



Roseland area seeking a turnaround

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By LAURA WASHINGTON August 24, 2013 11:44PM

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One of every two African-American men from Chicago's South Side will die before the age of 64. One of three black women will face that fate. In Chicago, 3,200 more blacks than whites die every year.

Those dire statistics hung in the air last Monday night at a town hall meeting in Roseland, on the city's far South Side. But the resilient people behind the numbers were determined to turn them around.

The meeting was inspired by the plight of Roseland Community Hospital, a neighborhood linchpin and last resort for the sick and poor. It's easy for some to ignore this far-flung place, to turn away from the community's sorry but familiar problems, like crime, joblessness and poverty.

That's what residents feared last April when the hospital was nearly shut down. Administrators said the facility was buried in \$14 million in unpaid bills. There was much wrangling over whom to blame.

In June, Gov. Pat Quinn announced an infusion of \$350,000 in state funds. A new administration was appointed in July.

Now, residents wanted to know — will Roseland survive? I served as co-moderator of the town hall, where neighborhood residents, activists and politicians turned out to proselytize.

As several hundred people piled into a local community center, they were handed red buttons that proclaimed: "Working to Build a New Roseland."

Elizabeth Harrison, a 40-year resident, stood to declare her community suffers from the "dry bones" of boarded-up houses, irresponsible parenting and other ills. But, she added, "Roseland will not die. Dry bones, you can live!"

Roseland has rich old bones. The village of "Roseland" was settled in 1849 by Dutch immigrants drawn to its "high prairie." Polish and Italian families came later, and the area was once a stop on the Underground Railroad, according to

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the Encyclopedia of Chicago.

White flight and economic turmoil took a toll in the 1960s and 1970s. In the mid-1980s, a young, ambitious community organizer named Barack Obama toiled there, then moved on. I lived there, on Normal Avenue, in the 1990s. Not enough has changed.

At the meeting, Tim Egan was asked the big question. Egan is Roseland's new president and chief restructuring officer. The former administrator at Norwegian American Hospital specializes in turnarounds.

For the first time, he publicly promised that Roseland would not be shut down. "I didn't come here to cut services," Egan told the crowd. "I came here to build services."

Let's get that on the record.

The hospital is considering expanding services in crucial areas like asthma, diabetes, obesity and mental health, Egan told me.

The hospital has good bones but has suffered from mismanagement. "We found \$8 million of billings that had not even gone out the door," he said. "I discovered that, probably, on the second day I was there."

He is fixing those poor business practices, getting the place stabilized, and promises more reforms soon.

At the meeting, Harrison exhorted, "We need to do a whole lot of work to get Roseland on its feet again!"

She got a host of "Amens."

"Roseland, you can live again! You must live again!"

Those bones may be dry, but they've got the spirit.

Email: LauraSWashington@aol.com






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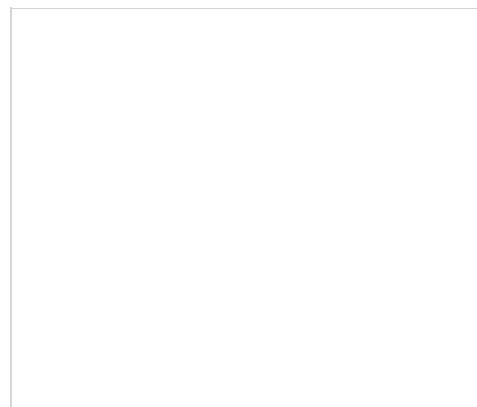
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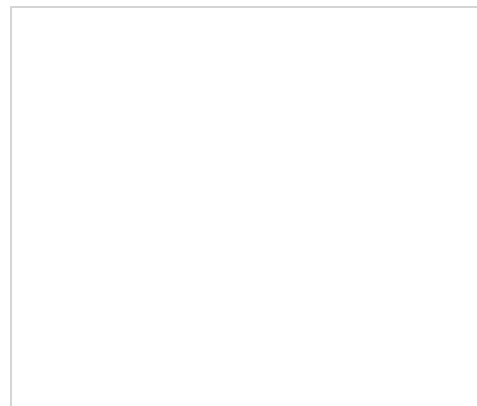
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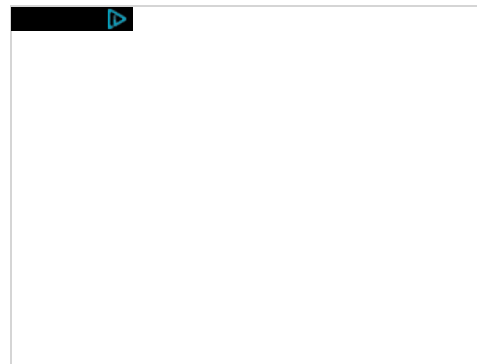


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