Gold Medal Winner

Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park

Chicago, Illinois

Photos by Steve Hall / Hendrich Blessing

This is an expert from:

Inspiring Change

The 2013 Rudy Bruner Award for Urban Excellence

BRUNER FOUNDATION, INC.
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Overview

Submitted by: Inspiration Corporation
Completed: 2011
Total Development Cost: $2.5 million

Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park is an 80-seat restaurant created by Inspiration Corporation that provides free meals to the working poor and market-rate meals to the public along with foodservice training and catering.

The restaurant is located four miles west of the Chicago Loop in East Garfield Park, across the street from the 185-acre Garfield Park and one block east of the Garfield Park Conservatory. Opened in 2011, the facility is a non-profit, social enterprise that provides workforce training and healthy, affordable meals in one of the city's most distressed neighborhoods.

Inspiration Kitchens—Garfield Park's restaurant, kitchen, and offices are housed in a 7,315 square foot, single-story, former factory alongside the Chicago Transit Authority's elevated Green Line. Designed by Wheeler Kearns Architects, the renovated brick structure features a light and airy interior that takes advantage of natural daylight from skylights and large windows. The main dining room includes exposed brick walls and tables, and built-in benches and paneling. Large windows facing the street were designed to maximize transparency between the restaurant, kitchen, and community and to minimize sound transmission from passing trains. The project features an energy-efficient kitchen exhaust, a solar thermal hot water system, and a superior building envelope, the use of recycled wood, as well as bike racks and shower facilities.

"INSPIRATION KITCHENS—GARFIELD PARK IS AN EPITOME OF HOPE. IT IS AN OUTSTANDING EXAMPLE OF A PLACE THAT BRINGS PEOPLE TOGETHER – AROUND GOOD FOOD, JOB TRAINING, AND A WELL-DESIGNED SPACE." *–2013 Selection Committee*

The property includes a small parking lot and garden that, along with another community garden, provides produce used in meals prepared by the kitchen. The gardens and meals are intended to offer a healthy dining alternative in a community with little access to fresh food.

The project's sit-down restaurant offers a "Southern-inspired" menu of affordable, high quality meals prepared by clients of the foodservice training program. They are available to market-rate paying customers and to local, low-income residents and families at no cost via a "Guest Certificate" program. Inspiration Corporation partners with local community organizations to distribute the certificates to residents who use them to pay for meals in the restaurant.

The host corporation for Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park is Inspiration Corporation. Founded by Lisa Nigro, a former Chicago police officer, the Corporation offers employment, housing and supportive services to help those affected by homelessness and poverty move toward self-reliance. Under its aegis, Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park offers an intensive 13-week job training program that enables homeless individuals, ex-offenders, and low-income individuals to obtain employment in the food industry. The organization has provided a restaurant-style meals program since 1989 through its initial cafe and foodservice training program in the city's Uptown neighborhood.

The idea for the Garfield Park restaurant emerged through discussions with the project's lead donor, whose dream was to open a restaurant that provides free or affordable meals to working poor families. At the same time, expansion of the foodservice training program was envisioned in Inspiration Corporation's 2006-2010 strategic plan. The organization solicited input from the community, public officials, non-profit, and philanthropic leaders and targeted East Garfield Park as a place where its services could yield the most impact. Inspiration Corporation and its design team then worked with Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance and Local Initiatives Support Corporation (LISC) Chicago's New Communities Program – East Garfield Park to convene a series of community meetings to gather input that informed the design of the building and restaurant.

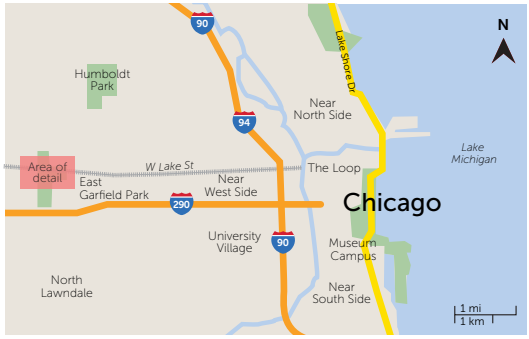
Funding for the nearly $2.5 million cost of purchase and construction was raised through a "Catalyst Campaign" that included a significant gift from a private donor and additional support for ongoing operating costs and an operating reserve. The project receives annual support from the City of Chicago Department of Family and Support Services.

Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park is one of eleven "model kitchens" that are part of Catalyst Kitchens, a national network of organizations with a shared vision to empower lives by providing job training, quality foodservice, and revenue generation through social enterprise. While a bit off the beaten track, the Garfield Park restaurant has garnered local attention, including awards from AIA Chicago, Chicago Architecture Foundation, Chicago Association of Realtors, Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, Urban Land Institute Chicago, and the US Green Building Council (USGBC) Illinois.

Project at-a-Glance

- Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park (IKGP) is a program of Inspiration Corporation that assists families and individuals affected by homelessness by offering a high-quality experience at no cost for diners in a restaurant that also offers training, counseling, and placement in the foodservice industry for hard-to-employ individuals.
- IKGP is a facility that provides attractive space for these programs in an energy-efficient, adaptively re-used, century-old structure that has also provided a much-needed community gathering space in a neighborhood struggling for regeneration.

- IKPG is a board, staff and student population of dedicated individuals that make the program and facility work. They bring an overall sophistication and capacity to the organization providing the vision, leadership, and horsepower to sustain it.
- IKGP is also the product of hands-on and intellectually rigorous philanthropy by Leonard and Gabriel Goodman. The Goodmans had a vision, sought out a capable not-for-profit organization to act on that vision, and engaged in the development process fully to completion.
- IKGP is, in the long view, the result of the intrepid individual initiative by Lisa Nigro who set out to serve the homeless with a little red wagon full of coffee and bagels, led by the simple idea that the transformational attitude toward those she served must be one of respect.
- Finally, IKGP is a manifestation of the broad-based strength, capacity, and sophistication of the not-for-profit and social-enterprise sector in Chicago and its environs – in housing and neighborhood development, community development finance, education and workforce development, parks and recreation, and much more.



Steve Hall / Hedrich Blessing

Project Goals

- To offer working poor families affected by homelessness a high-quality dining experience – gourmet-quality food with table service offered in a way that expresses respect for the individual – with some meals provided at no cost through an innovative Guest Certificate program.
- To help move difficult-to-employ individuals – often homeless themselves, many returning from prison – into the workforce through training, education, counseling, supportive services, referral, and placement, guided by the principle that the best preparation for work is work.
- To reinforce ongoing community revitalization efforts in one of Chicago's poorest and most distressed neighborhoods by creating an attractive community meeting place for organized events and serendipitous encounters.
- To create a truly "green" facility through the adaptive re-use of an existing building incorporating a wide range of energy-efficient features, located near public transit, and providing support to those who come by car, train, bicycle or on foot.

Chronology

inspiration corporation CATALYST FOR SELF-RELIANCE

1989 Inspiration Cafe founded by Lisa Nigro, a Chicago police officer on leave. The Cafe began when she borrowed a red wagon from her nephew and served coffee and sandwiches to homeless people on the streets of Chicago. This operation moved from the wagon to a sport utility vehicle and then to a building in the Northside Uptown neighborhood.

1992 Lisa Nigro begins the process of stepping away from the Cafe's day-to-day work with the hiring of the first staff person, but still volunteers and engages in the evolution of work.

1994 The Employment Project is founded by Luke Weisberg, serving the homeless and impoverished Chicagoans. In 2003 it becomes part of Inspiration Corporation.

1995 The Living Room Cafe is founded by Jennifer Kihm, a former intern at Inspiration Cafe.

2000 Cafe Too, Inspiration Corporation's social enterprise and foodservice training program in the Uptown neighborhood, initiates its pilot program.

2001 Inspiration Cafe receives its first government grant for subsidized housing in Chicago's north side.

2003 Inspiration Cafe and The Living Room Cafe merge, forming Inspiration Corporation.

2005 East Garfield Park: Growing a Healthy Community plan is completed by LISC Chicago.

Inspiration Corporation opens Inspiration Kitchens – Uptown (formerly Cafe Too).

