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Memphis: Future Games

Good things are popping up all over town.

POSTED BY [ANDRIA K. BROWN](#) ON WED, DEC 5, 2012 AT 10:30 AM

As I sat on a makeshift bench in a temporarily sodded yard adjacent to the Sears Crosstown building and watched a well-dressed couple ambling down the sidewalk toward various nearby destinations, I was suddenly struck. “They got me,” I thought, “it worked.” Because in that moment, I was able to envision what a revitalized Cleveland Street would look like, and that was exactly the point of MemFix, the event that had brought me (and my kids, and seemingly half of midtown) to an empty department store parking lot that day.

[click to enlarge](#)



Call me unimaginative, but before MemFix, I'd had a hard time picturing how the street I'd avoided taking my parents down during their visits to Memphis was going to become a thriving new part of the community. I must not be alone, though, because this whole if-you-fake-build-it-they-will-come thing is starting to become a powerful new tactic around here. It took an event like A New Face for an Old Broad in 2010 to show the potential of that long-neglected area. In the two years since, artists, restaurants, and other adventurous businesses have taken a chance on the old Broad and, based on steady occupancy of the street and unsteady departees of The Cove, it seems to be working out as planned.

Lack of imagination isn't something Memphians are often accused of, however. Our default is more akin to skepticism. "Believe Memphis" was a great tagline for our NBA team, but did anyone happen to notice that it didn't get picked up until the Grizzlies were near the playoffs? Did we believe before we saw the proof?

I don't fault anyone for this tendency toward doubt; I'm a strong purveyor of it myself. There have been a lot of plans and promises that haven't come through for Memphis, and it's fair, I think, to want some evidence before we show enthusiasm, that most vulnerable-making of emotions.

But it's hard to deny that the evidence is mounting. It's filling up the empty spaces all around us. In the last ten years, a museum and charter school rose from the rubble of the Stax studio. New homes finally replaced the bare swath cleared for a deflected highway. A beautiful and well-managed trail system overtook abandoned rail routes. Vacant storefronts along South Main became condos and galleries and offices (where, in the interest of full disclosure, I happen to be currently employed by a firm that works with many of these emergent entities). I even hear they might do something with that Pyramid.

The next experiment begins this weekend, when MemShop will fill the unoccupied spaces on Overton Square with temporary businesses, just in time for your holiday shopping. I've spent the entirety of my Memphis residency wishing for Overton Square's comeback, and have been let down numerous times, but it really and truly seems to be happening. For sure. Maybe. Probably? If MemShop can lure retailers back to the square the way Broad Avenue's efforts did, the corner of Madison and Cooper may skip a revival and go straight on to renaissance.

With the recent addition of Memphis to National Geographic's "Best of the World 2013" list, the doubt has been temporarily set aside for something dangerously close to giddiness. Had those explorers come to visit a decade ago, they would have found many of the things that made them declare Memphis a must-see destination – the food, the music, the all-around uniqueness – but they also would have found an overwhelming sense of defeatism, one which probably would have pushed us somewhere behind Cleveland (or, heaven forbid, Nashville) on their list. Luckily, they came to 2012 Memphis, and that's a whole different story.

So the positivity is pervasive? And everything's solved? No. Not at all. Our position between St. Augustine and Kyoto on some travel site makes little change in the daily lives of residents who are more concerned about feeding their kids than updating their feeds. Our issues as a city are deep and serious, and pop-up shops and food truck rodeos aren't going to make them disappear. They are, however, going to help us have a little more fun while we work the rest out. And what could maybe be dismissed as hipster boosterism (hoopsterism?) will fill in some of the space where our doubt used to be.

We have holes all over the city, from downtown storefronts to suburban foreclosures. But what's making Memphis a must-see is how we're planning and working and collaborating to fill them. We don't have to imagine what's coming next. We can see it. We, finally, can believe.



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I don't think the actual residents of Memphis (City) have ever been particularly negative. The problem is that the local media is decidedly negative - and The Flyer is the most negative.

Check out the alternative weeklies from Nashville, Knoxville, St Luis, Chicago - they are all champions for their cities.

I rarely get that same warm fuzzy feeling from The Flyer that I do from other alternative weeklies that I have read.

report

5 likes, 3 dislikes like dislike

Posted by [cdel](#) on 12/05/2012 at 10:51 AM

What an awesome article. Thank you Andria Brown for the words I have been trying to put together this year. It is truly remarkable to see 2012 Memphis only moving here from Chicago 7 years ago and nearly giving up hope. I look forward to 2013 Memphis because let's face it, it is going to be the best year yet.

report

4 likes, 0 dislikes like dislike

Posted by [Andrew Bartolotta](#) on 12/05/2012 at 1:24 PM

As a lifelong Memphian, I call BS on cdel's "I don't think the actual residents of Memphis (City) have ever been particularly negative." hating Memphis is the birthright of every Memphian my age (40). Only in the past 5-10 years has that slowly started to change. I'm trying to get on board, but old habits die hard. I still hope my kids will go away to college and make their adult lives in a better place.