

WRITING A NEW WEST SIDE STORY

BY ALAN J. BORSUK

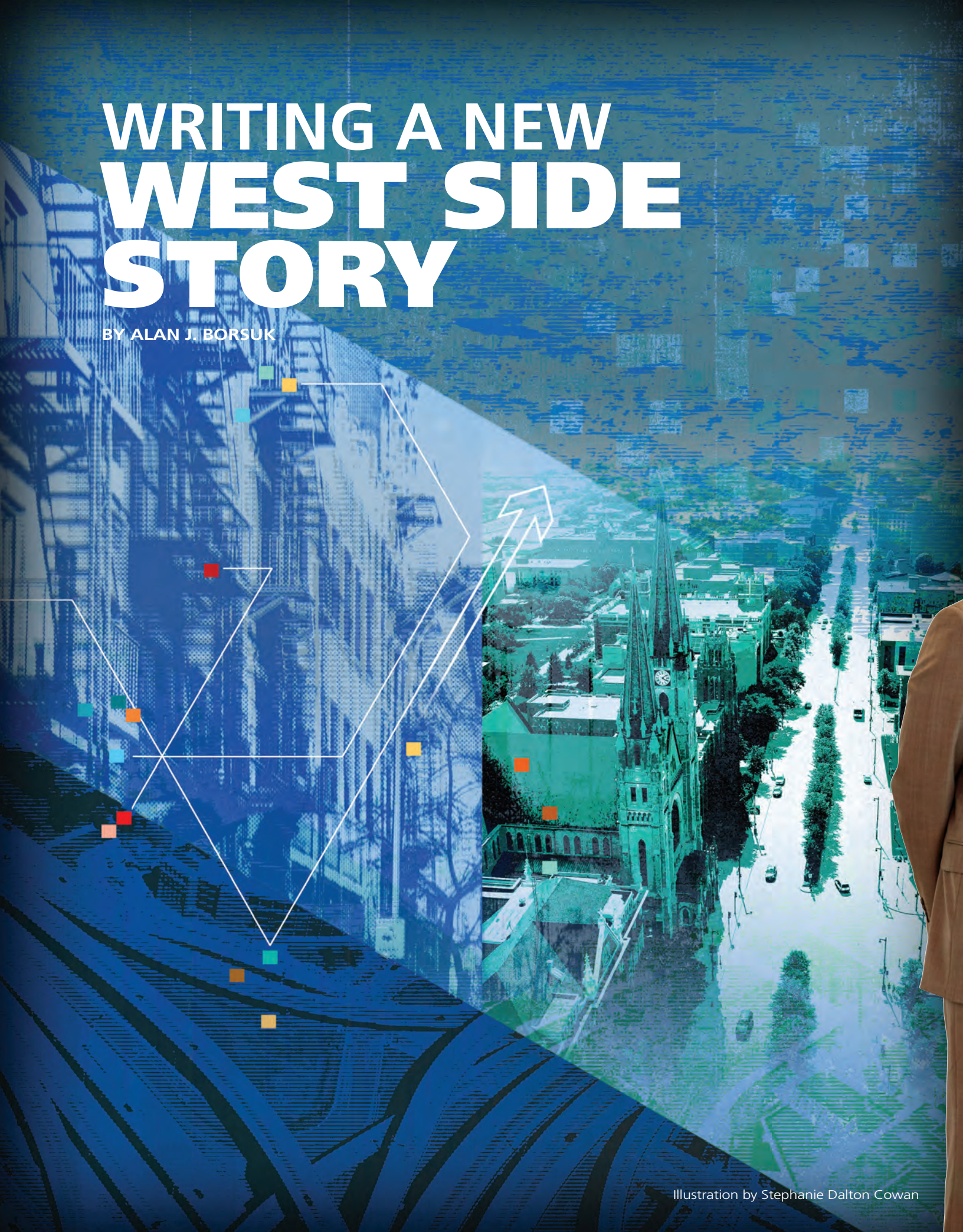


Illustration by Stephanie Dalton Cowan

Michael R. Lovell has learned a lot since becoming president of Marquette University in 2014, but this seemed like an unexpected example: “I’ve learned more about what it takes to run a grocery store than I really care to know,” Lovell wryly acknowledged to more than 200 people who filled the Appellate Courtroom of Eckstein Hall one morning last fall.