2006 Inspiration Corporation's five-year strategic plan identifies expansion of programs as an agency priority.

2007 Inspiration Corporation starts "Career Connections" to provide pathways to education and vocational training for participants.

2008 East Garfield Park is identified as the target neighborhood for a new facility to become Inspiration Kitchens – Garfield Park through an intensive community selection process.

Inspiration Corporation

Wheeler Kearns Architects

Steve Hall / Hedrich Blessing

The Catalyst Campaign begins in December with a $6 million goal and receives its first gift: $100,000 to create an operating reserve, which was later named for the seed donors, Paul and Mary Ann Judy. The campaign has two priorities: expansion of Inspiration Corporation's food service training program and social enterprise at a new facility to become IKGP and creation of an operating reserve fund to ensure the agency's future.

2009 The Catalyst Campaign receives a $4.26 million lead gift to fund expansion into East Garfield Park.

Inspiration Corporation buys 3504 W. Lake Street building in October.

Beginning in October, IC staff and the project architect network with community groups and host meetings to discuss project design and potential partnerships over the next ten months.

2010 IKGP Construction begins in June.

July: Board of directors approve revised construction budget, raising the Catalyst Campaign budget by $550,000 to $6.55 million and extend the campaign through February 2012.

Catalyst Campaign meets original $6 million goal in August.

A project blog is launched in October to provide the public with updates on construction, program development, building access, tour info, staffing, etc.

Between December and April 2011 IKGP hires 13 full- and 5 part-time staff positions for its Garfield Park location.

2011 The building passes inspections and foodservice training begins in March.

April-May: Adjacent 2,000 square foot lot is acquired and a garden installed.

Restaurant opens in May.

Part-time catering manager is hired in October.

IKGP signs two-year agreement with the City of Chicago for an additional 11,000 square-foot garden in Garfield Park.

2012 Fiscal year ends in June with goals for catering and restaurant exceeded by 80 percent.

Catering business expands in July/August as a van is purchased and full-time manager and part-time driver are hired.

Project Description

Steve Hall / Hendrich Blessing

Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park (IKGP) is an 80-seat restaurant on Lake Street in Chicago's East Garfield Park. It offers an affordable menu, free food for working poor families, and foodservice training for poor, unemployed, often homeless clients as part of a larger nonprofit organization called Inspiration Corporation (IC). The place occupies a 1906 manufacturing building that has been renovated from its prior use as a warehouse with parking on site together with an adjacent vacant lot. The long-term goal for the facility and staff is to serve 3,000 meals a year at no cost to working poor or homeless families and operate a high quality, moderately-priced restaurant for the community, while enrolling 90 students a year in a 13-week foodservice course. The simple expression of the place and program, however, involves a much richer story about how IC developed an approach for working with distressed populations of poor, sometimes homeless, and often formerly incarcerated clients.

HISTORY AND VISION

There are many threads but several key storylines that lead to the development of Inspiration Kitchens. The first is the story of Lisa Nigro, a Chicago police officer, who found a calling to serve the homeless and hungry in her city with respect and dignity. These early efforts provided the foundation for what grew into a sophisticated, professional nonprofit agency that became strong enough to survive her stepping away. This tale further involves the thoughtful philanthropy of Leonard Goodman, a Chicago defense attorney and philanthropist and his cousin Gabriel Goodman, a businessman who joined the Inspiration Corporation Board of Directors. The Goodmans not only brought to bear the vision and led financial support for the Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park initiative, but also drove the development process from beginning to end.

The facility design and development offers another set of stories that further reveal these organization and leadership themes. These stories illustrate the quality of place and strength of the governing board and staff that now supports the activities and programming of IKGP. They also show the role of not-for-profit organizations that at one crucial moment or another, aided the development of IKGP. Finally, this is also the story of the neighborhood not-for-profit and community organizations that welcomed Inspiration Kitchens to East Garfield Park.

CONTEXT

The origins of the East Garfield Park community go back to its annexation into the city of Chicago just two years prior to the fire of 1871. Because of the promise of the park, there was an initial spate of real estate speculation but virtually no development resulted. It was destined to remain undeveloped in any significant way after the fire as well because speculators sprawled further out to get beyond the perimeter of the fire's destruction. Weak transportation links contributed to continued slow residential development, even as the railroads to the north, east and south invited manufacturing expansion. Commercial development followed the elevated tracks on Lake Street, which began operation in 1893, leading to the eventual development of two-family homes and some apartments supporting the emerging manufacturing workforce.

Some of the real promise of the park, originally designed by William Le Baron Jenney, was not realized until Jen Jensen took on the landscaping in 1905. This work was completed in time for early Irish and German residents to enjoy, followed by Jewish, Russian and Italian workers and their families. The area was a stable but modest mix of residential, commercial and manufacturing land uses up to the Great Depression and World War II. Before the Great Depression, East Garfield Park enjoyed some additional vitality following the creation of places like the Madison-Crawford Shopping District, a high-end residential hotel, and new schools.

After the Great Depression and the War, the community saw two-family homes carved up into multiple unit boarding houses that were poorly maintained. The racial profile of the community also shifted from 1930 to 1960 with the white population dwindling from 97% to less than 40% while the population of African-Americans grew from about 3% to over 60%. In this same time period the community demographics shifted from about 24% foreign-born to just over 5% foreign-born. Larry Bennett, author of *Fragments of Cities: The New American Downtowns and Neighborhoods,* argues that the shift in settlement demographics were, in part, prompted by the displacement of residents due to the construction of the Congress Expressway in the 1950's as well as to the arrival of African-Americans who had been crowded out of the South and Near West Side. The demographic shift was further prompted by new Chicago Housing Authority projects that had been on the east edge of the community by 1960. The overcrowding and landlord neglect of properties exacerbated the previous decades of community decline and poverty levels rose still higher.

The 1960's were a time of activism in the community. Organizations addressing civil rights issues set out to confront the decline by resisting new public housing, promoting successful rent strikes, and establishing the East Park Cooperative, set up to acquire grocery stores and housing. But these and other efforts ran into the face of riots on Madison Street in 1968 and the resultant loss of business and resettlement

Wheeler Kearns Architects

Project location in relation to Garfield Park Conservatory, Garfield Park and the "L"

programs led to vacancy and the outmigration of still more population and economic opportunity.

Today, East Garfield Park is part of a larger archipelago of West Side Chicago neighborhoods deeply mired in poverty. The long-term population trend has been disastrous for Garfield Park, with a loss of two-thirds of its population over the past 50 years. This trend has stabilized in recent years, with a slight loss of population in the core census tract but an increase in several nearby tracts in the 2010 census.

At the time of the project's development, most census tracts within about a two-mile radius had median household incomes of below $30,000 and some well below that level. The median household income for the census tract in which the project is located was $15,202 (American Community Survey estimates, 2005-2009). Two adjacent tracts had median incomes that have declined in recent years to $24,734 and $26,836 respectively. There are lower income neighborhoods on Chicago's West Side, but not many and not by much. Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park cites other figures showing 41% of households at or below the federal poverty line and 23% of households living in extreme poverty.

Distress in the neighborhood extends to housing, as well. The number of vacant housing units in the core census track doubled from 2000 to 2010 when 18.5% of all units were vacant. In 2013 a visual scan of Google Maps satellite imagery suggested at least 10% of the residential lots in the immediate neighborhood were also vacant. Notably, these were concentrated along W. Lake Street, which sits underneath the "L" and along N. St. Louis Avenue. In contrast, the building stock along N. Central Park Avenue – facing the Conservatory – appeared largely intact.

There is a suggestion in the data of a shift in the racial composition of the neighborhood population. Overall, the area immediately around the project and for a significant radius beyond is overwhelmingly African-American – mostly 90% or higher. But the change from 2000 to 2010 showed significant in-migration of ethnic groups other than African-American. In the core census tract, the African-American population declined by 10% during the period while White, Asian, and Hispanic populations each increased by roughly 300%, even though their absolute numbers remain small.

