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ANNUAL  
REPORT

# The POWER of COLLABORATION



[homansquare.org](http://homansquare.org)



## THE HOMAN SQUARE CAMPUS INCLUDES:

- Chicago Park District
- DRW College Prep
- Family Focus Lawndale
- Gardeneers - Homan Rails Farm
- Goodwill
- Holy Family School
- IFF
- Lawndale Business Renaissance Association
- Lawndale Christian Health Center
- The Lunch Box Café
- North Lawndale YMCA
- Options for Youth
- Rosenwald Foundation
- School of the Art Institute of Chicago
- UCAN Chicago
- West Side United
- YWCA Julian Grace Innovation and Technology Institute



## Letter from the Executive Director

Hello Friends,

In the pages of this annual report, you'll sense a consistent theme: the power of collaboration. Foundation for Homan Square (FHS) would not be able to achieve its mission alone. We rely on partners for nearly everything we do. By building relationships with partners, FHS has taken significant steps in investing in the fabric of Homan Square and its residents.

Looking back on the past year, I'm particularly heartened by the positive outcomes that have a direct impact on the lives of our community members. People like Shawntavia Brazil, who is returning to live on the West Side as a first-time homeowner thanks to our Home Sweet Homan initiative. Shawntavia's story is just the start of what's possible when it comes to the 20 new single-family homes being built on vacant lots through Home Sweet Homan.

The Mothers Healing Circle is another initiative that makes use of our space at Nichols Tower while teaming up with artist Sonja Henderson and partners that include the School of the Art Institute. Because of this collaboration, grieving mothers have an opportunity for communal healing and artistic expression. Our Sears Sunken Garden is decorated with 16 flags that are the product of mothers participating in the circle.

Our ties to Sears will be on display in a temporary visitor center that honors the life of Julius Rosenwald, the late executive and philanthropist whose giving helped establish nearly 5,000 schools across the country for African American students. Nichols Tower is part of a plan for a National Historical Park that spans sites in Illinois, Mississippi, and Maryland. The concept of the visitor center was formed thanks to the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park Campaign.

Together with other like-minded organizations, FHS will continue to invest in the West Side community. That means convening a larger community table and rooting our strategies in the insights of residents and partners. In the coming years, we intend to grow and evolve as a vital community hub, and those are goals that we will achieve thanks to collaboration with others.

In partnership,

**Kevin Sutton**  
Executive Director  
Foundation for Homan Square





## New initiative, new construction make homeownership dreams come true

Shawntavia Brazil has deep roots in North Lawndale. She attended Hughes Elementary School and Westinghouse High School, and her great-grandparents owned a restaurant in the neighborhood. But as housing prices rose and she experienced changes in her life that included a divorce, she departed the community to find affordable rental housing. Through the Home Sweet Homan initiative, Shawntavia now has an opportunity to return to the neighborhood and become a homeowner for the first time.

"I was told by people I wouldn't be able to afford a home over there," Shawntavia says. "The value is too much. And I said, 'That's fine. I'm going to find what I'm looking for and it will be where my family is supposed to be.'"

That turned out to be a three-bedroom, two-bath home on Lexington Street, the first of what will be 20 new single-family homes on vacant lots in Homan Square. Foundation for Homan Square leads the initiative, providing affordable homeownership opportunities along with partners Reclaim Chicago and United Power for Action and Justice.

Shawntavia is a longtime federal government employee. A single parent, her children are now of college and high school age.

"I couldn't afford to live in North Lawndale anymore," she says. "This is Chicago, so even with affordable housing prices, every year the rent amount changes. I thought if I can pay this much for rent, I can own a home even as a one-parent household."

Carmen Dennis is the real estate agent responsible for marketing the new homes, which are outfitted with electric appliances, security systems, maintenance guarantees, solar panels, and smart-home technology to ensure energy efficiency.

"Over 200 individuals have come through the homes," says Carmen. "There's plenty of interest. The houses are affordable, and ready for the future. They're eco-friendly, and people understand things are changing."

Shawntavia says those features were attractive to her family.

"My entire family is vegan," Shawntavia says. "We are eco-friendly people. That is our thing. That was one of the things that attracted me to the home as well."

### THE GOALS OF HOME SWEET HOMAN ARE:

- To build generational wealth at the individual and household level.
- To provide affordable homeownership opportunities.
- To activate vacant land in the community in a productive way.