What does a grocery store have to do with being president of a major university? The answer in Lovell’s case: A lot. It is an important piece of a bigger picture that many Milwaukee leaders and institutions, including Marquette, hope will add vitality to a struggling area near the Marquette campus.

The success of Near West Side Partners, Inc., in the next several years will say a lot not only about that area but also about Marquette’s future and its aspirations as a Jesuit institution. Lovell said in an interview, “In my career, this may be the most significant project I’ve worked on because of the impact on the city. The impact could really help change Milwaukee.”

Collective efficacy—that is a term used by Harvard Professor Robert J. Sampson to describe urban neighborhoods that are doing better than one might expect. (See the essay version of Sampson’s Boden Lecture at the Law School in this issue, page 8.) In essence, the term means that the more that people and entities involved in a neighborhood jointly contribute to maintaining and improving the quality of life, the better a neighborhood will be.

The near west side effort is bringing together a large number of people and organizations who hope their work will be a prime example of collective effort that is effective. Marquette University has joined with four other “anchor” institutions, as well as with neighborhood residents, business owners, nonprofits, and government agencies, in a concerted effort to build up the health of

the near west side as a community—or, as those involved in the effort call it, “a neighborhood of neighborhoods.”

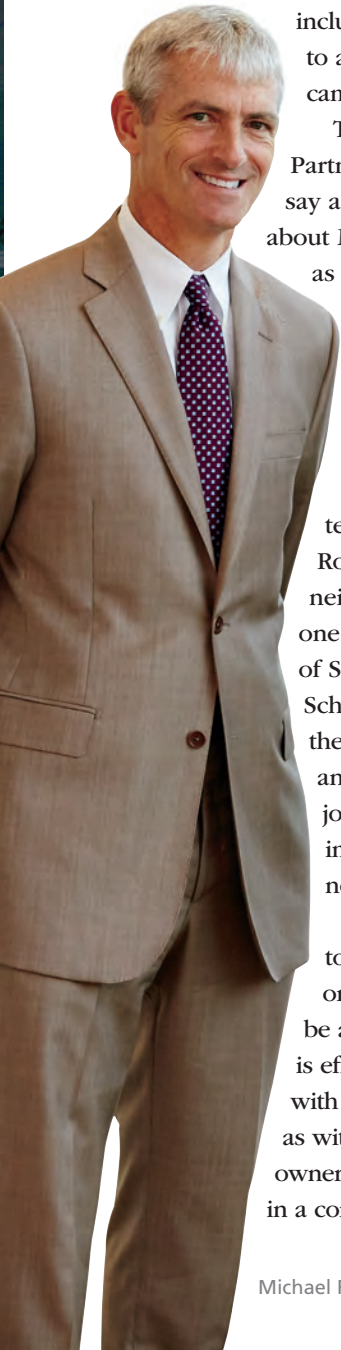
For Lovell, the initiative is one that addresses both Marquette’s direct needs and its broader mission. On the direct side, assuring the security of areas adjacent to the campus and making those areas more attractive as places to live will help recruit students, faculty, and other staff. On the mission side, Lovell said, “We’re a university that wants to educate students to improve the world.” Marquette’s overall goal, as a Jesuit institution, is to put people on paths not only to successful careers but also to lives of service. “There is a mind/body/spirit approach to Jesuit education,” Lovell said. “We want faculty, staff, and students to think about how to solve the city’s problems. The near west side couldn’t be a better test case.”

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President Lovell

In the first months of the project, Marquette students and faculty, as well as the university’s top administrators, have shown initiative and gotten involved in projects on the near west side. One of the projects receiving major attention is the proposed grocery store. The idea started with two students who were concerned about lack of access to nutritious and fresh food in the vicinity of Marquette. That has grown into a core group of students who continue to play important roles in pushing for creation of a market that will meet that need—a push all involved hope will (pun intended) bear fruit soon. The grocery store is “a huge student issue,” said Jeanne Hossenlopp, Marquette’s vice president for research and innovation.

But the grocery store is hardly the only example of what members of the Marquette community are tackling. An example: Amber Wichowsky, a political science professor, and a team of students are working on ways to help area residents get more involved in the process of deciding the future of the community. Another example: Scores of Marquette students are taking part in “service learning” efforts, including tutoring students in local schools and enhancing recreation options in the area. ▶▶



Overall, Hossenlopp said, the near west side effort is an opportunity to think about Marquette’s role in the broader community. She said she wants Marquette faculty and students to be involved in research that’s relevant to the neighborhoods and in partnerships to help institutions in the area.