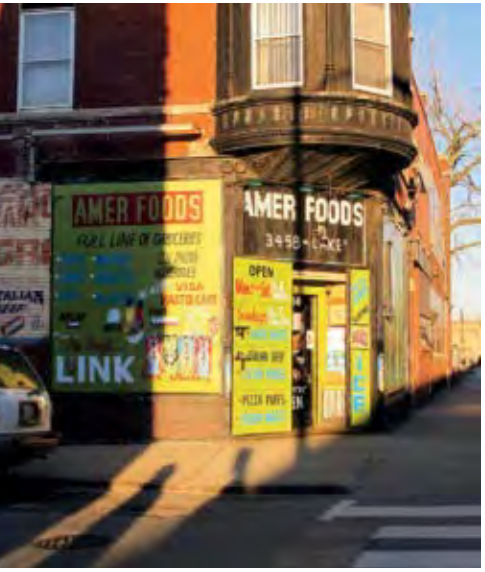
It is impossible from census data to say whether this is a harbinger of broader demographic changes to come or merely a temporary blip. However, the combination of the proximity of these neighborhoods to whiter, more affluent neighborhoods closer to downtown Chicago, and a slight uptick in total population in several census tracts adjacent to the Garfield Park Conservatory suggests that the conditions of poverty and food desert may give way to gentrification and upscale food shops in the near future. While the area suffered a spike in foreclosures during

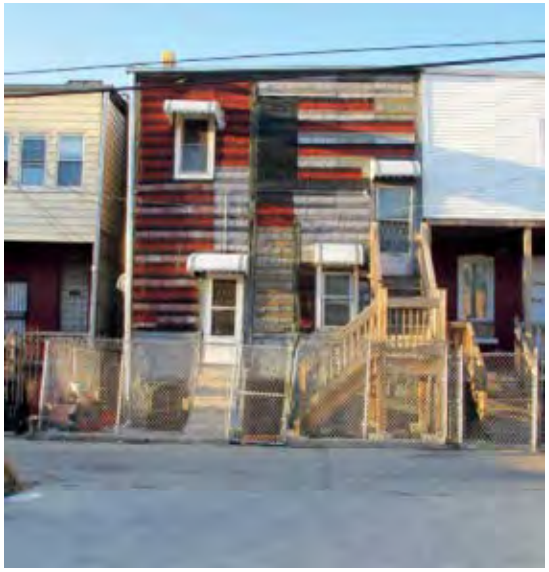
Views along W. Lake Street towards the Loop and across to Garfield Park

the recession starting in 2008, price appreciation of housing in the area, while low at 5%, was the best in the metro area.

The neighborhood surrounding IKGP is defined most prominently by the "L" which travels above W. Lake Street, the Conservatory immediately to the west, and the park to the south. At this scale, the "L" might be both a blessing and a curse, providing access from Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park to the broader region by public transit (just 15 minutes by the Green Line to the corner of State and Lake in the Loop) while depressing property values somewhat due to the nuisance impact of noise, vibration and what some, but by no means all, might find the unsightly infrastructure of the train. To the north of the site are a series of densely parceled single family houses, while to the east and scattered throughout the neighborhood is the roughness of still largely vacant or underutilized manufacturing land uses.

In a sense, the neighborhood's greatest assets are the same things that might make it vulnerable to the dynamics of rapid reinvestment from outside leading to residential displacement. Garfield Park has just enough special resources to make it attractive in a strengthening residential real estate market. It includes the historic and architecturally prominent Conservatory and Golden Dome Field House recreation facility, as well as proximity to downtown Chicago, strong service by rail transit, emerging community development through non-profits, and now Inspiration Kitchens. While gentrification has not arrived, there are already some who are sounding the alarm about its potential.





Neighboring homes and businesses

The neighborhood is part of what has been characterized as "Chicago's largest food desert." A 2009 study conducted by Inspiration Corporation found that only one-quarter of 32 restaurants within 20 blocks had seating and none were described as serving healthy food. Except for a small handful of soul food restaurants, these were mostly sub shops, chicken shacks, and Chinese take-out restaurants. Staff report that many local residents who come into IKGP for dinner have never before ordered from a waiter at their table, as opposed to walking up to a counter.

The planning documents supporting the revitalization of East Garfield Park indicate that the community is a frequent point of reentry for people leaving incarceration and returning to the community. From 2004 to 2006, a total of 2,082 previously incarcerated people re-entered society and relocated to East Garfield Park – one of five communities in the state with the highest number of the previously incarcerated.

In the broader picture, homelessness is a major and chronic problem in Chicago. An estimated 60,000 people in the city are homeless for some period of time each year. The causes for homelessness are multiple and complex, but one of the fundamental reasons for homelessness is a lack of affordable housing. A study by the McArthur Foundation estimated there is a shortage of 180,000 units of housing in the Chicago metropolitan area with an additional 53,000, needed by the year 2020 – a total shortfall of 233,000 of affordable units.

ORGANIZATION HISTORY AND LEADERSHIP

The cop and the little red wagon

The story of Inspiration Kitchens begins with Lisa Nigro, who had been a bartender when she determined – literally on a bet – to join the Chicago Police Department. She made the force and won the wager, but she carried out her duties, by her own account, more like social worker than a conventional a law enforcement officer. Arriving at the scene of a domestic shooting (where the mother-in-law had apparently put a bullet in the groin of the man she suspected of molesting her granddaughter), Nigro worked to arrange appropriate supportive services for the family and was happy to leave the attempted murder unsolved. Her supervising officers were not pleased with this resolution, and eventually Nigro decided to express her determination to help in more straightforward ways outside of the force.

Nigro hoped to open a cafe that would serve the hungry and homeless, not just a meal, but with the respect that really good food and personal service express. She scouted out restaurants of the type she hoped to open, places like Atlanta's Café 458 and a similar facility in the Twin Cities. However, no one in Chicago wanted to help a former cop with no track record and what she describes as that "look in her eyes" revealing the intensity of her personality. Undaunted, she borrowed a little red wagon and trundled the streets of Uptown Chicago with a load of bagels and coffee. Really good coffee – not "shelter coffee" – served in real mugs, a taste of quality to let the hungry know they had value.

This first initiative brought attention from the media and ultimately support from early funders. She was able to acquire a sport utility vehicle from which to serve her meals. Soon after, a North Side landlord agreed to rent her space for her first cafe – what became known as Inspiration Cafe in Uptown. The equipment was rudimentary – a toaster, a coffeemaker, and a wok – but she was in business. Nigro began with a focus on homeless women and children. The cafe remained mostly empty, in large part because the preponderance of the homeless population was single men. She shifted targets and the place filled up.

Lisa Nigro (left) and display referencing the "little red wagon"

As the enterprise grew and evolved, the underlying philosophy remained the same: treat the homeless with real eyeball-to-eyeball respect. This wasn't to be a soup kitchen. It was a place where homeless people could sit down and be served by a waiter or waitress, where the food was good, and where all patrons were treated with respect. This was not an environment of patronizing volunteer service. It made no distinction between those who volunteered and those who were served meals. Nigro liked to say that the volunteers weren't there to improve the experience of the customers but rather the volunteers were there to have their own life-changing experience through which they came to see the homeless in a different light.

She took the task personally and used a "tough love" approach in dealing with her patrons. Nigro would demand to know from her regular customers what they were willing to do to "get off the street." She was ready to help but wanted them to help themselves. Nigro was also willing to police the promises her customers made. She reports that one time she saw someone who had pledged to quit drugs standing on a street corner smoking pot. She grabbed the joint out of his hand and squashed it on the sidewalk. She then went home with him, searched the apartment, and flushed the rest of his stash down the toilet.

A maturing organization

The agency professionalized during the 1990's. At the same time Lisa Nigro began to step away. While she was the inspiration for Inspiration Cafe, she also recognized that additional organizational skills would be needed to build it for the future and to deal with all the details that would give it longevity. It drove her crazy, she admits, to see some leadership that didn't always share her vision for the place or her affinity for the clientele, but the idea of Inspiration Cafe and the structure that was in place was strong enough to survive her letting go.

