Small Business, Big Reach

By Mischa Webley
NECN Staff Writer

It wasn’t too long ago that Brian Parham was a humble guitar teacher, lugging his instrument on his back as he biked from lesson to lesson in the rain. He was doing what he loved, but it was a hard grind and he wasn’t making much money. But that all changed when he got connected to an organization called Microenterprises Services of Oregon (MESO).

For nearly twenty years, MESO has been quietly supporting small businesses in the Portland area. It began in the Black United Fund building on Alberta as a response to the first wave of gentrification that hit that street, helping Black-owned businesses build resilience as rents went up and clientele changed. MESO’s mission then, and now, couldn’t be more plain: to improve the economic opportunities of underserved individuals through empowerment, education and entrepreneurship for the benefit of the greater community. That is, everybody, regardless of their background or experience, should have access to the tools to become a successful entrepreneur.

It’s a cause that MESO’s Executive Director, Nita Shah, takes to heart. For fifteen years, she has helped steer the ship and oversee the organization as it grew out of its Alberta location and into its current spot on Northeast MLK. MESO has also opened offices in Gresham and Hillsboro.

“We’ve been expanding where communities are moving because of gentrification and [where there’s] a huge lack of resources for small businesses,” says Shah. Wherever they go, the focus is on building trust with the community there. Felicia Wells-Thomas, Community Relations Manager at MESO, adds “We’re going to be here for the long haul. We have established ourselves and are putting roots into the community.”

The need is great, and varied. Some businesses need capital, while others need training. But most of them, Nita says, need the See MESO pg 3

The Walnut Park Theater

By Margaret O’Hartigan, King Neighborhood

1923 was a boom year for the Walnut Park section of what is now King Neighborhood. In addition to dozens of houses sprouting up almost like weeds, the Walnut Park Theater was built on the site where Natural Grocers is now located at Alberta and Martin Luther King Jr. Blvd. The theater opened on February 17, 1924. Built at a cost of $55,000 and with a seating capacity of 550, the theater featured a Spanish architectural and decorative motif.

Walnut Park resident Isaac Geller owned and operated the theater – built to replace his old Mutual Theater directly across the street. The theater featured second-run silent films by the likes of Cecil B. De Mille, accompanied by an organist performing on what was billed as the “East Side’s Largest Concert Organ”. Helen West Cole was the theater’s organist at the time the talkies came in.

Friday matinees were reserved for “Ladies Only”, after the show the patrons could adjourn to Walt’s Eats directly next door for a lunch or fountain drink. The theater also rented time on the theater’s pipe organ to organ pupils for “reasonable rates”.

In 1927 Geller built the Aladdin Theater in Southeast Portland. In 1932 a $30,000 remodel of the Walnut Park Theater was unveiled, and in 1934 Geller handed See THEATER pg 5
Hey Neighbor! A free publication by Northeast Coalition of Neighborhoods

Living Yoga work at the Columbia River Correctional Institution in Northeast Portland

By Mira Mohsini

The COVID-19 public health crisis has hit prison populations especially hard. Social distancing is nearly impossible in locked facilities and prisoners are at high risk of contracting and transmitting the virus. Support services have ceased due to strict regulations about who can enter locked facilities. Many organizations work in prisons to provide prisoners with religious and cultural services, education, and mental and behavioral health support. With these services unavailable, already vulnerable populations are not receiving important forms of physical, mental, and spiritual support.

Living Yoga is one such nonprofit organization that is no longer able to provide in-person services in locked facilities. For more than 20 years, Living Yoga’s 200+ volunteers have provided trauma-informed yoga and mind-body classes in locked facilities, including Columbia River Correctional Institution (CRCI) in Northeast Portland, as well as in addiction treatment programs and community health centers. Living Yoga’s down-regulating classes can help alleviate the impact of stress and trauma, which live physiologically in the body. Before COVID-19, Living Yoga offered eight classes per month at CRCL. A rehabilitation manager at this facility would refer people to Living Yoga’s classes who had “problems with anger management or just a lot of stress and trauma in their life.”

Living Yoga students at CRCI have expressed how their participation in classes helped them in many ways, including connecting to their bodies. “I’ve been trying to learn how to relax my whole life, how to free my mind, how to feel more comfortable with myself.”

“I’ve been trying to learn how to relax my whole life, how to free my mind, how to feel more comfortable with myself?”

Living Yoga brings together people who are not receiving important forms of physical, mental, and spiritual support. Coming to these classes has made you more comfortable with yourself.” student explained.