The overall picture

The area generally between downtown Milwaukee on the east and Washington Park on the west and between I-94 on the south and Vliet Street on the north was part of the solid fabric of Milwaukee for many decades, home to thousands of German and Irish immigrants and their families. It was also home to a concentration of about 10 hospitals for many years. But the Germans and Irish mostly moved out of the area to the suburbs and beyond, and, in the 1970s and 1980s, all but one of the hospitals closed, merged, or became part of the regional medical center in Wauwatosa, some five miles to the west. Only Aurora Sinai Medical Center remains in the area.

As their conversation developed, the Marquette and Harley-Davidson leaders realized that to deal with safety problems, what they really needed to do was to improve the whole neighborhood.

Milwaukee Alderman

Robert Bauman, who represents much of the area on the Milwaukee Common Council, said the departure of the hospitals “really devastated the neighborhood.” He elaborated: “In one fell swoop, you yanked all that employment and business activity out of that neighborhood. The land use has never adjusted.”

One problem, Bauman said, is that numerous low-rise apartments built

in the 1960s, many then occupied by people working in health-related jobs, have become sore spots. They have aged poorly, don’t meet the interests of today’s renters, and, in too many cases, have been occupied by people whose unstable lives affect neighborhood stability itself.

But the area also has kept a lot of its vitality. About 40,000 people live there, including about 10,000 Marquette students. Some 29,000 people work in this section of the city. There are major businesses and institutions in the area, some with histories that go back more than a century. The area includes some high-quality schools, art and entertainment venues, and stretches of high-quality, even elegant, housing.

In fact, detailed analysis of the area suggests that a relatively small number of locales and specific addresses account for disproportionate shares of the neighborhood problems. Advocates for improving the area say that this means that the dimensions of the issues they must face are not as intimidating as one might think.

So how do you build up and spread what is good and deal with what is not? That is the challenge of the near west side initiative. And the large cast of those involved expresses confidence that the efforts will succeed.

Launching the initiative

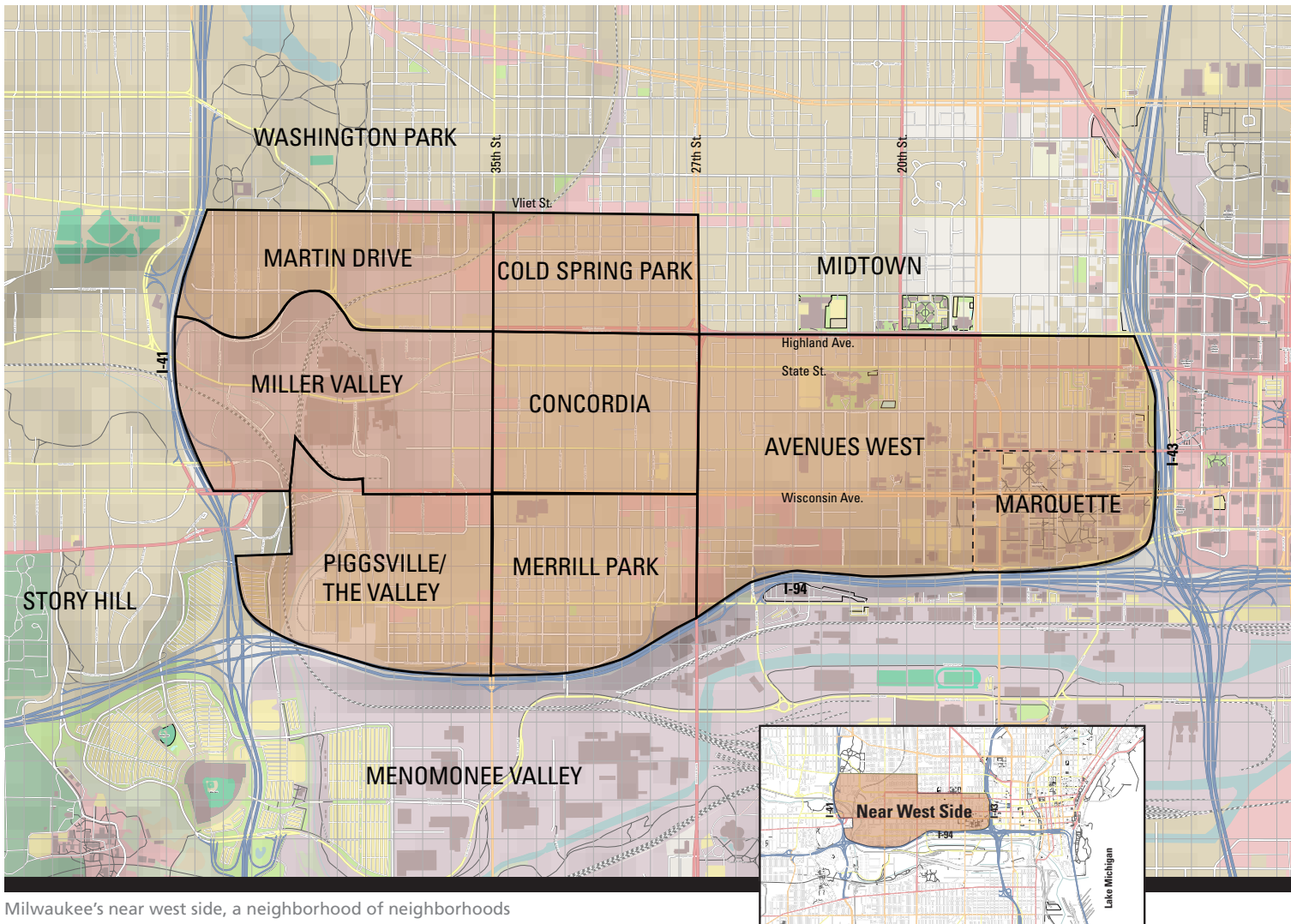
The creation of the Near West Side Partners organization dates to shortly after Lovell took office.