After a decade or so in business, the various enterprises we now know as Inspiration Corporation were consolidated. This began with Inspiration Cafe in Uptown in 2001 adding foodservice training and placement, supportive services, case management, and housing to its portfolio. In 2003, Inspiration Corporation was formed through the merger of Inspiration Cafe and The Living Room Cafe, a South Side counterpart to Inspiration Cafe that had been started by a former volunteer at the Uptown establishment. Two years later, Inspiration Corporation also merged with The Employment Project to advance the integration of serving food with general employment preparation training programs and a broader array of "wraparound" services for those affected by homelessness.

By then, Inspiration Corporation's three main elements were geographically focused on neighborhoods on the North Side in Uptown – an ethnically and socio-economically diverse area – and on the South Side in the Woodlawn neighborhood not so far from the University of Chicago.

The creation of Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park was supported by the lucky coincidence of a growing interest in the same kind of development by an active and informed local philanthropist – Leonard Goodman – and his cousin and advisor Gabriel Goodman. The Goodmans wanted to create a restaurant not unlike Cafe Too in Uptown (now Inspiration Kitchens – Uptown) or Fare Start in Seattle – places that combine great food with job training and support for the poor and homeless. Len was willing to make a very substantial donation and they were intent on making sure the money was well invested.

Len and Gabe Goodman spent considerable time talking with area not-for-profit agencies to determine what organization might be entrusted to make best use of the kind of gift Len was willing to give. Most of those conversations came back around to one agency: Inspiration Corporation. The Goodmans' plan to create a new restaurant dovetailed with Inspiration Corporation's strategic plan goal of expansion.

Len Goodman, working with his cousin Gabe, engaged in extensive discussions with Inspiration Corporation's leadership about his proposed gift and the restaurant plan, resulting in a contribution that would support capital costs for the new restaurant and a portion of operating expenses for the first five years. The new restaurant could begin its life free of any debt service and have the promise of five full years to ramp up earned income from food sales as well as grants and contracts. The model does not assume the full costs of operations will ever come from revenues, but does anticipate increases in revenue reducing the required subsidy.

Len and Gabe Goodman's involvement continued throughout project planning and development after their due diligence helped identify Inspiration Corporation as the home organization for the restaurant they wanted to see created. They worked with the agency to select a neighborhood in which to locate, and later to find a property to purchase. They consulted on the selection of the architect and, subsequently, on the design itself. Len and Gabe Goodman were the epitome of engaged, thoughtful – one person said "intellectually rigorous" – philanthropists. They had a lot of help as Len Goodman's lead gift was followed by a numerous other donors, securing the financial future of IKGP.

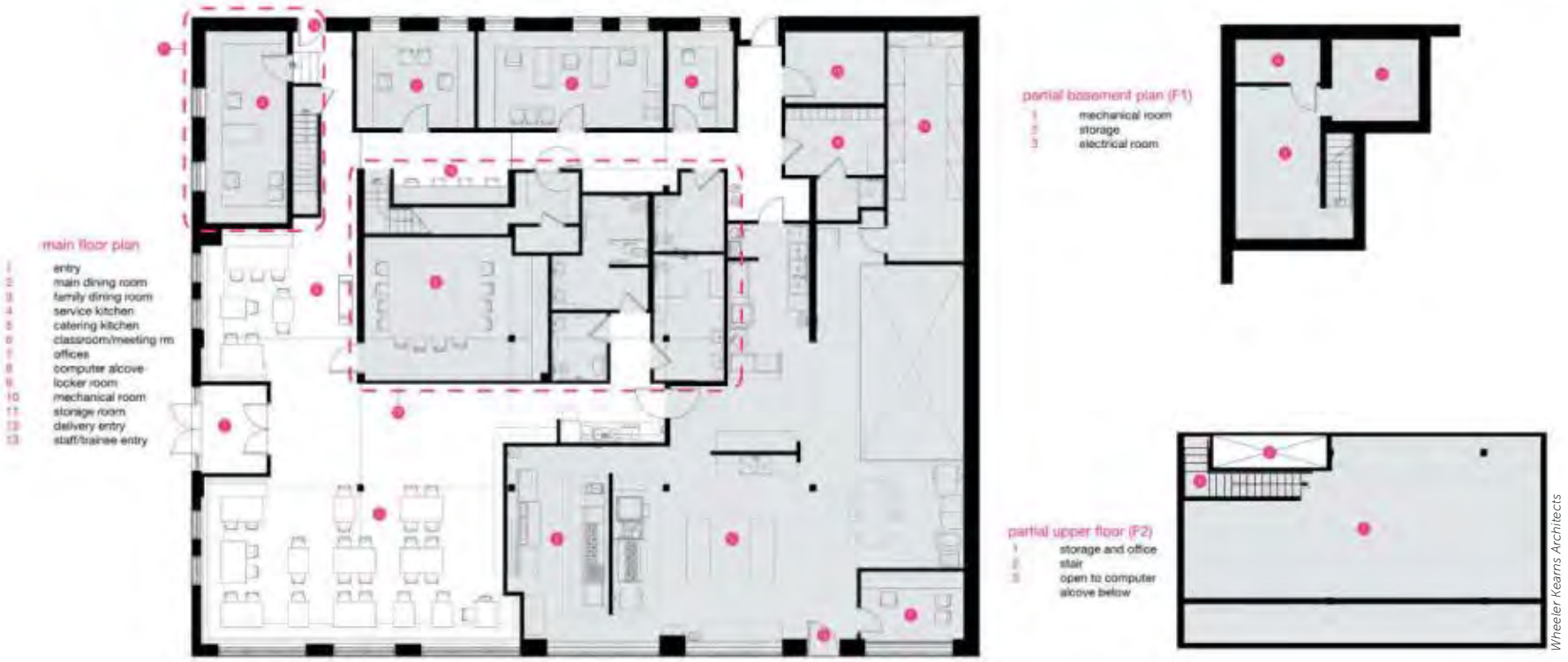
Rick Easty, Larry Kearns and Chris-Annemarie Spencer

FACILITY DESIGN AND DEVELOPMENT

The facility occupies a 7,315 square foot manufacturing building and includes: a 60-seat restaurant; a room with 20 additional dining seats for groups and families; offices for 14 staff; a computer lab to support job-seekers; a 1,990 square foot kitchen for teaching, restaurant production, catering, and a growing business in contract meals; and a small classroom space. Also included are showers, lockers, and bike racks for bike commuters. Outside are a small "permaculture" garden and a five-stall parking area which includes storm water design features that manages storm water on site and slows its flow into the city's sewer system.

The design of IKGP is a thoughtful effort that avoids heroic gestures. Given the values of the other participants, including the major funder, it's probably not surprising that they chose Wheeler Kearns Architects (WKA) to design the building. Larry Kearns describes the firm on his web site as being "devoted to a critical pursuit and practice of architecture," toward a "search for spaces which define a full, rich, and dignified way of life." The firm's architects take pride in "the participatory atmosphere of (their) studio," and a process which "involves clients, engineers, consultants, and contractors in the development of structures which respond to desire, function and budget." Part of that involves "finding the 'emotional center' of a project" early in the design process.