Another student said that “doing yoga is definitely a time I can do a lot of deep thinking. The body stores a lot of energy as well, so certain poses can make you think of certain things.”

Students also mentioned feeling a sense of social connection while practicing Living Yoga. “I’ve learned a lot of ways to cope with daily stresses I have by interacting with people.”

Another student felt that the classroom provided a respite from the negativity he experienced in the facility. “There was a lot of negative energy out there, you know, people talking about things that aren’t really positive or on a good path and so Living Yoga brings together people who are like minded and on a positive path.” Similarly, one student felt that classes provided a “brief ceasefire in the violence that is prison.”

Living Yoga is a small but mighty organization that has had a huge impact. Like so many organizations, we are quickly adapting to provide online programming although technological limitations make this challenging in locked facilities.

To ensure that Living Yoga survives this crisis and can offer a brief ceasefire in the violence that is prison.

Living Yoga students at CRCI have expressed how their participation in classes helped them. “I’ve been trying to learn how to relax my whole life, how to free my mind, how to feel more comfortable with myself.”

Living Yoga brings together people who are not receiving important forms of physical, mental, and spiritual support. During these difficult times, we always keep our students, our mission, and our commitment to equity at the forefront of our efforts. With our community’s support, we look forward to a time in the not too distant future, when our dedicated volunteer teachers can provide in-person classes again at facilities like CRCI.

If you have any questions about Living Yoga’s work, please contact Mira Mohsini at mira@living-yoga.org.
whole package: financial education, business skills, mentorship, access to capital and accountability. MESO has worked hard with its modest staff to provide support for businesses from beginning to end, with the goal of being a single stop for busy business owners and would-be entrepreneurs. It's not easy, and it requires a complex, always-evolving approach to the work. And MESO has worked tirelessly to lower the barriers to receiving their help so that anyone who walks in the door can get the help they need.

Brian Parham walked through MESO doors a few years ago, and what he discovered there changed his life. His story since that day backs it up: beginning as one guy with a guitar, a bike and a few students, MESO quickly helped him realize that he wasn’t thinking big enough. “They teach you how to build a biz from the ground up,” says Parham. “It’s the ultimate empowerment you can have in today’s age.”

With a mentor’s guidance, and with a lot of help from their Individual Development Account (IDA) program, which makes a 3:1 funding match with money saved, Brian transformed his business and never looked back. Learning to manage, and value, his time was key. Instead of offering individual lessons, he began offering group lessons, and quickly partnered with schools to hold lessons on site. The savings program helped him afford a new vehicle (the Dojombile) to make the rounds and his business, Rock Dojo, has expanded far beyond what he ever could have imagined, with employees, contractors and even a few awards. As far as he’s concerned, there’s something magic going on at MESO and recommends anyone who is thinking about starting a business to knock on their door. “They’re releasing an enormous amount of human creativity and potential. If you teach people how to really create wealth from thin air, that’s a tremendous amount of power and that’s what MESO is doing.”

Vanessa White, MESO client and owner of Just V Natural

On the importance of building generational wealth:

“...My family has been in Oregon since 1864. My great-grandfather owned property throughout Portland, in downtown and Northeast, not far from where I live now. He was able to help his oldest daughter purchase her first home and when he passed he left property and money for all his children. He did that in the 1800’s. If he did that then, then what can I do now? [Learning that] totally changed the game for me.

What that means for me is my kids won’t have to work as hard as I did. It’s not a cool thing to have to bust your ass and not reap rewards of what you’re doing. I’ve already done that and I don’t want to pass that down my family line. I want to pass down doing what you love, finding your creativity, living life with as much comfort and relaxation as possible and just being able to enjoy your existence here.

So the importance of generational wealth to me is that my kids won’t have to work at such a hard rate that they won’t be able to enjoy the life they’re working for.” Check out the shop at www.JustVNatural.com.
**Geneva’s Shear Perfection: A Community Institution Closes (For Now)**

But Paul Knauls Jr. is leading the effort to recast the barber and beauty salon as a charitable foundation

By Lisa Loving, Hey Neighbor contributor

This past Spring, the Knauls Family made the difficult decision to close their business, Geneva’s Shear Perfection Barber and Beauty Salon. Hey Neighbor caught up with Paul Knauls Jr. to ask about the shop, its past and its future.