In July 2014, Lovell went to see Keith Wandell, then CEO of Harley-Davidson, to talk about safety in the area. Marquette is on the east side of the expanse; the corporate headquarters of the world-famous motorcycle company are a couple miles to the northwest. Both Harley-Davidson and Marquette—and a lot of residents and institutions in the area—put high priority on combating crime, enhancing safety, and improving perceptions on both fronts.

At the “On the Issues with Mike Gousha” session at the Law School where Lovell talked about grocery stores, the Marquette president recounted his meeting with Wandell. As their conversation developed, the Marquette and Harley-Davidson leaders realized that to deal with safety problems, what they really needed to do was to improve the whole neighborhood. A vibrant neighborhood is a safe neighborhood. They began considering what was needed and how it might be done.

Several months later, in October 2014, a meeting of many of the stakeholders connected to the near west side was held at Harley-Davidson’s offices. There was agreement that the need was there, the time was right, the potential was strong, and the willingness existed to join together in a new surge of work on improving the area.

Five major institutions agreed to be the anchors for a new organization, Near West Side Partners, Inc. In addition to Marquette and Harley-Davidson, partners include MillerCoors brewing company, Potawatomi Business Development Corporation, and Aurora Health Care. Potawatomi is putting tens of millions of dollars into developing businesses on 11 acres of tribal land in the heart of the area. The land was previously used as the campus of Concordia College, which relocated to suburban Mequon a few decades ago. MillerCoors has a major brewery and offices for many of its corporate employees across the street from Harley-Davidson on the west side of the area. And Aurora Sinai Medical



Milwaukee's near west side, a neighborhood of neighborhoods

Center is on the east side of the area, just north of the Marquette campus.

The anchor institutions have pledged more than \$1.5 million to fund the effort. They are also putting a large amount of time and energy of employees, including top executives, into the initiative.

But leaders of the five anchors go to lengths to say they do not want this to be a top-down project in which the future of the area is decided and imposed by a small number of heavyweight players. Through numerous meetings in the community, residents, small business owners, and others have become involved.

“A top-down approach is not going to work,” Kelly Grebe, chief legal and corporate services officer at MillerCoors, told the audience at the “On the Issues” program. “Just throwing money at the problem is not going to work. We need to have residents involved, and we have had that involvement from day one. We’re here as anchoring institutions, and we have a little bit of money to

throw at the problem. We need the residents, and I think we’re seeing the residents and the businesses step up.”