Perhaps even more to the point, the firm splits its efforts about fifty-fifty between higher-end residential clients who pay in full and not-for-profit organizations who get a different rate. When first engaged with Inspiration Corporation Wheeler Kearns was asked to do the job on a purely pro bono basis. Partner Larry Kearns demurred, as he was philosophically opposed to working for nothing, and argued that it was



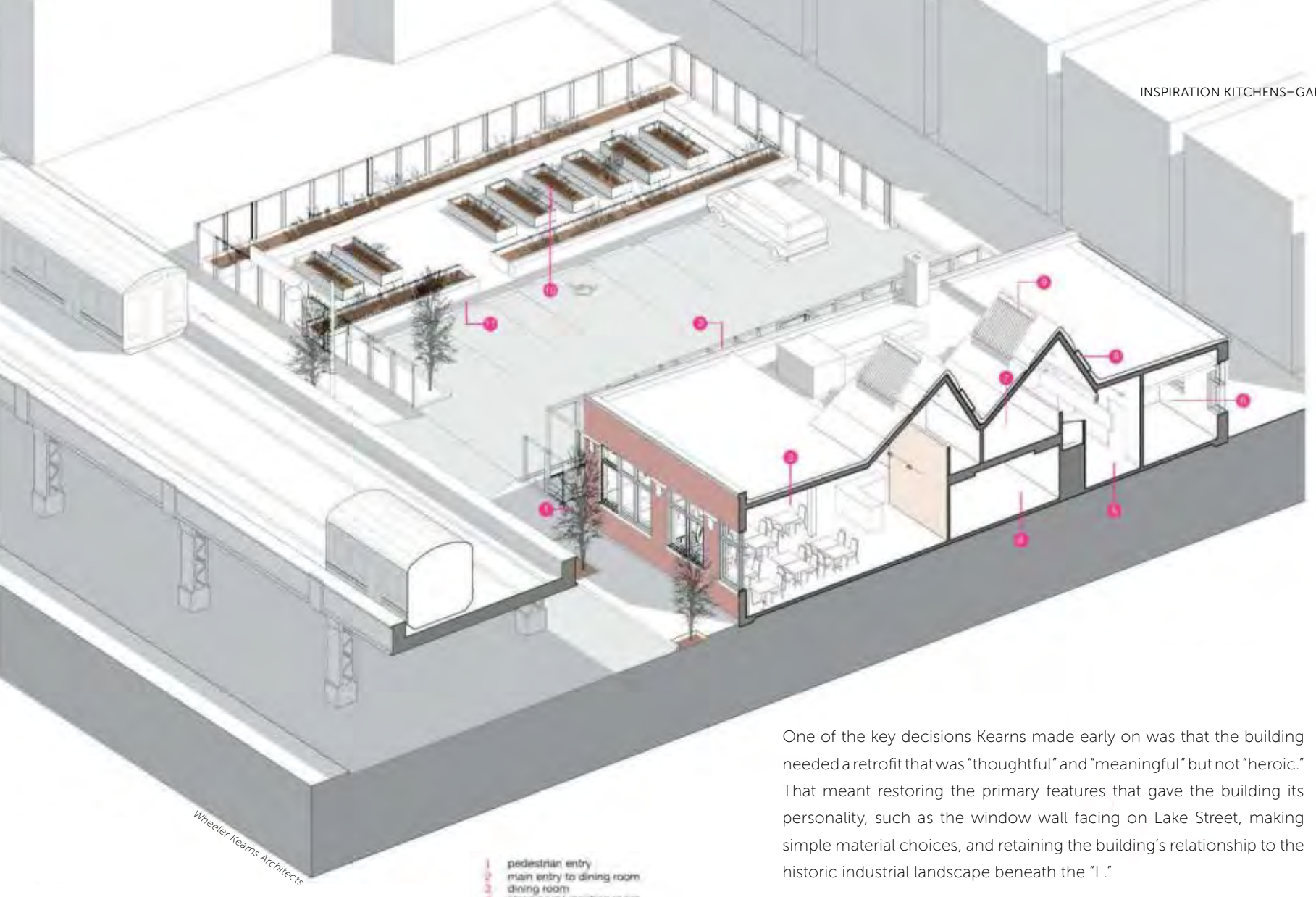
Wheeler Kearns Architects

crucial for everyone, including the designer, to "have some skin in the game." Instead, WKA did the job at a substantial discount. Much of the work in the design was covered by a green design grant from Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation.

The firm remained true to its stated philosophy, however, engaging not only the Inspiration Corporation staff, but also the Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance and its partners during their planning process in a series of workshops to present their plans and ask for guidance. Wheeler Kearns established a blog to show preliminary plans to the public, seek comment and make additional in-person presentations to the community.

Inspiration Corporation

Warehouse interior prior to renovation



Wheeler Kearns Architects

1 pedestrian entry
2 main entry to dining room
3 dining room
4 classroom/ meeting room
5 computer alcove + hallway
6 office
7 storage loft/ office
8 skylights
9 evacuated solar tubes
10 garden w/ ornamental edibles
11 gravel fill for storm water retention

One of the key decisions Kearns made early on was that the building needed a retrofit that was "thoughtful" and "meaningful" but not "heroic." That meant restoring the primary features that gave the building its personality, such as the window wall facing on Lake Street, making simple material choices, and retaining the building's relationship to the historic industrial landscape beneath the "L."

A "thoughtful" design also meant resisting suggestions from some members of the Inspiration Corporation board of directors to create a more defensive facility. The idea of walling the place off from East Garfield Park and the neighborhood was seen by the design team to be antithetical to the whole intent of the project. Safety is clearly a

concern in the neighborhood, but addressing it without walls, bars, or bullet-proof glass – common building features in East Garfield Park – was understood as key to the success of the project.

A more humane approach to the problem was demonstrated during the construction phase by members of Rick Easty's Heartland Construction Group. The workers, led by Chicago native Vince Perino, made a point of getting to know the immediate neighbors, even to the extent of volunteering to fix a leaky toilet or a wobbly porch. The result was that residents took a proprietary attitude toward the site and the construction process and kept a watchful eye on the place and construction materials. As a result, IKGP was relatively free of the kind of vandalism, graffiti, and theft that often plagues such projects.

The actual design of the project focused on the reuse of the 1906 manufacturing building – with no major additions and an emphasis on reclaiming positive features that had been lost during the structure's previous uses. Skylights were rediscovered and thermally insulated; blocked up front windows were replaced with expansive triple-glazed glass angled to help further insulate against noise and vibration from the passing "L"; original materials were exposed to give character to the interior spaces; works from local artists hang on the walls of an open, well-lit dining area.

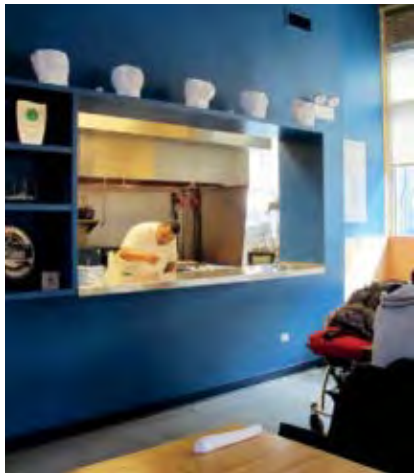
The building has been certified LEED Gold — something which members of the board pushed hard to achieve – and features an array of energy-saving technologies. Variable speed exhaust hoods in the kitchen only run at full-speed when heat or smoke demands it. Lights are on timers or sensors to save electricity. Dining room furniture is made from recycled barn wood. Bike racks, lockers, and showers

Photos by Steve Hall / Hedrich Blessing

Exterior and interior views of restaurant

are available for bicycle commuters and the parking lot is designed to manage storm water. Roof-top solar-thermal panels supply much of the facility's hot-water needs. (An economic analysis comparing possible returns between roof-mounted, photo-voltaic arrays and a solar hot water system led to the choice of the hot water system.) There were some early problems resulting in a messy leak, but the system is now functioning well.

Total purchase, design, and construction cost was $2,478,840 with a square foot project cost of $339. Wheeler Kearns estimates



that the building offers 21% better energy performance than other contemporary high-performing buildings. Expenses related to the solar hot water system and variable speed exhaust hoods were offset by grants for green building from Illinois Clean Energy Community Foundation and the Field Foundation of Illinois. These features also helped attract additional funding, such as major grant from The Kresge Foundation. Nevertheless, the architects acknowledged that additional energy saving features were omitted due to cost constraints.

The general contractor for the project, Heartland Construction Group, solicited sub-contractors from the surrounding community and encouraged local laborers to apply for work, though it is unclear whether any firms or individuals from the neighborhood actually participated in the work.