## Celebrating 21 new housing units

Organizational partners, local residents, and community leaders gathered on July 10 for a celebration of Foundation for Homan Square's permanent supportive housing initiative. The innovative scattered-site development includes 21 units across four locations. Residents will have the opportunity to enjoy the comfort of accessible units while benefiting from the support and security of a dedicated community.

## Driehaus Foundation supports critical tower masonry project

Chicago's harsh winters have taken their toll on the nearly 120-year-old John D. and Alexandra C. Nichols Tower on Homan Avenue.

"The freeze and thaw cycle of Chicago is not great for bricks," says John Kuhnen, Vice President of Asset Management for IFF, which manages the property.

The 14-story structure with 360-degree views of the city is the last remaining portion of what was the Sears merchandise building on the company's campus. The building's façade has been vulnerable to weathering even after its renovation in 2016. The Neo-Classical warehouse tower was vacant—and unheated—for many years prior to the renovation.

Enter the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation, which has provided a generous \$400,000 gift to Foundation for Homan Square to address the city-required masonry work on Nichols Tower. The project began this past July and extended into the fall.

"This detailed work will reduce the need for future work at this level going forward," John adds. "It is quite expensive to do this sort of solid stabilization."

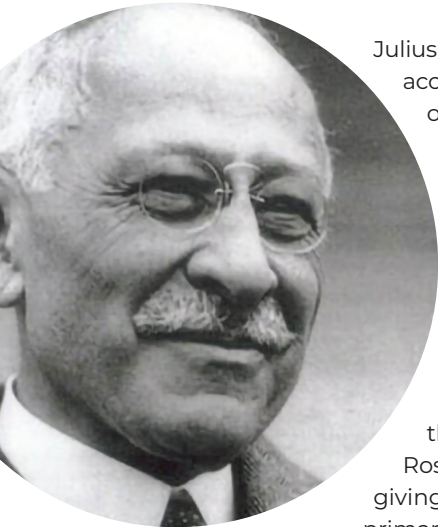
"Words cannot express our gratitude and appreciation for this wonderful support and commitment to the preservation of this vital community asset and nonprofit hub," says Kevin Sutton, Executive Director, Foundation for Homan Square.

The project is expected to shore up the masonry for at least the next 10 years. That means Foundation for Homan Square can focus on what it does best—bringing community partners together and addressing issues related to education, healthcare, and housing.

"Nichols Tower is integral to the history of Chicago and anchors the Homan Square community culturally, geographically, and physically," says Anita Alexander, Senior Program Officer for the Richard H. Driehaus Foundation. "Foundation for Homan Square does good work as caretakers and stewards of the neighborhood and its historic buildings. We are pleased to provide funds to help preserve and maintain the landmark so the organization may use more of its resources for housing and other programs."



## Visitor center at Nichols Tower to commemorate Julius Rosenwald



**Julius Rosenwald is credited with helping to build more than 5,000 schools for African American children in the United States.**

Julius Rosenwald had a simple approach to the wealth he accumulated as an early and highly successful President of Sears.

“His philosophy was to give while you live,” said longtime National Parks advocate Dorothy Canter. “He requested that the Julius Rosenwald Fund be expended within 25 years of his death. He was a modest man who never graduated high school. He never accepted honorary degrees and only one time allowed his name to be put on a building, and that was because he was traveling abroad when it was done and felt it would be inappropriate to ask that it be removed.”

Rosenwald’s humility during his lifetime may be one reason his story is lesser known, but the Foundation for Homan Square is part of a new campaign designed to draw attention to Rosenwald’s significant legacy and impact. Rosenwald was a visionary philanthropist whose giving resulted in nearly 5,000 schools being built for African American students across 15 states, primarily in the American South. The schools educated more than 600,000 children who would have had limited access to education otherwise. The impact was far-reaching; many Rosenwald graduates played a role in the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s. Famous Rosenwald graduates include poet Maya Angelou, the late U.S. Rep. John Lewis, the singer Nina Simone, and newspaper editor Eugene Robinson.

Rosenwald also contributed to numerous causes in Chicago, including the University of Chicago, Jane Addams Hull House and the Jewish United Fund of Metropolitan Chicago. He was the founding donor of the Museum of Science and Industry.

Dorothy helped launch the effort to recognize Rosenwald with a multi-site National Historical Park spread across several states, including Illinois and Maryland. The planned park would be the first of 430 in the National Parks System to commemorate the life of a Jewish American.