The group also has emphasized that this is not intended to be a gentrification effort, aimed at moving out lower-income people and moving in people who are better off. The goal is to make the area better for everyone, including the people who live there now, and to continue to have a high number of social service and nonprofit agencies serving the people of the neighborhoods involved.

As Rana Altenburg, vice president for public affairs at Marquette and president of the board of directors of Near West Side Partners, put it, this is not a “not in my backyard” effort aimed at keeping people with needs of many kinds at a distance. “We’re the backyard,” she said. “We like our backyard.”

So what needs to be done for the project to succeed? The answer can be broken down into several subjects. ▶▶



Rick Wiegand, owner of the Ambassador Hotel and area developer

Aiming to improve safety

All involved agree that safety is a prerequisite to improvement. Hossenlopp said, “The safety piece is absolutely critical.” For Marquette, that is a big factor in keeping student enrollment strong.

Across the area, community leaders have built rapport with the Milwaukee Police Department, the city’s Department of Neighborhood Services, and the Milwaukee County District Attorney’s office, both on general strategies and on ways to focus on specific needs. The latter include such efforts as trying to close down a tobacco store on N. 27th Street that has required several hundred visits by Milwaukee police in the last several years and shuttering an apartment building several blocks away that was the source of problems. Both the apartment building and the tobacco shop have been closed.

The launch in May 2015 of the Marquette University Police Department, succeeding the university’s public safety department whose officers had fewer enforcement powers, was “a huge step forward for us,” Lovell said. In his State of the University address in January, he said that since the Marquette police initiative began, the area that officers patrol had 34 percent fewer robberies and 26 percent fewer crimes overall than in the comparable period a year earlier.

Near West Side Partners has launched an effort called Promoting Assets and Reducing Crime (PARC), which aims to pursue two goals: actual improvement in safety and improvement of people’s perceptions of the neighborhood. Perceptions are sometimes as influential as the reality itself, leaders say, and they can be improved. The effort includes promoting an awareness of the facts about the area as well as knowledge of the many cultural and lifestyle assets the area already has.

Improving the array of housing

The five anchors are making it a priority to improve the overall quality of the places people have available to live. One goal is to attract more of their employees to live close to work. Investments to offer better living situations—whether in existing properties or in homes needing renovation—are increasing, said Keith Stanley, executive director of the Avenues West neighborhood association and the Near West Side Partners organization. Leaders talk optimistically about developers’ interest in area projects.

The goal is not to price people out of the neighborhood. But several key figures, including Alderman Bauman and real estate developer Rick Wiegand, said that tearing down some of the problematic properties built a half century ago may be a needed step, because the properties are not of high quality and the density in the area is too high.

But, Bauman said, the area can—and in his expectation will—become increasingly attractive as a place to live. He notes its affordable housing, proximity to downtown and other areas, good access to transportation, nearby employment opportunities, and neighborhoods that are in themselves attractive.

“These assets should naturally be blooming and growing and prospering,” Bauman said. “Instead, there’s the big lead weight that sits on top of them,” which is too much rental property.

One new resident in the area is Thomas J. Devine, CEO of the Potawatomi Business Development Corporation. While the Potawatomi name is associated with the casino and hotel south of the Marquette campus, the tribe owns 11 acres in the heart of the near west side. The tribe is building businesses on the land, including a high-security data storage center, and it

expects to employ 700 people on the land in the future, Devine said at the Law School event last fall.

Devine himself lives in the neighborhood, several blocks from the tribe’s land, and often walks to work. “I want to show people that living here is safe,” he said. “There’s a true beacon of hope if we live here, if we work here. And if we can stand on that and show others that we do that, it just changes” the way others regard the area.

Attracting business and jobs

Nobody personifies the drive to bring in new businesses and jobs more than the developer Rick Wiegand. In the mid-1990s, he bought the Ambassador Hotel, on W. Wisconsin Avenue at 23rd Street, which had been a trouble spot for years. He said he “nursed it along” for years but, around 2005, decided to invest in turning it into an art deco hotel that would draw visitors. Many people thought it couldn’t be done, he said, but the project has been a success. He also bought several surrounding properties and took firm steps to assure that responsible tenants rented his apartments. Wiegand has succeeded in putting new energy in the area and, as he puts it, extending “the safe zone” around Marquette a half dozen blocks or more to the west.

Now he has bought a set of buildings known as City Campus at N. 27th and W. Wells streets. With the recent departure of some Milwaukee County offices, the buildings, including a former hospital, are vacant, and Wiegand is working on ideas of what to do with them, including attracting business tenants, commercial storefronts, and residential renters.