ACTIVITIES AND PROGRAMMING

The two primary activities that take place at Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park are foodservice training for chronically unemployed and under-employed individuals as well as healthy sit-down meals for the public including free meals for low-income families and individuals.

The training features a 13-week course providing "hard-skills" in the restaurant and foodservice industry, leading to a sanitation certificate. The program also provides individualized case management for students and graduates, including placement and follow-up.

The restaurant serves lunch, dinner and weekend brunch. Meals in the IKGP dining room are provided in one of two ways. First, the menu is affordably priced, in a manner consistent with the market in Garfield

Clockwise from top: Catering kitchen, service kitchen, bike racks at entrance, acoustically insulated window, family dining room

Photos by Steve Hall / Hedrich Blessing

Clockwise from top: computer alcove, classroom/meeting room, announcements board

Park, though underpriced compared to the high quality of food and experience offered, made possible by IKGP's willingness to accept lower profit margins than other restaurants. Patrons are given the opportunity to "pay up" – to add a little extra in lieu of tipping as a way to support the organization's mission. The wait staff is salaried without expectation of tipping and the "pay up" goes to the restaurant's net revenues. Second, a "Guest Certificate" program provides free meals for low-income residents in the neighborhood. The program description at IKGP states "These certificates were distributed at community events such as back-to-school picnics and health fairs and through a network of community partners – including social service agencies, schools, and religious congregations. Partners used the certificates in support of their mission as incentives, engagement tools, or to supplement their participants' budgets." Offering free meals to the public, as done through the certificate program at Inspiration Kitchens – Garfield Park, is new to Inspiration Corporation operations, and was not a part of the program at Inspiration Kitchens – Uptown.

The process for using Guest Certificates is designed to minimize the stigma for people receiving free meals. To use a certificate, the holder calls the restaurant and makes a reservation, indicating they intend to use the certificate at that time. They pay with a card that resembles a credit card or gift card, making all diners feel and appear equal.

The goal is to serve 3,000 free Guest Certificate meals per year – which the restaurant is still working to achieve. In the first year 112 families took advantage of the program – for a total of 629 meals. IC hopes to do better in the future and is evaluating two particular hurdles to the program's acceptance. First is the commitment from the partner agencies to promote the system. Second is the willingness of diners to actually use the certificates. Staff acknowledged that something as modest as a requirement to place a reservation may be a deterrent for some potential uses of the guest certificates and are seeking still more creative ways to facilitate use of the system.

Ultimately, what is most important for IC is the ongoing story of what happens inside the IKGP kitchen and dining room in terms of what the students learn and the diners – paying customers and otherwise – experience.

It is not easy to get into the culinary training program, as IKGP continually searches for applicants who are the most motivated and most likely to succeed. Of the first 800 people to attend an initial orientation in the first year, 200 opted out immediately. They screen out applicants with severe mental health problems. Personal choices and failure to meet threshold conditions ultimately left 300 participants from the original group who were invited back for an interview. Of those, some failed to show up for their interview appointment and, finally, about 130 were enrolled. As the course proceeds, the attrition rate is fairly high. The leadership of the IKPG exercises a strict attendance policy and evaluates student performance on a regular basis – in respect to knife skills, recipe math, work ethic, food savvy, and more. Some get into the program and realize it is "not for me." Others drop out. The combination of a strict and demanding program and participants with several social and economic challenges results in the heavy attrition rate.

Brunch

Two Eggs any Style, Potatoes, Toast 7

Omelet, Bacon, Roasted Shallot, Gruyere, Potatoes, Toast 8

Shrimp, Three Sisters Grits, Sauce Americaine 9

Crawfish Hash, Poached Eggs, Smoked Tomato Hollandaise 8

Biscuits & Gravy, Cheddar Biscuits, Scrambled Eggs, Chorizo Gravy 9

Pecan French Toast, Toasted Almonds, Chantilly Cream 8

Buttermilk Pancakes, Poached Pears, Ginger Syrup 7

Soup & Salads

Soup du Jour, Ask your server about todays soup 5

Maize Ball Gumbo, Chicken, Andouille 7

Roasted Beets, Candied Pecans, Goat Cheese, Arugula, **Honey Vinaigrette** 7

Southern Lyonaise, Dandelion Greens, Braised Pork Belly, House-made Corn Nuts, Poached Egg, **Creole Mustard Vinaigrette 8**

Sandwiches (all sandwiches served with chips or mixed greens)

Catfish Po Boy, Red Pepper Aioli, Romaine, **Corn Relish 8**

Braised Oxtail, Smoked Date Spread, Arugula, **Spicy Peanut Slaw 9**

Paneéd Chicken Breast, Swiss, Smoked Bacon **Vidalia Marmalade 8**

Quinoa Burger, Herbed Aioli, Slow Roasted Tomato, **Mixed Greens 8**

Pulled Squash, Mixed Greens, **Carrot Slaw 8**

Sides

Fresh Fruit 4

Yogurt Parfait, Homemade Granola, Fruit Compote 4

Bacon or Chicken Apple Sausage 3

Toast, Wheat or Sour Dough 2

INSPIRATION KITCHENS

Inspiration Corporation provides employment training, housing, supportive services and voice mail to Chicagoans affected by homelessness and poverty, serving as a catalyst for self-reliance. We inspire our participants to take action to improve their own lives. Here at Inspiration Kitchens, we help individuals gain valuable skills and experience that lead to employment in the food service industry. Every plate is produced by a participant in our 13-week job training program. Each graduate receives sanitation training, employment assistance, housing assistance and access to other services, because at Inspiration Kitchens, we serve people on both sides of the counter!

Thank you for dining with us and changing lives!

Dine Well. Do Good.
www.inspirationkitchens.org

Steve Hall / Hedrich Blessing

Clockwise from top: Salad, catering van, brunch menu, food preparation, appetizer, window stickers highlighting travel guide listings

Nevertheless, dozens have made it through the program, been placed in permanent employment, and retained their jobs. Even those who don't make it, IKGP staff noted, absorb new work skills that are transferable to other arenas.

IKGP is premised on the ideas that well-prepared food is an expression of the respect the homeless and the formerly incarcerated need to start the process of rebuilding their life. By all accounts, the food at IKGP is very good – a creative, southern-inflected cuisine with dinner served Wednesday through Saturday, lunch Wednesday to Friday, and brunch on the weekend. Customer reviews on Yelp overwhelmingly give it four- and five-star ratings. Although IKGP staff is uncertain about the exact makeup of their clientele, the restaurant is clearly becoming an important site for not-for-profit organizations around the neighborhood and well beyond for informal meals and meeting spaces. People in these emerging networks bring their families to IKGP and commission the catering services for parties, meetings, and the like.

COMMUNITY

Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park provides a welcome addition to the neighborhood largely identified with Garfield Park Conservatory. The strength of the not-for-profit sector in Chicago extends to the immediate neighborhood where the project is located. The Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance (GPCA) is a not-for-profit organization that maintains, manages, programs, and promotes the conservatory of the same name.

Before inception of the GPCA in 1998, the conservatory received about 10,000 visitors a year. Fifteen years later about 150,000 people visit annually, including 80,000 Chicago-area school children. The organization has an annual budget of more than $2 million and a staff of about 25. It is one of the largest conservatories in the country, providing a range of programs – hands on gardening, composting, bee keeping, and master gardener classes.

Leaders of GPCA like Eunita Rushing clearly see the need to build the neighborhood as well as the conservatory, or else the Conservatory would just be an island in a sea of poverty and decline. They worked with Local Initiative Support Corporation and its New Communities Program to create the Garfield Park neighborhood plan, and created the Garfield Park Community Council (GPCC) to implement the plan. With a staff of four, GPCC focuses on initiatives that addresses health, housing, public safety, and retail business, but with a clear emphasis on activities that would grow new business and create jobs.

In that sense, East Garfield Park, the Conservatory, and the fledgling neighborhood association were looking for partners like Inspiration Corporation and the Goodmans. Even though it was a natural match of interests, it wasn't easy. IC was an organization perceived as "white," coming into a neighborhood that was overwhelmingly black. Clearly, some local support and introductions were needed.