“I’d been on the Board of the National Parks Conservation Association for nine years and had visited 300 of the parks,” said Dorothy, who is now President of the Board of Directors for the Julius Rosenwald & Rosenwald Schools National Historical Park Campaign. “My husband and I saw a Rosenwald documentary in 2015, and we were blown away.”

Rosenwald’s office at Sears’ headquarters in North Lawndale was in the Administration Building, so it was natural to incorporate the nearby Nichols Tower into the National Park plans. A temporary visitor center is now planned for the tower as the Campaign seeks the designation of a National Monument by President Biden in 2024, followed by Congressional legislation to establish the National Historical Park shortly thereafter.

“Rosenwald’s goal was to make a more perfect union,” Dorothy said. “It’s a story that needs to be told by the National Park Service.”





## Mothers find healing in artistic expression

Earlier this year, on a warm Juneteenth, a group of women gathered at the historic Sears Sunken Garden. The women, all grieving the loss of children, raised 16 flags that had been carefully sewn as part of the healing process.

“It was beautiful,” said Sonja Henderson, founder of the Mothers Healing Circle, “it’s incredibly healing for Lawndale as a whole.”

Sonja is a Chicago-based sculptor and visual artist who recognized a need for restorative and healing justice for the mothers in North Lawndale. For the past four years, Sonja has personally funded, crowd sourced, and secured micro-grants from Illinois Humanities and the School of the Art Institute (SAIC) for supplies and programming. As the Mothers Healing Circle continues to grow, the need for funding and donations is critical.

SAIC provides space for Sonja and the Mothers Healing Circle on the 12th floor of Nichols Tower. As many as 30 mothers have been meeting weekly for several years. The women have found a space for creative expression, meditation, and wellness after the experience of losing a child to violence.

“There is an immense amount of healing that happens in the community through this,” Sonja said.

SAIC provided a small grant to provide materials and enable a graduate student to compile a book and turn the flags into a permanent display.

“It puts so much joy and beauty in the physical space,” said Jaclyn Jacunski, Director of Community Engagement at SAIC, “and celebrating lives and the community of these mothers.”

The Juneteenth flag-raising was the second since the initiative began. The first took place in September 2023, and those flags are now on display at Rainbow Beach on the city’s South Side.

“We’re really happy to give this space and provide women the opportunity to grieve the way they need to,” said Sonja. “SAIC has been there by my side.”

SAIC’s work at Homan Square aspires to engage artists from a variety of disciplines to combine their skills and engage the community.

“This is to me the way artists should be participating in the community,” Jaclyn said. “This is really what it’s all about. The mothers bring so much creativity and vibrancy to our space.”

**Sonja Henderson helps prepare a flag for raising on June 22.**



Our sincerest thanks to the individuals, families, and organizations who support Foundation for Homan Square. Because of you, we are able to meet the need for education, healthcare, recreation, and family support services in our community.

**THANK YOU**  
to the  
**John D. and  
Alexandra C.  
Nichols Tower  
Preservation Fund!**

And a special  
**THANK YOU** to  
**Bev Hayford & family**  
for their tremendous  
support of  
**Homan Square!**

## 2023/2024 ANNUAL FUND

**THANK YOU TO THOSE  
WHOSE GREAT GENEROSITY  
ALLOWS US TO TOUCH THE  
LIVES OF MANY.**

### LEGACY CIRCLE (\$25,000+)

The Beverly Hayford Family Fund  
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Family Foundation

### FOUNDER'S CIRCLE (\$10,000-\$24,999)

Catherine Shaw

### CHAIRMAN'S CIRCLE (\$5,000-\$9,999)

John Mabie

### PRESIDENT'S CIRCLE (\$2,500-\$4,999)

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Elevated Chicago  
Richard H. Driehaus Foundation

## MANY THANKS TO OUR PROJECT PARTNERS!

### HOMAN SQUARE PERMANENT SUPPORTIVE HOUSING

**PROJECT-** Illinois Housing  
Development Authority, Cook  
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Weinberg Foundation, SPARRC,  
Elevated Chicago, Steans  
Foundation, ComEd

### HOME SWEET HOMAN HOMEOWNERSHIP PROJECT-

United Power for Action &  
Justice, Cook County Land  
Bank Authority, JPMC, Inherent  
Homes, L3C



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