“I like the challenge of trying to turn around the neighborhood,” said Wiegand, who also owns a substantial number of properties offering students apartments closer to the Marquette campus. Wiegand said he has succeeded with the Ambassador. “Why can’t we do it on 27th Street?”

The grocery store idea has been at the forefront of efforts to bring in new businesses. “As of today, that’s my top priority,” Lovell said. There has not been a full service food market in the area since a Kohl’s grocery store at N. 35th Street and W. Juneau Avenue closed many years ago. Keith Stanley, the main staff person for the near west side initiative, called the grocery store “so important.” But the food business is complicated and highly competitive and working out specifics of a plan for a store has been a challenge—which is why Lovell has learned so much about selling groceries.

Marquette and Harley-Davidson also have announced that they are launching a “shark tank” competition in which entrepreneurs with ideas for launching small businesses in the area will compete for support for their plans.

Improving schools

Advocates for the near west side initiative say that quality schools are a major attraction for any good neighborhood, and that needs to be true on the near west side.

They point to the quality schools that exist in the area as often-unrecognized assets. Schools from each sector of Milwaukee’s complicated education landscape are included. Examples include Milwaukee High School of the Arts, a public school; Highland Community School, a charter school; and Marquette High School, a private school.

But improvement in other schools in the area is an important need. And some of the people involved want to see creative partnerships with existing schools. For example, Lovell said he envisioned aiming to build a partnership with the Milwaukee Academy of Science, a charter school in a former hospital building near the university, and help give the school a focus on water issues.

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Rep. Evan Goyke, a 2009 Marquette Law School graduate who represents much of the near west side in the State Assembly, also is a good example of the hopes and challenges facing the area. He and his fiancée, Gabriela Leija, a 2014 Marquette Law School graduate, live near N. 27th and W. State streets.

Goyke said he bought the house five years ago with the thought of rehabbing it and selling it. Now, he and Leija have decided to stay. “That’s because of the changes we’re seeing in the neighborhood,” he said. “It’s an exciting place to live.” He describes his neighborhood as “unique, diverse, chaotic—we love it.” ▶▶



Keith Stanley, executive director of the Avenues West neighborhood association and the Near West Side Partners organization

But he would like to have more places to shop and enjoy within walking distance of his house, which would require more people in the area who would patronize such places.

The opening several years ago of a well-regarded charter school, Woodlands East, not far from their house, is important to Goyke because he and Leija hope to have children and would love to have a nearby school that would be a good choice in a few years.

Goyke said there is one big concern: “Crime is unacceptably high.” On the other hand, there is big hope: “That area has all the potential in the world.”

That latter thought is echoed among the leaders of the initiative.

What makes a good neighborhood? Tonit Calaway grew up on the near west side, and her parents still live in the area. Calaway is now vice president of human resources for Harley-Davidson and president of the Harley-Davidson Foundation. As someone involved in the near west side initiative, she is asked often what people in the area want. She tells those asking the

question to look at their own neighborhoods and the good qualities those neighborhoods have.

“That’s what you want to see,” she said. “It’s the same thing every other American wants who lives in a good neighborhood.”

Calaway is hopeful about the initiative. “You’ve got a great group of companies and people and citizens and organizations

working to make change here, and I’m really excited about that,” she said. “This is about doing the right thing, period.” If the issue were just Harley-Davidson’s wanting to make its employees safe, “we could build a fortress, and that is not what this is about.”

Matthew S. Levatich, the new CEO of Harley-Davidson, recalled the first time he drove up N. 35th Street from I-94, heading toward the Harley-Davidson headquarters. He was not impressed by what he saw.

“I would like the future Matt Levatich to come driving up 35th and have a different experience than I had 20 years ago,” he said. “Actually, there have been improvements over the 20 years. Not enough. This neighborhood has so much potential, and the power in that potential is really spectacular. I would just love



Tonit Calaway, vice president of human resources for Harley-Davidson

the idea that, in five, ten years, that 27-year-old coming up 35th has a different feeling.”

Levatich’s hope—and almost a promise: “We will be a symbol for what is possible when a community truly comes together and works on the right things in the right order.”

