

MemFIX descends on Cleveland Street, showcases revitalization efforts

MemFIXing Cleveland: Neighborhood hopes for a rebound

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Stan Lumpkin, 53, stood alone, arms crossed, in the shadow of the vacant Sears Crosstown building and was reminded of the former vibrance of his childhood stomping grounds.

All around him, kids and parents were enjoying a sunny Saturday on Cleveland Street, which was dressed up for a daylong MemFIX event with mounbounces and food trucks and pop-up shops to show residents what a little revitalization could do for the community.

"It's really nice to see it come back," said Lumpkin. "I left about 25 years ago, and when I came back, the neighborhood had changed — had just died out."

The 1.5 million-square-foot monolith that he and his mom once walked to from their home eight blocks away had decayed after nearly two decades of abandonment. And the rest of the street had grown just as despondent, with at least six vacant storefronts darkening the surrounding area.

But developers on a mission to revive Sears Crosstown announced in August commitments from nine prospective tenants that have plans to transform the building into a vertical-village of mixed uses.

Thus, the same team that organized a weekend transformation of Broad Avenue in

November 2010 decided the time was ripe to showcase Cleveland from Overton Park to Galloway. About 100 volunteers cleaned the street and helped put up temporary bike lanes, crosswalks, street trees, benches, pop-up businesses and public art.

"We're trying to bring awareness to people about this neighborhood that's up-and-coming," said Robert Paulus with Memphis Regional Design Center, the project manager of the MemFIX Cleveland Street event. "When the (Sears) building opens, it would be nice to have the support of the street and have this area be more pedestrian friendly."

Within a year of the Broad Avenue promotion, three businesses moved to the street, giving the group, which includes the Mayor's Innovation Delivery Team, Crosstown Arts and Livable Memphis, a sense of validation for their efforts.

Three of the vendors who moved onto Cleveland Saturday — artist Yvonne Bobo, Crosstown Arts and the Visible Music School — are there to stay.

"I'm so happy to see stuff happening," said Shiloh Barnat, a Cooper Young resident. "There's been such an exodus from the interior of Memphis, and this is where it's most interesting — where you have culture and personality."

The next neighborhoods on the MemFIXx radar are Soulsville in South Memphis and Binghamton.



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