For their part, Inspiration Corporation seems to have done everything right in making connections to the neighborhood. The organization had a strong track record. They learned about the community, engaging it in a respectful way without making judgments, and presented their proposal to community groups in a way that addressed local concerns. They made their goals clear, and showed graphically what they hoped to do. They described the "wrap-around" services they

Clockwise from top: Garfield Park Conservatory, Mike Tomas, Conservatory-Central Park CTA Green Line stop, Eunita Rushing

intended to offer for the previously incarcerated: counseling, job training, showers, and housing.

An example of the care taken includes the identification of the name Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park. Multiple names were tested with residents. "Corporation" was considered too "corporate" and cold. "Kitchen," however, was seen to connote the warmth of the kitchen table at home. Garfield Park in the name was obviously appropriate and captured the sense of ownership of IKGP by the community.

And Inspiration Kitchens also needed a local host – a "home-grown way in" to the community sponsored by a local organization that residents trusted. The Garfield Park Conservatory Alliance and the Community Council played that role and convened the community to hear from Inspiration Corporation.

Even with this support and collaboration, gaining acceptance wasn't a slam dunk. This neighborhood had previously and successfully fought transitional housing proposals, arguing that there were enough social services in the area. As noted earlier, East Garfield Park has one of the highest rates of formerly incarcerated residents of any place in Illinois. In the end, the residents who came to the meetings didn't place IKGP in the same category as the transitional housing project, and recognized that it was very different from a standard soup kitchen. Rather they saw it as a social enterprise that could be beneficial to the neighborhood. To the credit of all involved, the IKGP never got an initial "no" that it had to overcome. There is no evidence of any resistance to the place or program. A frequent IKGP diner from the West Side Cultural Arts Alliance, for example, didn't see the restaurant as gentrification because of who it helps and what the program proposed to do.

FINANCING

Capital Costs

As noted above, the project benefited from a major gift by a single donor – a total of $4.26 million – with part dedicated to the capital costs of construction and another major part set aside to help cover the first five years of operating expenses. Because capital costs are already paid in full, the enterprise will be able to operate without debt service indefinitely. The IKGP budget calls for an increasing proportion

of costs to be covered by earned income generated from restaurant sales and catering. There is no expectation that the enterprise will ever be fully self-sustaining from foodservice income, given that much of its expenses are in instruction, counseling, and support to students who enroll at no cost. Going forward IC expects to close this gap with additional philanthropic donations and program-specific government grants.

Even with the major gift from Leonard Goodman, it was necessary for the project to raise additional funds from individual and corporate donations. There was strong support from major national and regional foundations and corporations such as The Kresge Foundation. There were also a large number of individual supporters who gave donations less than a thousand dollars. More than 30 staff members of Inspiration Corporation donated a total of $25,000.

TABLE 1: 2013 REVENUE BREAKDOWN*

	Amount	Percentage
Philanthropy	$726,280	63%
Government	$56,410	5%
Earned Income	$319,656	28%
In-Kind Income	$45,043	4%
Total	**$1,147,389**	**100%**

*For fiscal year 2013, indicating 28% of the resources were earned income (down 1% from 2012) and an additional 5% came through government sources.

The only other significant element of the financing was a "bridge loan" of $520,000 made by IFF, a not-for-profit lender, during construction. IFF's ability to make the loan and their confidence in Inspiration Corporation's ability to raise the additional money allowed the project to move forward without delay.

Operating costs

IKGP is meeting its operational cost goals. From January to December 2012, the Restaurant averaged 10.5 full time equivalent (FTE) staff positions and has 6.5 FTE more staff working hourly. The total earned revenue was $297,731 and the total budget was $1,020,690. Earned income as a percent of budget in 2012 was 29%, just ahead of their target 25%. The ultimate goal in the first five years of operation is to work toward 50% earned income as a percent of budget. Total enrollment for the year was 52 students, of whom 40 graduated (an 81% graduation rate). The fiscal year 2014 operating budget for IKGP is 23% of the total Inspiration Corporation budget. The total budget for IKGP in fiscal year 2013, was $1.17 million. Table 1 shows the revenue breakdown for fiscal year 2013 indicating 28% of the resources were earned income (down 1% from 2012) and an additional 5% came through government sources.

Staff report they are working to increase earned income, especially through expansion of the catering business, but do not have an estimate of how much it will grow in the coming years. 2013 operating expenses for the Garfield Park site were $1.17 million, with about 64% expended on personnel and fringe costs.

IMPACT

Given the relatively recent opening of the project, as well as the lack of a track record for IKGP, it's difficult to assess the success of the project or its impact in areas for which the project sponsor set its goals. It is easier to frame a few issues for further investigation.

IKGP is still ramping up in terms of production, sales, and meals provided. They reported 12,000 meals served in the first year and just over $250,000 in revenue. This was 180% of the goal they set for themselves though still less than 50 meals a day, resulting in an average daily revenue of about $800. These figures do not include, however, the sales from a growing catering business. The Guest Certificate program provides an average of about ten free meals a day for low-income patrons. Clearly, IKGP still has some hurdles to overcome in drawing the level of patronage they want and need.

The capacity of the training program is 90 students per year, and the goal for first year was 70, although only 52 were finally enrolled. Of those enrollees, 81% students graduated and 55% of the graduates (21) were placed in jobs, underscoring the severity of the challenges this population faces in finding long-term employment.

That said, these estimates may be too limited. A full accounting should also consider the value added from the program through its job placements. One value-added calculation developed by the IKGP addresses the number of clients actually placed and their estimated wages, discounted by about 10% for those who might have found jobs without the program. That totals over $290,000 per year. In addition, the organization has also calculated the amount of public benefits not acquired by clients who have been placed in jobs, such as reduced use of food stamps, Medicaid and other programs, as well as the cost of incarceration for at-risk groups like ex-offenders. Altogether, this suggests a savings of over $1.7 million per year in public expenses (see Table 2).

TABLE 2: VALUE ADDED BENEFIT CALCULATION

Estimated clients placed and anticipated benefits	
clients placed x average wage x average number of hours worked/week x number of weeks (*retention less 15% if program did not exist)	
	$322,924.80
Total	**$322,924.80**
Estimated public benefits saved by clients placed	
Clients not needing food stamps, Medicare, or other programs	$172,800.00
Clients not in homeless shelters	$112,420.00
Clients (70% ex-offenders) not incarcerated	$551,880.00
Total	**$837,100.00**

IKGP also points to still broader impacts, suggesting that the project might be encouraging other investments in the neighborhood, including housing and commercial ventures. While this is a goal of the GPCC plan, and the community council may have programs to work toward that goal, given the newness of this project, its particular focus, and its limited scope, it seems unlikely to have significant impact on neighborhood redevelopment in the immediate future.

Sunday Brunch

Ray Oldenburg writes about the importance of "third places" in helping communities develop a sense of place that supports social organization. IKGP is becoming such a place where community groups use the space frequently for meetings as well as meals. Some groups make it their regular gathering spot. Staff members from the conservatory are also frequent diners. The conservatory also uses IKGP as its standard caterer for all but their larger events. People interviewed from the neighborhood report that Garfield Park is becoming a "destination", at least in part because IKGP is there.

CURRENT PROJECTS AND FUTURE PLANS

IKGP is on target in respect to its strategic/business plan and goals; it has established effective processes for regularly evaluating its progress in respect to its own goals and performance of peer organizations; and it is making headway in addressing significant, pervasive urban problems. There are no plans for expansion. Appropriately enough, the only plans are to stay the course with incremental improvements year over year fulfilling the promise of its initial goals

Assessing Success

Inspiration Corporation identified four categories of goals for Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park: a high-quality dining experience, foodservice training for hard-to-employ individuals, reinforcement of community revitalization efforts, and the creation of a "truly" green facility in support of the first three goals. It is clear that all of the categories are well met and that the project has achieved much more.