**Hey Neighbor:** Paul, describe the big decision to close Geneva’s. Why did it happen and who made the call?

**Paul Knauls Jr.:** I actually did not make the decision. My father Paul Knauls Sr. the “Mayor of Northeast Portland,” made the decision. It was him and his wife Geneva who built that business. I was in the family business for almost 30 years between Geneva’s the barbershop and Geneva’s the nightclub. And if you’ve seen the new Oregon Health Authority regulations for that industry, our business model was just not going to be successful with all of that. The number of stylists that we have, and the number of barbers that we have.

And the community – we have been privileged to serve this community for all these years, the family has been in business for over 50 years. But – how can I say it? The numbers of COVID cases across the country had high, high, high death rates and infection rates in the African American community.

And in some cases there were 40% of people in a city – and I mean 16% of the population is Black and 75% of the citywide cases were affecting us. Our business was 98% African American people, and the chances of someone getting ill…

*“Our business was 98% African American people, and the chances of someone getting ill…”*

**Hey Neighbor:** Now I have to bring it around to the current moment. Across the country, we’re seeing huge protests and they are supporting the Black community, which I never thought I would see in my lifetime. Is it a turning point in history? And where are people bringing their unity if they can’t discuss things like this are the institutions like the barbershop?

**Knauls Jr.:** It’s a tipping point. COVID-19 has everyone in the world on lockdown. And the world saw an African American man killed by a police officer – they actually saw it. I’m 67 years old. Do you know how many Black men and women I have seen lynched? Murdered? I remember watching TV as a young Black boy with my grandfather, Chet Huntley and David Brinkley. Walter Cronkite. It was nothing to see an image of a Black man hanging from a tree. On the news, and talking about it. I saw people all my life have gone through this entire lifetime. I have a 12-year-old granddaughter who had a social studies project. She said, America we love you but you don’t love us back.”

**Hey Neighbor:** Last question. What is the single most important thing people should know about Geneva’s Shear Perfection?

**Knauls Jr.:** I think it’s important to realize how it got started. The lady with her name on the sign, you know? She was the first African American barber in the state of Oregon. She brought this about. Her legacy is important to the state, the city. We’re going to try to use the property to do some of the good things that she would have done for the village and for people in general. She is some kind of special. Her and my father, they were a hell of a team. My dad, their philanthropic work here in the city was unending. And it continues, and we would just like to solidify that. This lady from way down south caught a train out here, did something special with her life.

Find out more about what comes next at the Facebook group, Geneva’s Memories. https://www.facebook.com/groups/239640090648156/
Hey Neighbor! SUMMER 2020

More important than any head they’ve touched, Geneva’s Shear Perfection Barber & Beauty Salon will be forever remembered as capturing the hearts of Portland. Its esteemed owner Paul Knauls decided to call it quits in May after nearly three decades in business at the NE Martin Luther King Boulevard location after COVID-19 presented unprecedented uncertainty for its future. And while the city continues to process the loss, one group remains particularly impacted by its closure – the heartbeats to its operation – the barbers and beauticians.

Now, the stylists are juggling the weight of losing this iconic business with the rest of Portland, while also searching for new employment during a global pandemic.

“My co-workers became my family. My daughter grew up in that shop”

Tasha Bell has been with the shop for over 17 years. She and the rest of the staff received a personal call from Mr. Knauls the day before his decision was made public. Shocked, her first thought wasn’t about the loss of a job, but a loss of part of her community.

“I was emotional. I started thinking about all the memories, that part really touched me.”

Before the news, Bell says she had already been contemplating her next move after nearly two decades with the shop. Now she is counting the closure as a sign to begin branching off on her own, though she was tight-lipped about the specifics of what that may look like.

Alvin Russell III isn’t sure where he’s going next. He came to Geneva’s 6 years ago, at a time where he was houseless and living “out of control.” In an attempt to make a change, he picked up the phone one day and asked Mr. Knauls for a job – he accepted.

“He gave me a second chance at life,” says Russell, who had no prior barbering experience outside of cutting from time to time. And while suddenly closure finds him cutting from home, he credits the shop with “blessing him” with a healthy roster of clients he hopes will follow him into his next venture.

“He gave me a second chance at life”

For shop veteran Cynthia Riley, she says “it was like the rug being pulled from underneath me” when she learned of the closure.

“At the start of the pandemic, at least the thought was I know where I’m going back to. And now I don’t...” she says, adding she chose to work at Geneva’s in part because Mr. Knauls owned the building, and never figured he would sell it.

Now, she’s adjusting. After two months of pausing all services, Riley has slowly begun allowing a handful of clients and family members into her home to generate some income. Her preference is to immediately relocate back into a full-service shop. But with the growing Black Lives Matter demonstrations picking up throughout the region, she worries that the state’s re-opening will be slowed.