Wiegand, the developer, was asked what he expects in the area five years from now. “It’s going to be a completely revitalized neighborhood,” he said. Look at other areas near the heart of Milwaukee that have improved greatly in recent years—such as Brewers Hill, Walker’s Point, Bay View, and the immediate Marquette area where a project known as Campus Circle had substantial positive impact in the 1990s. It can happen on the near west side, too, he said.

Lovell shares the expectations and hopes. “If you align enough people together, that’s when really good things happen, and we have really great alignment,” he said.

In February 2015, a group including leaders of the five anchors went to Philadelphia to see what had been done over the last 17 years as part of a large renewal effort led by the University of Pennsylvania and involving land adjacent to its campus. Lovell said they were impressed by what they saw. The group learned that simple things can really help—including a successful quality food market, programs promoting employees living within walking distance of work, and the presence of good schools.

Lovell said, “The biggest takeaway for me from that trip was Penn essentially did it by themselves, and we have these great partners.” And it took Penn 17 years. “It’s not going to take us 17 years,” Lovell said.

The Penn project has become the go-to place to visit for universities considering improvements in urban areas near their campuses. Lovell has one particular hope for the Milwaukee effort: Not too far in the future, people will want to go to the place where the work has been done especially well and with especially good impact.

And they’ll head to Milwaukee. ■

“If you align enough people together, that’s when really good things happen, and we have really great alignment.”

President Lovell

The University as Neighbor

by Daniel J. Myers

In the landscape of organizations that populate cities, colleges and universities play a pivotal role. That is especially apparent in the quintessential “college town.” But even in larger cities, higher-education institutions provide not just direct economic input (often being among the largest employers in their locality and a key portal for funneling outside dollars into the region) but also the intellectual catalyst for the development of industry and the education and training of the workforce. Universities also can prove to be heavyweights in their *neighborhoods*—sometimes as good, thoughtful, and integrated neighbors, while other times being less thoughtful about their impacts and connections to those around them. As a Jesuit institution, Marquette University is striving for the former, and this is nowhere better exemplified than through its leadership in the Near West Side Partners project, which seeks to revitalize its neighborhood(s) not through an all-too-common gentrification process but rather through a truly engaged partnership with the institutions and community around it.

Marquette University, of course, is no slouch when it comes to community service. It has a long and honorable history of sending students into its neighborhood and greater Milwaukee to make contributions, ranging from more than 25 years of “Hunger Clean-Up” to the decade and a half of service by the Marquette Volunteer Legal Clinic to, most recently, the College of Business’s fraud victims’ assistance project. The president’s office calculates that, in the past year alone, our students contributed no fewer than 455,000 hours of service to the community. Indeed, in my short time at Marquette, I have come to appreciate the organic integration of service into student life—whether those students are undergraduates, those seeking the Ph.D., or professional students such as those in Law and Dentistry. It is a core part of what defines the Marquette experience and the character of its graduates.

But Jesuit tradition does not define service as a charitable gift flowing from the more fortunate to the less but rather calls on us to engage fully with those in our environments, in mutual respect, to collaboratively confront the problems and challenges in our social and physical environments. This type of engagement benefits all who are involved—not just by improving their environment but also by inducing a deeper understanding of the problems we are confronting and the assets that exist to address these problems. That flavor of engagement is the route toward the collective efficacy that Professor Robert Sampson identifies as so critical to the success of neighborhoods and the cities that they constitute. This is why we have asked Marquette’s newly formed Office of Community Engagement, headed by Dr. Dan Bergen, to take this orientation as its guiding principle when facilitating our work with the local community.

Like other types of institutions, universities bring special resources to the table when developing partnerships with city governments, nonprofits, community action groups, and for-profit corporations. Their special charge is to provide intellectual resources to the enterprise. Marquette, for example, promotes the pursuit of engaged scholarship through teaching and research that address problems through collaboration across community divides and disciplinary boundaries—and with explicit involvement of nonacademics. In this role, it not only produces research resulting from the assessment of theoretically driven interventions, but it also informs the iterative development of those theories and subsequent interventions. And it provides a special brand of intellectual leadership by acting as a neutral convener of scholars, activists, politicians, business leaders, and community members to depose and promulgate the best thinking about our collective societal condition and how to improve it. This very issue of the *Marquette Lawyer* and, more generally, the Marquette Law School’s public policy initiative stand as shining examples of that critical role.

Daniel J. Myers is provost of Marquette University.

