly, the Commonwealth filed suit against LFUCG for

misappropriation of funds. A settlement, reached by Mayor Pam Miller, established a Memorandum of Understanding, which mandated Lexington fund a range of diverse culture-preserving facilities. Notables on this list are the University of Kentucky Basketball Museum, the Kentucky Theatre, the Downtown Arts Center, and the Lyric Theatre. Except for the Lyric, each of these has been completed.

Since the Memorandum of Understanding fully materialized in 2005, when the county acquired the Lyric property through eminent domain, Lexington council members have dragged their feet in planning its restoration. Now, nearly four years later, Lexington risks a financial penalty, to the tune of \$500 per day (\$182,500 per year), if the theatre and African American history museum restoration is not completed by January 27, 2010.

In a report on WUKY in September 2007, Third District Councilperson Dick DeCamp, who has since been replaced, explained that he was worried that the theatre would not be able to sustain itself.

"I want it to succeed as a theatre. I want it to succeed as a museum. But at the same time, I want it to be in a position to support itself, and not come back to this community every six months or annually and [ask for more money]," DeCamp said. His perspective is typical of community leadership that does not realize, or just doesn't care, that LFUCG has both a legal obligation and a fiduciary responsibility to restore the Lyric.

History and the Present East End

So it's understandable why some people see the Legacy Trail and the Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden as signs that a trend of bad faith has been reversed. Lexington no longer cares to neglect the cultural heritage of African Americans. In fact, it has deliberately chosen to honor it, an assertion that each community in Lexington is vital to its collective identity.

However, how does the preservation of a neighborhood's historical past correspond to justice for those presently living in it?

There are, of course, many complex reasons why the East End is in its current condition. As I've contemplated these reasons, I cannot help but wonder whether the contest over whose historical legacy, black people's or white people's, gets recognized side-steps more pressing problems—like drug dealers, exploitative food markets, and liquor stores along Third Street.

This question is informed, at least in part, by a conversation I had with Thomas Tolliver, a community organizer who has lived on Third Street for fourteen years. Tolliver appreciates the Isaac Murphy Memorial Art Garden, the William Wells Brown Elementary School, and the Bluegrass-Aspendale Housing Redevelopment. He views them as signs of progress and hope in the East End.

Yet, Tolliver doesn't see the need to reconstruct the Lyric or even refer to our community as the William Wells Brown Neighborhood. He explains that doing so takes away from the fact that many residents in this community, black and white, are culpable in their non-action.

"If there's anyone to criticize here," Tolliver said, "it's not city officials or council members. It's the residents and local business owners, the sorry sons-of-a-bitches, who won't get off their ass and do something about this neighborhood." Tolliver adamantly insisted that I quote him verbatim.

Pragmatically, Tolliver's perspective is valuable. It may be hard to justify educating people about William Wells Brown's place in the American literary tradition (Brown is America's first black novelist and a native of Lexington), especially in a neighborhood riddled by crime, absentee landlords, and substandard living conditions. A recent East End development plan, compiled by an independent consulting firm, reveals that the neighborhood's mean annual household income as of the 2000 census was \$14,570, or less than one-third of the mean annual income for all other areas in Fayette County. This ratio probably hasn't changed much in the last decade. Three times as many houses are rented than are owned, and 45 per-

cent of all homes are in substandard or worse condition.

"To be honest, I really wouldn't care if they demolished the Lyric, as long as they replaced it with single-unit homes that are owned by people who actually live in them," Tolliver said.

I think that Tolliver values efforts to commemorate histories, but only if doing so does not controvert movements to get all community members involved in the much more difficult, and not unrelated, project of making the East End a healthier and more equitable place to live today. Despite his misgivings about preserving buildings like the Lyric for the sake of historical memory alone, Tolliver has collaborated with Jess Miller, another East End resident, to supervise a historic preservation project.

As we talked, we walked through his back yard and toward his garage, where he stores a set of plaques that annotate the Lyric, Bluegrass-Aspendale, and other landmarks in the East End. At one point, Tolliver stooped over and picked up an empty Lifestyles condom wrapper, evidence of public prostitution. A few paces later, he retrieved a plastic baggie that had been twisted at the bottom (to hold marijuana, Tolliver told me). In the trip from the front porch to the backyard garage, we found signs that a course of action much more radical than historical preservation needs to happen in the East End.

Today, you can see the plaques that Tolliver and Miller constructed around the Third Street neighborhood. They mark notable homes and places along the Third Street Corridor, suggest reasons for the neighborhood's decline, and offer an imperative for valuing the people who have lived and worked in Lexington's East End. There's even a sign where Tolliver lives, the T.T. Wendell House. His home once belonged to Dr. T.T. Wendell, a staff physician at the Eastern State Hospital who worked tirelessly to upgrade the medical care of mentally disabled and black patients. Can factoids like this compel Lexington residents, those who live in and around the East End, to improve the quality of life for those around the Corridor? Perhaps it's an important first step.