- It is a sustainable business/philanthropy partnership model that is ahead of schedule to meet the revenue goals needed to sustain its operation. In many ways this is already exemplary, but especially so because it is an intentional long-term partnership.

- Teaching and client support is ranked high by clients. Reports from the students routinely offered in annual surveys show high levels of client satisfaction over two years of classes and illustrate an increase in satisfaction from 2011 to 2012.

- Monthly assessments, including year-to-date assessments of FY 13 compared to FY 12 record of achievement, indicate success and improvements in all categories including enrollment, graduates, graduation rates, transitional jobs, total job placements, job retention, housing placements, business

partnerships, meals provided, guest certificate meals provided, and total sales.

- Outcome measures have met or exceed donor, Board, and City of Chicago (Department of Family and Support Services) expectations. These outcomes include earned revenues, meals served, students enrolled, students graduated, and students placed.

Another measure of success is the design awards the facility has received, including a Social Economic Environmental Design (SEED) award, and LEED certification. These awards offer external affirmation of the quality of design, community engagement and green aspects of the project. Although the design is neither "heroic" or particularly innovative, it illustrates best practices in renovation – including the simple, approaching elegant, use of materials and very sensible building systems and envelope design that minimizes the building's carbon footprint and successfully addresses the acoustic control required by the proximity to the "L. "

It is difficult to consider the success of IKGP without looking at its peers for comparison, such as the members of the Catalyst Kitchens network. Catalyst Kitchens is a national organization whose members have a shared vision to empower lives through foodservice training, generate revenues through social enterprise, and nourish bodies and minds through quality foodservice. The organization offers resources to its members that include comparisons of metrics, while noting the uniqueness of each member in terms of client, context or mission circumstances that make them not so comparable. In 2013 job retention for Inspiration Corporation's foodservice training program was the lowest of the 11 network members, as was graduate employment. Moreover, Inspiration Corporation also served the lowest number of meals and was second from the bottom in trainee retention. None of this addresses the scale of the organizations in the network or the relative difficulty of the work they do. It would be a mistake to imagine such statistics give IKGP very much useful information about their performance. The benchmarking at Catalyst Kitchens is still very much a work in process.

To their credit, Inspiration Corporation was a charter member of the network and continues to stress the importance of its work as it strives to build peer benchmarks. Concurrently IKGP also sets internal, year over year improvement metrics on their individual performance, testing each year against the previous which, at least over the first two years, show great progress.

All of these comparisons actually raise more questions than they answer. They don't and can't tell the whole story about the IKGP passion for the organization's mission, the ambiance of the place, and the character of the staff, board and clients. They do speak to the transparency of their operations and aspiration to improve on the way the organization measures progress.

There is no single or even primary reason why Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park is worthy of recognition. Rather, IKGP and the process that created it exemplify important aspects of the social enterprise development process – the role of passionate individual commitments to change, the power of engaged and well-informed philanthropy, the importance of building and maintaining a strong organizational infrastructure for not-for-profit organizations, and the making of a fundamentally good, well-designed place.

Steve Hall / Hedrich Blessing

Fresh produce is grown in the on-site garden and offered for sale

IKGP is also worthy of note in the way the project incorporated such a broad range of best-practices in energy efficiency and green design; urban design to support neighborhood life; comprehensive programming and services to deal with entrenched poverty, unemployment, and homelessness; true collaboration among private, public, and not-for-profit players to achieve shared goals; and robust communication and participation in community planning and development. There are many aspects to the story of IKGP. Together they reveal a comprehensive approach to social enterprise development.

SELECTION COMMITTEE DISCUSSION

In selecting Inspiration Kitchens–Garfield Park as the 2013 Rudy Bruner Award Gold Medal Winner, the Selection Committee was impressed with the project's focus and its ability to help people improve their personal condition by addressing issues of food and nutrition broadly – using food service as an employment opportunity while providing healthy meals in a vast food desert on Chicago's West Side. The Committee commended IKGP as a thoughtful nonprofit that has grown incrementally, expanding services comprehensively, and – in the process – meeting or exceeding expectations for revenue generation. The Committee noted that for a not-for-profit organization, meeting fifty percent of its expenses with earned revenue was an excellent benchmark.

In design and program, IKGP addresses human dignity in the way food is considered, menus are designed, and meals are prepared, presented and served. The Selection Committee observed that it is important to have national and local conversations about the importance of

providing access to fresh, healthy food, particularly in communities with limited or no access. The Committee saw this project as addressing the fundamentals of life – food, community, and the dignity of work. They noted that while the restaurant is the most prominent aspect of this project and an important symbol of nutrition and change in this neighborhood, it is not the main reason for the project, which is largely about job training for difficult to employ populations.

IKGP illustrates that design matters. The facility's architecture is attractive, thoughtful, sustainable and supportive, without being ostentatious. The design demonstrates respect for the neighborhood in presenting a light and open interior that is visible to the street, with a facade that rejects security bars and grates. Even so, the Committee noted that the value of the IKPG's education and job training extends beyond the immediate outcome of getting a job by teaching responsibility, learning skills and the importance of showing up every day.

Steve Hall / Hedrich Blessing

Exterior at dusk

The Selection Committee found IKGP to be truly inspirational and selected it as the Gold Medalist to celebrate the entrepreneurial spirit of this nonprofit, as well as the "do-it-yourself" (DIY) approach to urban rehabilitation that is spreading in the United States (as also illustrated by 2013 Silver Medalists The Steel Yard and Congo Street Initiative). IKGP is an example of a small not-for-profit that can bring real change to a community, while operating within a relatively small budget and short time-frame.

Inspiration Corporation chose Garfield Park for the location of the facility because of – not in spite of – the fact that it was a neighborhood with great needs, while also recognizing its significant potential. While the Selection Committee acknowledged some uncertainty about the pace of change in Garfield Park and questioned how much this single, small facility might contribute to it, they anticipated that IKGP's investment will support future development in the neighborhood. The Committee also noted the complexity of the task IKGP has taken on – training for work in the food service industry, which is a notoriously underpaid and unstable profession, as well as supportive programs to reduce the likelihood of re-incarceration of program participants. They admired the organization for taking on such a difficult problem.

Resources

INTERVIEWS*

Inspiration Corporation:
Lisa Nigro, Founder, Inspiration Corporation
John Pfeiffer, Former CEO, Inspiration Corporation
Gabe Goodman, Treasurer of the Board of Directors, Inspiration Corporation
Carl Segal, Vice Chair – External Relations of the Board of Directors, Inspiration Corporation
Shannon Stewart, Executive Director and CEO, Inspiration Corporation
Diane Pascal, VP External Relations, Inspiration Corporation
Margaret Haywood, Director of Workforce Development, Inspiration Corporation
Jennifer Miller Rehfeldt, Chief Program Officer, Inspiration Corporation
Sean Cunneen, Associate Director of Social Enterprise, Inspiration Corporation
Michael Webb, Case Manager, foodservice training program
David Rosenthal, Executive Chef, Inspiration Kitchens – Garfield Park
Tony Reinhart, Front-of-house Manager, Inspiration Kitchens – Garfield Park, Program Graduate
Samara Hightower, IKGP Program Participant

Consultants, Advisors to Inspiration Corporation:
Ayse Kalaycioglu, IFF, Director of Owners Representative Services
Kate Ansorge, IFF, Senior Project Manager
Laurie Alpern, Open Door Advisors

Architects and Contractors:
Larry Kearns, Principal, Wheeler Kearns Architects
Chris-Annmarie Spencer, Project Manager, Wheeler Kearns Architects
Rick Easty, The Heartland Construction Group

City and Local Organizations:
Evelyn Diaz, Commissioner, Chicago Department of Family & Support Services
Eunita Rushing, President, Garfield Park Conservatory
Mike Tomas, Executive Director, Garfield Park Community Council
Melissa Crutchfield, Lawndale Christian Health Center
Dawn Ferencak, Advertising Sales Representative, Austin Weekly News
Lavette Haynes, West Side Cultural Arts Council

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