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Media Contact:

Maya Fidziukiewicz, Mueller Communications
(414) 390-5500, nwsp@muellercommunications.com

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Near West Side Partners Honors Changemakers, Celebrates a Decade of Impact

Collaboration, community, and revitalization in Milwaukee's Near West Side and looking ahead to what's next in the neighborhood

MILWAUKEE – [Near West Side Partners](#) (NWSP) brought together neighbors, business owners and anchor institutions at Concordia 27 to celebrate a decade of bold partnerships and transformative investment in Milwaukee's Near West Side. Throughout the event, partners reflected on the relationships that have fueled community revitalization since 2015 and reaffirmed a shared commitment to continue collaboration for years to come.

"When a community comes together with shared purpose, even things that seem impossible are possible," said Lindsey St Arnold Bell, Executive Director of Near West Side Partners. "For the past decade, NWSP has been powered by partnership – neighbors, businesses, institutions, and local leaders all working side by side, bringing their talents and resources together to catalyze change. After gathering to celebrate the last decade of success, I think we all left even more energized to work. This celebration was not just about looking back – it's about honoring the people and progress that brought us here and looking ahead to an even brighter future for the Near West Side."

Honoring Excellence: NWSP 10-Year Impact Awards

The event celebrated NWSP's continued legacy with an awards ceremony honoring those who have made lasting contributions to the area's revitalization, and highlighted how cross-sector collaboration remains the driving force behind transformative community development.

As part of the evening's program, NWSP presented its 10-Year Impact Awards, recognizing individuals and organizations whose dedication has strengthened the community:

Community Champion Award

For fostering collaboration, inclusivity, and social progress.

Honorees: Rana Altenburg, Associate Vice President for Public Affairs at Marquette University, and Mick Hatch, Retired Real Estate Partner at Foley & Lardner LLP

Innovation & Resilience Award

For perseverance and creativity in growing local business and economic opportunity.

Honorees: Bennie and Angela Smith, Owners of Daddy's Soul Food & Grille

Neighborhood Stewardship Award

For a deep commitment to neighborhood revitalization and engagement.

Honoree: Valerie Langston, NWSP Volunteer and 29-year resident at Merrill Park Neighborhood

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The Power of Partnership – Then and Now

Since its founding in 2015, NWSP has been a catalyst for community revitalization, born from a shared vision led by the late Dr. Mike Lovell of Marquette University and championed by neighbors, small businesses and five anchor institutions. From safety and housing to small business growth and community health, NWSP has driven tangible outcomes across its focus areas – including support for 60 new businesses, nearly \$1 million in grants awarded to entrepreneurs since 2021, and the transformation of key commercial corridors like Vliet Street and 27th Street.

NWSP's success is rooted in its collaborative model, powered by the support of its five anchor institutions – Aurora Health Care, Harley-Davidson, Marquette University, Molson Coors and Potawatomi Ventures – as well as countless neighbors, entrepreneurs and public sector allies. This wide-ranging partnership enables NWSP to rapidly implement high-impact projects based on grassroots priorities, backed by data and informed by the lived experiences of residents.

A major highlight of NWSP's first decade is the opening of [Concordia 27](#) (C27)—a once-vacant building transformed into a vibrant hub for affordable housing, small businesses, workforce development and community gathering. Opened in 2024, C27 reflects years of collaboration among neighbors, partners, and institutions, inspired by the community's vision from the 2021 Appreciative Inquiry Summit. As NWSP looks to the future, C27 stands as a powerful example of what's possible through community-led revitalization.

Looking Ahead

As NWSP embarks on its second decade, it is actively shaping a refreshed strategic plan that not only builds on a strong foundation of community-driven success but also looks boldly to the future. A recent community charrette, which brought together residents, businesses, and stakeholders to imagine what's next for the neighborhood, is just one example of how NWSP is embracing fresh ideas and co-creating ambitious goals for the decade ahead.

"While we're proud of how far we've come, we know our work is just beginning," said St Arnold Bell. "The next 10 years are about deepening our impact – expanding opportunities for residents, strengthening housing and public safety, and continuing to build a neighborhood where everyone feels they belong. This is more than revitalization – it's about creating a place where people and possibility grow together."

For more information about Near West Side Partners and to stay updated on future initiatives, visit nearwestsidepartners.org or [sign up for our newsletter](#).

About Near West Side Partners

Near West Side Partners, Inc. (NWSP) is a non-profit organization with a mission to revitalize and sustain the Near West Side as a thriving business and residential corridor, through collaborative efforts to promote commercial corridor development, improved housing, unified neighborhood identity and branding, and greater safety for residents and businesses. NWSP was founded through the support of business and civic leaders, including the organization's five anchor institutions – Aurora Health Care, Harley-Davidson, Marquette University, Molson Coors and Potawatomi Business Development Corp.

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The following quotes were issued in celebration of this milestone:

Lindsey St Arnold Bell, Executive Director of NWSP

"The success of an organization like Near West Side Partners will ultimately be measured by its sustainability. It's not just about building an internal team with the capacity to lead this work—but also empowering the community to carry it forward. That's best achieved by letting residents take the lead and giving them the tools and confidence to succeed."

