

NORTH BIRMINGHAM MATTERS

North Birmingham industrial plant remains closed as residents and health advocates seek stronger action to protect air quality

As Bluestone Coke sits temporarily closed, several nearby residents hope to see the doors shut permanently and new standards set to bring environmental justice and fairness to the North Birmingham Community.

Bluestone Coke stopped operating in the Harriman Park Neighborhood in October 2021, the same time that the Jefferson County Department of Health continued its court fight to deny the coke plant an operating permit. Bluestone uses coal to produce foundry coke. Coke is a major industrial ingredient needed to produce steel.

North Birmingham residents for years have expressed concern that industrial activity in their neighborhood, including the manufacturing of coke, created air pollution and related health issues.

"They should stay closed down," said Sharron Barkley, a life-long resident of nearby Collegeville, and a member of the Community Advisory Board of the UAB Superfund Research Center. "They are making money in the community, but it is not coming into the community."

In addition to ending operations, Barkley called for a plan to cleanup the industrial site.

The health department's legal action cited air quality violations, according to WIAT CBS 42, which has reported on North Birmingham environmental issues for several years on television and online at WIAT.com. A status update is set for June 8, 2022.

Officials at Bluestone, in a statement to WIAT, said the company was working to make upgrades at the



plant and plan to reopen. Parent company Bluestone Industries, bought the North Birmingham plant in 2019.

Birmingham Mayor Randall Woodfin this fall said the city would join efforts to hold Bluestone accountable and oppose its reopening.

There is also a separate legal case against Bluestone that involves the health department and the Greater-Birmingham Alliance to Stop Pollution (GASP). Both groups in that case are seeking civil penalties for environmental violations by the company.

Advisory Board member Keisha Brown of Harriman is also a member of GASP. She lives just few blocks away from the plant.

"It's a positive first step," she said. "But I want it shut down forever because we've gone through enough over here."

Bluestone Industries is owned by the family of West Virginia Governor Jim Justice.

Sources: WIAT CBS42, birminghamal.gov.

WE WANT TO HEAR FROM YOU

The Superfund Research Center wants to know more about what you think is needed in your community. We are looking for people to complete a Community Needs Assessment Survey. This information will help us as we continue to partner with the residents of the North Birmingham Community.

For more information, please contact Edrika Miskell at 205-934-6839 or emiskell@uabmc.edu

Service is full time job for honorary 'mayor' of North Birmingham



Jimmy Coleman is called "the Mayor of North Birmingham" for good reason.

Coleman's cell phone is constantly buzzing as residents from across the city call him with questions and concerns. He almost always has an answer or knows where to find one. He has been a North Birmingham neighborhood officer for 43 years.

"You just don't know how your life is going to turn out," he said.

The Community Advisory Board member for the

UAB Superfund Research Center was given his honorary mayoral nickname after he became neighborhood president in 1986. He often smiles and laughs it off. But he still answers to it.

A Vietnam War veteran, Coleman went into the Marines in 1966, then spent time in other parts of the country. Yet, his affection for home brought him back to the North Birmingham community.

Coleman is also president of the Citizens Advisory Board, the umbrella organization for all of Birmingham's 99 neighborhood associations.

"I've been around a long time, but it's just not about me," he said. "It's about the community and what we can do to make this community better than what it is today."

Charmell Hicks, an advocate seeking clean air for the children



Charmell Hicks' reasons for getting involved in environmental issues are simple. She just wants the air to be fresh enough for her children to go outside and play.

"I like the outside and being able to get together, but you can't really enjoy yourself right now," she said.

"We're just trying to make it better for the next generation."

It is this one request – for clean air – that made Hicks interested in joining action to study and improve health conditions in the North Birmingham Community. Her participation on the Advisory Board is an example.

Hicks said she wants her children to share some of the same fond memories that she has of growing up in the area.

Hicks spent much of her childhood in the North Birmingham Community and in Collegeville where her grandparents lived. Her grandmother and grandfather became sick with illnesses that Hicks believes were directly related to the industrial pollution that surrounded them in their neighborhood.

Hicks said evidence of a problem is obvious when going outside during certain times of the day and being able to smell odors from factories operating nearby. Still, Hicks is hopeful for a better future in North Birmingham.

"I just want to give back so that the children will be able to come back outside," she said. "I hope that it does improve and that things do change."

Community Advisory Board Members: Charmell Hicks, Barbara Goudy Thomas, Chris Mosley, Omar Harvill, Keisha Brown, Melodie Agnew, Jimmy Coleman, Chester Wallace, Letitia Collins, Sharron Barkley.



UAB Superfund Research Center team member Crystal Stephens talks to residents and shares information about the initiative, while Chester Wallace, a longtime Collegeville neighborhood leader and member of the Research Center's Community Advisory Board, stands nearby.

Neighbors helping neighbors: Community Pop-Up Markets deliver supplies and encouragement to North Birmingham residents

The Superfund Research Center was well represented at the most recent Community Pop-Up Market event in Collegeville November 20, 2021.

At one table, Crystal Stephens, MSN, CRNP, Study coordinator and Research Translation Coordinator for the Research Center, greeted residents and offered information packets with details about the center and how they may get involved.

The neighborhood Pop-Up Market series is a partnership of community organizations, and neighborhood associations, convened by GASP. Keisha Brown, a member of the Superfund Research Center's Community Advisory Board is also a community liaison for GASP.

Chester Wallace, another Community Advisory Board member and a longtime Collegeville neighborhood leader, participated and greeted dozens of his neighbors.

The event served more than 100 residents, who drove up to tables lining the parking lot where volunteers delivered bags of supplies that included food, clothes and toiletries.

The pop-ups are also neighborhood reunions for many of the participants and volunteers after nearly two years of social distancing and continued pandemic precautions.

"We are here to share with the neighbors," said Collegeville Neighborhood President Drucilla Royal. "All of us were just born and raised right here. "So many residents go back four and five generations."

Organizers are planning to present the next pop-up market in the spring. Details will be announced later.

For more information, contact Keisha Brown at 205-285-0692.

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North Birmingham Matters wants to share
items of interest to you. Please submit your
stories ideas for consideration.

Contact: Sharonda Hardy (205) 934-1717
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