Despite such, employment is only a secondary worry. After 15 years with Geneva’s Shear Perfection Barber and Beauty, she, like the rest of her colleagues, say they will miss the daily interactions with Mr. Knauls.

“I worked besides him for years,” she says. “Mr. Knauls has a wealth of knowledge, and even when he’s not talking to me [I would listen].” Because people come through and seek his advice and mentorship, so just to be able to hear that was a blessing for me, and I miss that, definitely.”

The Final Cut

Now that the historic barbershop and salon Geneva’s has closed, what’s next for its stylists?

“The city of Portland had put the new manager on notice that the film violated a new city ordinance regarding ‘obscene films’”

petition from the new medium of television, movie theaters across the country were forced to adapt or close – and the Walnut Park Theater was no exception. Larger venues experimented with 3-D or CinemaScope, while smaller, inner-city venues often turned to “blue” movies.

By Donovan M. Smith, Hey Neighbor contributor

Theater cont’d from pg 1

The Walnut Park Theater remained for the most part a safe venue. For Thanksgiving week in 1953 the theater featured Shirley Temple’s “The Little Colonel” and “Rebecca of Sunnybrook Farm”. Nevertheless, as a result of comments, that part really touched me – that there won’t be a Geneva’s anymore,” she says. “My co-workers became my family. My daughter grew up in that shop,” says Bell.

While Geneva’s could never be replaced, she says the fact that the building will now be home to three other Black businesses (Joe Brown’s Carmel Corn, Kee’s Loaded Kitchen and Ilana’s PDX) offers some resolve, knowing the property itself won’t become gentrified.

The city of Portland had put the new manager on notice that the film violated a new city ordinance regarding “obscene films”.

In 1983 a series of meetings regarding “obscene films” were each sentenced to five years

in the state penitentiary. Still, the Walnut Park Theater over operation of the Aladdin to Allan Cushman, in order to devote his full attention to the Walnut Park Theater.

The Walnut Park Theater was an integral part of neighborhood life. Among the theater’s projects was its sponsorship of a Northwest Junior League baseball team, which played other firms’ and merchants’ teams. For example, on August 18, 1935 the theater team defeated Nu-Way Laundry, 12 to 8, in a game played at Alberta Park. The Highland Parent-Teacher Association often held benefits at the theater, holding an event in November 1937 to raise money for its school milk fund.

Not everything was so innocent, however. While in the theater’s cashier cage on December 18, 1946, Geller was held up at gunpoint and robbed of $22.80. After being arrested – and identified by Geller as the robbers – in 1947 the two men were each sentenced to five years

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Interviewed by Mischa Webley, NECN Staff Writer

Bri Condon is Executive Director of Bradley Angle, a social services organization on North Albina working to support survivors of domestic violence.

Tell us about who Bradley Angle serves and how.

Established in 1975, Bradley Angle is the oldest domestic violence shelter on the West Coast. Our mission is to serve all people affected by domestic violence. We do this by placing people experiencing—or at risk of—domestic violence at the center of our services and providing them with safety, education, empowerment, healing, and hope.

Since the onslaught of COVID-19 we have served 277 survivors of domestic violence through emergency-based housing, short and long term housing, culturally specific services, economic empowerment and LGBTQ culturally specific services.

“Lived experiences and the need for a culturally specific match between provider and participant is crucial to the effectiveness of our work”

We believe that lived experiences and the need for a culturally specific match between provider and participant is crucial to the effectiveness of our work. 82% of the survivors we serve identify within communities of color. 83% of our staff identify within Communities of Color.

What challenges do survivors face when trying to leave an abusive situation and what challenges do providers face when trying to support them?

For survivors, being able to find a stable and safe place to live is crucial to living a life free from violence. Financial power in a relationship is too often held by an abuser rather than the survivor. Survivors can lack the necessary finances to flee an abusive relationship and survivors that do leave the relationship can face incredible financial hardship.

The most common challenge service providers face is when supporting survivors is that while they work to address a lack of resources due to past abuse, they must also do a great deal of listening and extending support in order to counteract the influence of traumatic events on a survivor’s self-worth. Locating culturally specific service providers for survivors is even more of a challenge.

A common control tactic used by abusers is to isolate their partner so that they are not allowed to communicate and connect with others. Abusers will make their partners feel as though they are not worth being helped. This often leads to the deterioration of a survivor’s connectedness to their allies and a clear path for a safe exit.

What should someone do if they are in an abusive situation or know someone who is?

