

# NORTH BIRMINGHAM MATTERS

## Environmental Justice: The Fight Continues

The Community Engagement Core sat with Ms. Kiesha Brown (KB) and Dr. Shauntice Allen (SA) to discuss their long-standing fight for environmental justice (EJ). We discussed not only the need for EJ but also the importance in documenting many of the long-standing initiatives of black women continuing to fight the injustice.

**Q: *What prompted you to write the piece, *The Intersectionality of Environmental Justice and Women of Color: Birmingham, AL "She'roes" in the EJ Movement?****

SA: There has not been a lot of writing about black women's involvement in this work highlighting the role of black women in the EJ movement. I thought it was important to write about the real work that people are doing in Birmingham.

**Q: *Why do you think that there isn't that spotlight on the actual people who do the work?***

KB: I would say the reason is because it's not work that comes with a lot of limelight or visibility. Many want to be involved when there's national attention and often those doing the day-to-day grassroots work are overlooked.

**Q: *How did both of you get involved in EJ?***

SA: I think I've always been an advocate and an activist in some way. It's not a job, it's a part of who a person is. Both my personal and professional lens has always centered on betterment, improvement and helping people, specifically in the EJ space. I trace it back to the influential women in my own life who have shown me what it means to be a giver and a helper.

KB: I live in a community surrounded by industries such as the railroad. A major railroad yard is behind my house. I live across the street from a cement plant

quarry, and a coal plant less than two blocks away. I've been around it all my life. We always had people getting sick out here. And I always wanted to do things to help. We are the ones going through this, so we should be on the table when a decision is made that affects us. Others who are not from this area don't know what polluted land looks like.

**Q: *What keeps you going?***

KB: Clearly what keeps me going is being that fair, prayerful person. I pray to God every day. As a child, I was sick. I had respiratory problems. I kept going to the doctor and the emergency room. I thank God that I was able to grow up, because I'm still going to be fighting for the little children who can't fight for themselves.

SA: Knowing that these problems and issues didn't happen overnight and are not going to be resolved and rectified just by snapping one's fingers, keeps me going. It takes transparency and communication in order to chip away at these issues, and try to make things better.

**Q: *How do you get more people to care, use their voice, and move in the right direction?***

SA: There's power in people coming together. We've seen that even over the last few years with Black Lives Matter. And even the work that's happening now. It's not a question of how you can get people to care, but how you keep them caring about something.

KB: My thing is education. Before COVID, we used to have focus groups where we'd talk about different things. As an activist, you have to think outside the box. Some call me with issues like bills or other things, and I get information to help them out. I consider my community my family, and I'm gonna help them.

## Barbara Goudy Thomas: A Foundation of Success Laid Solid in Collegeville



Taking the bus as a child past large homes along the tree-lined boulevard, Barbara Goudy Thomas never imagined being able to live in Norwood, just a few blocks from Collegeville, let alone becoming its recently elected president. Her devotion to the community remains evident through her community service, including serving as president of the Carver National Alumni Association from 2014 to 2018. She currently serves as vice president.

In the 1960s, Norwood seemed a world away to Thomas because of racial segregation.

"Although we went through problems in our environment growing up in the 60s, I always tried to take lemons and make lemonade out of it. My parents shielded us from the racism that was around us and they were my biggest champions. They encouraged me to embrace my education," said Thomas, a retired respiratory care practitioner and pulmonary nurse.

Thomas lost her entire immediate family from health issues related to environmental toxins. That loss, coupled with her devotion to her home community, propels Thomas to advocate for positive change. Residents need to understand the initiative and how it could benefit them, and Thomas stands ready to provide that education.

## Omar Harvill: 'Serial Entrepreneur' Committed to Investing in a Rebirth for North Birmingham



Omar Harvill remembers as a child listening to regular conversations between his father, Horace Harvill, and A.G. Gaston, Birmingham's celebrated entrepreneur. The men talked about the state of the community and ways to improve the economic lives of its residents. Those moments helped lay a foundation that would guide the younger Harvill in his own business development and community involvement. Like Gaston, Harvill desires to use his business skills to uplift communities and the people that he serves.

"I'm passionate about redeveloping and bringing

North Birmingham to where it once was—a thriving neighborhood," Harvill said.

As the founder and owner of businesses, Harvill is heavily invested in both investment and community advocacy. He sits on several boards, including the Birmingham Downtown Redevelopment Board, where he serves as chairman. Harvill is a regular presence in North Birmingham, walking and looking for restoration possibilities and opportunities to collaborate with members of the community. He sees what is possible with proper planning and investment.

Harvill has a simple message when it comes to people interested in helping to revive the North Birmingham Community, particularly those with roots in the area. "Come back home," he said.

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



## We Invite Residents to Participate in 'Needs Assessment Survey'

The UAB Superfund Research Center Community Engagement Core is committed to engaging with communities in the North Birmingham area to provide information and resources to mitigate risks from environmental pollution. At the same time, we want to hear what the main concerns people have around environmental pollutants and any health issues within their community.

For us to do that, we first need to understand the needs and the capacity of the community. We need to identify resources within the community such as community leaders, organizations, and community partners who can work with us to facilitate collaborative efforts to reduce environmental exposures and promote health.

As a part of this effort, we are inviting the residents of the six North Birmingham city neighborhoods, Acipco-Finley, Collegeville, Fairmont, Harriman Park, Hooper City, and North

Birmingham, to participate in our *Needs Assessment Survey*. A community needs assessment survey is a strong tool that can help us to assess local concerns and perceptions of neighborhood conditions, health problems, potential sources of environmental pollution, access to health care, and other issues affecting residents.

Our goal is to get responses from a diverse group of community members and survey up to 200 residents from the six neighborhoods. As residents, people can provide valuable local knowledge to assess environmental health risks in their community. They can tell us what their community values the most and what their expectations are.

By participating in our 'Needs Assessment Survey', the residents of North Birmingham can help to prioritize the most important community needs. They can also help us to effectively access the people in the community, find possible solutions, and successfully advocate for solutions that reduce environmental risks.

The Needs Assessment Survey is a 30-minute survey that you can choose to complete online or on the phone. In exchange for your time and feedback, you will receive a \$25 gift card. Participation is voluntary and your opinions help researchers better understand and address your concerns about your health and environment.

For more information, please email us at [UABsuperfund@uabmc.edu](mailto:UABsuperfund@uabmc.edu) or call us at (205) 934-6839.

*All participants receive a \$25 Gift Card.*

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**PROJECT 1: Pollution & Chronic  
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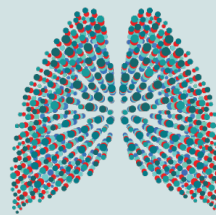
**PROJECT 3: Pollution & Lower  
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**PROJECT 4: Measuring Toxic  
Particles with Laser Technology**



**PROJECT 5: Using Natural  
Materials to Clean Soil  
Contamination**



# UAB SRC

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

Contact: Sharonda Hardy (205) 934-1717  
sharonda@uab.edu

You can change the community by volunteering for SRC research projects.

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