ANCHORS INSTITUTIONS

Rana Altenburg, Marquette University and NWSP Board Member

"Each year, we've seen double-digit decreases in crime, and I think we've made remarkable progress when it comes to safety. We've also done a strong job strengthening neighborhood identity and branding, and our healthy community initiative has been a terrific addition in recent years. Looking ahead, the true measure of our success over the next decade will be how we tackle housing in the Near West Side."

Tori Termaat, Harley-Davidson and NWSP Board Member

"In the past 10 years, we've seen an incredible wave of new businesses open in the neighborhood. As one of the anchor institutions, we make a point to support them however we can—and we believe in their missions, too."

Steven Brown, Molson Coors and NWSP Board Member

"You can build a successful career here. You can raise a family and give back to the community that supported you. Whether your contribution is big or small, there are real opportunities to make a difference."

Joe Tesch, Potawatomi Ventures

"The Near West Side Partners' 10th anniversary is a testament to the power of collaboration and community. We've seen firsthand how businesses can truly thrive in an environment where support, innovation, and shared values are the foundation. This milestone celebrates not just a decade of progress, but the strength of a neighborhood that believes in lifting each other up."

Nkem Iroegbu, Advocate Health

"Celebrating 10 years of Near West Side Partners means celebrating 10 years of investing in the health and well-being of our community. A thriving neighborhood starts with a healthy community. The Near West Side's commitment to wellness initiatives, access to care, and holistic support has made a real difference in the lives of residents—and we're proud to be part of that journey."

NWSP BOARD MEMBERS

James Madlom, NWSP Board Member and Mueller Communications

"The CEO [of Harley-Davidson] at the time recognized the need to invest in and commit to becoming part of the solution for our neighborhood and community. That led to the collaboration of initial partners, and soon Aurora, the Potawatomi, and MillerCoors joined in—contributing not just funding, but also their teams and energy. The focus became: how do we come together to be a force multiplier for this neighborhood?"

Rick Wiegand, Wiegand Enterprises

"The revitalization of properties like Concordia 27 and the historic Ambassador Hotel shows what's possible when real estate development is driven by a vision for community impact. Through our work with Near West Side Partners, we've seen how thoughtful restoration and investment can enhance neighborhood safety, spark economic growth, and create a true sense of belonging. It's about honoring the past while building a stronger future for all who live, work, and visit here."

NWSP TEAM MEMBERS

Stephanie Sherman, Associate Director of Near West Side Partners

"I believe the risk-takers—especially the next generation of emerging developers—have a real opportunity here. If they invest in the Near West Side now, they'll see the long-term rewards. I challenge our development community to look beyond the usual neighborhoods and recognize the potential right here in the Near West Side."

Savannah Brooks, Safety & Community Outreach Manager at NWSP

"I started out as a safety ambassador—the eyes and ears of the community. Over time, I learned the role, grew into it, and eventually became the safety manager for Near West Side Partners. I hope residents feel comfortable turning to our ambassadors, knowing we have tools and resources to support them—whether they're dealing with challenges or just want to feel more connected. We're here to offer a helping hand and a welcoming presence."

Kieth Stanley, Former Executive Director of NWSP

"It's vital that we have well-funded organizations that can uphold the vision and identity of our community. Change is constant, and we need people who are committed to a long-term vision—whether they're elected officials, business leaders, residents, or anchor institutions. Having everyone work together toward a shared goal is powerful. I'm grateful for everyone involved in this work every single day."

BUSINESS OWNERS

Angela Smith, Founder and Co-Owner of Daddy's Soul Food & Grille

"I love that the Near West Side community made us feel welcome from day one—even before we opened our doors. They embraced us fully and made sure we had access to the resources we needed to establish a strong foundation. That support allowed us to open with confidence and run a successful business."

Ian Robinson, Pete's Pops

"The business neighbors we have on the Near West Side are the best I've ever worked with. From day one, there was an immediate sense of support—people offering help, resources, whatever we needed to succeed. That kind of collaboration creates a real safety net. Just knowing that if something comes up, there's a community ready to step in—it's an incredible relief, and it makes it so much easier to focus on growing your business."

Chef Lisa McKay, Owner of Lisa Kaye Bistro and Lisa Kaye Catering

"We won Rev-Up MKE eight years ago, and it provided many of the resources we needed at the time. We're incredibly grateful for that support."

Tiffany, Owner of Fruition MKE

Fruition MKE would not exist without Near West Side Partners. The invitation to be a part of the Concordia 27 development was life changing and now Fruition MKE exists as Milwaukee's only cafe, coworking and creative space. I would not be a homeowner in Cold Spring Park without Acts Housings in collaboration with Near West Side Partners and the City of Milwaukee. Shout out to Corretta Herring. Near West Side Partners truly knows how to connect and engage with the whole person to improve lives, neighborhoods and communities.

NEIGHBOR

Valerie Langston, Near West Side Neighbor

We all have something to give—not just to our families, but to our neighbors and our community. You might surprise yourself with how much you can offer. I truly believe we have an obligation to give back.

DEVELOPER

Amelia Mitcham, Developer, Meeting Point MKE

"What's inspiring about Near West Side Partners and their collaborators is that they're not just talking—they're doing. They're living the mission and bringing residents along with them. There are people and organizations here I can reach out to and truly make an impact. It gives me hope."