My colleague, Alexis Robinson-Woods, Bradley Angle’s Programs & Services Director, suggests to “Stop and think about what that person really needs, before you act make sure you are aware of how your help will affect the physical safety of their person and yours.”

It is very important to listen first, and only if a person is in a space to receive your external reflections, you can then decide whether to offer them assistance or not.

Many organizations have temporarily closed due to COVID-19, but the Gateway Center is still currently functioning and still helping survivors with restraining orders and connecting them with resources such as SEI, Impact Northwest, Bradley Angle, Call to Safety, Other Domestic Violence Shelters, Catholic Charities, Multnomah County DAs office, Legal Aid, etc.

How has the Covid-19 situation affected your work?

Nationally, domestic violence crisis lines are seeing a rise in calls as the stay-at-home order forces survivors and their abusers to remain indoors together for extended periods of time causing high-stress situations. We have personally experienced a need from the survivors we support for more frequent contact and communication in order to offer encouragement and emotional support.

We have experienced more difficulties in helping participants secure equitable housing and/or transitioning out of our programs into safe housing. Safety planning for survivors has also gotten more difficult as traditional plans and options we would recommend to survivors become limited.

Bradley Angle’s Resource Center located in North Portland has been a reliable source for survivors to access food in our on-site pantry. Due to food scarcity and recommended social-distancing practices, we have needed to scatter times for accessing food resources and limit how many people can access the food bank at a time.

How can communities best support survivors of domestic and sexual violence?

Please be aware of what’s going on around you and don’t assume the stay-at-home order keeps everyone safe. If you haven’t heard from a friend who was in challenging circumstances, no news doesn’t mean everything is going great. Know your neighbors and be involved with your community to increase the safety and well-being of all.

To solve socially complex challenges, we must begin with an awareness of the problems and issues in our community. We need to learn from history in order to grasp the full scope of domestic violence. Where in history was violence power? Although these two words sit next to one another in my sentence, violence and power, they are in direct opposition to one another.

What is strength? Talk to anyone who works at Bradley Angle and you will know it instantly.

Together we can build and provide funding to fuel social service offerings that connect the root of oppression, the roots of generational trauma, and truly meet the needs of our community.
Jefferson High Feeds the Community

Jefferson PTSA has partnered with several local and very charitable organizations to provide our community with basic and a variety of food items. If you or someone you know in need of a little support right now, please share this information with them. All are welcome to participate!

Show up at Jefferson High School on the Commercial street side of the building on Tuesdays and Fridays from 1:00pm to 3:00pm. You will be able to shop with the assistance of one of our dedicated volunteers maintaining a 6’ distance at all times.

If you are supporting others and would like to have food to continue to support our community, please share your email address with us and we will try to make arrangement for you to participate or contact our president of the PTSA Georgie Honl at president@demosptsa.org

Donations are welcome! If you would like to donate to our nonprofit, please visit the donations page at demosptsa.org. Thank you in advance for your support.

Jefferson PTSA se a asociado con varias organizaciones locales y caritativas. Para proporcionar a nuestra comunidad con una variedad de alimentos.

Si usted o alguien que conosca necesita ayu-pa, por favor compara-tan esta información con ellos.

Todos son bienvenidos.

Llegar a Jefferson High School en el lado de la calle Com-mercial los Martes y Viernes de las 1:00pm a las 3:00pm. Va a poder escoger sus alimentos con la asistencia de uno de nuestros voluntarios manteniendo su dis-tancia a 6’.

Llegar a Jefferson High School en el lado de la calle Com-mercial los Martes y Viernes de las 1:00pm a las 3:00pm, y tendremos una caja de alimentos prepa-ra-da, para recoger en estilo pick-up, con asistencia de uno de nuestros voluntarios a 6’ de distancia.

Si usted esta apyanda a otros y quiere comida para poder seguir asistiendo la comunidad, por favor comparta con nosotros su correo electrónico, o contace a la presidenta de el PTSA Georgie Honl @ president@demosptsa.org

Para donar a nuestra orga-nización sin fines de lucro para seguir apoyando a la comunidad, por favor done lo que usted dese a demosptsa.org y vaya a dona-
tions. Gracias en Avanza.

Un agradecimiento especial a nuestras organizaciones carita-tivas: Jefferson PTSA @ demo-
sptsa.org / Hopscotch Foundation @ hopscotchhealth@gmail.com / Main Springs @ www.main-
springpdx.org / Urban Gleaners @ www.urbangleaners.org / Varios vecinos de Jefferson quien an donado en efectivo.

Juntos Podemos!