

#EnsleyAlive™

For Immediate Release

Ensley Alive launches “Branding Ensley” to drive foot traffic to downtown Ensley

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Birmingham, AL...Ensley stakeholders launch initiative to honor Ensley jazz greats while enticing patrons to visit downtown Ensley retailers.

[Branding Ensley](#) is an initiative developed by [Bettina Byrd-Giles](#), CEO of The Bethesda Life Center, Inc. and [Ensley Alive](#) co-founder as her culminating initiative for the [Culture of Health Leaders](#) program. The Culture of Health Leaders is one of four programs sponsored by the Leadership for Better Health Initiative of [The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation](#). Byrd-Giles was one of 40 selected for the inaugural class of The Culture of Health Leaders in 2016. Each leader is required to implement an initiative to build a culture of health in a community of their choice. For Byrd-Giles, Ensley was a natural selection. She has been working in Ensley since 2010 when she was asked to direct The Bethesda Life Center, Inc. The Bethesda provides healthcare regardless of one’s ability to pay. Prior to The Bethesda, Byrd-Giles was a university administrator for almost 20 years. In 2007, one of her former students who had grown up in Ensley asked how they could collaborate. Their initial collaboration was a photo voice project called, [“100 Lenses Ensley.”](#) Other former Ensley residents and stakeholders joined them to create, [Ensley Alive](#), a movement to spark a renaissance in Ensley. Branding Ensley builds upon work of Ensley Alive.

Building a culture of health from the perspective of RWJF includes what health looks like from the vantage point of communities. It relies upon viewpoints from multiple sectors, not just traditional health-related institutions. Byrd-Giles and Ensley Alive focused on the built environment and [shifting Ensley’s narrative](#). The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) defines the [built environment](#) as all of the physical parts of where we live and work (e.g., homes, buildings, streets, open spaces, and infrastructure). Byrd-Giles found the narrative around Ensley through the news, crime reports, and Census data to form a negative and incomplete story. The community has several assets that should be highlighted and built upon. However, the perception internally and externally held Ensley back from its potential. Ensley Alive set out to change the perception and focus on Ensley’s assets. It uses the cultural arts, social media and



articles to accomplish their goals. Byrd-Giles captures their mission in the article, [“The Revolution will be Painted, Planted and Photographed.”](#)

One thing Byrd-Giles noticed was that many people spoke of jazz as part of Ensley’s distant past that had a festival to commemorate it. Byrd-Giles is a professional interculturalist whose focus is mostly healthcare. She facilitates cross-cultural interaction, interprets culture and shifts culture in many settings. She noticed that jazz is still part of the fabric of Ensley and its legacy can be seen in the generations of musicians who were influenced by the jazz performers before them. Even millennial band directors affiliated with Jackson-Olin, the local high school, were proficient in jazz and actively performing with jazz ensembles in Birmingham and beyond. Jazz is often considered a lost art in many African American communities. Top jazz musicians such as [Wynton Marsalis](#) have openly voiced concerns around their audiences being mostly white. However, according to the [Jazz Education Network \(JEN\)](#) audiences though a small part of the US population (11%) are still mainly African American and male. Ensley influenced artists and audiences remain part of that elite subset of the country. Although not a scientific indicator, one of Byrd-Giles’ observations is recent selections of band directors at Jackson-Olin. All of them appear to have to have jazz backgrounds.



Jose Carr t-shirt launch--Ideal Furniture in Ensley

Branding Ensley is an opportunity to operationalize Ensley Alive’s social capital to bring foot traffic to downtown Ensley by highlighting its jazz heritage. Three teams have been commissioned to design t-shirts honoring jazz greats from Ensley and the surrounding communities. The t-shirts will be available in retail stores located in downtown Ensley and on-line at <https://teespring.com/stores/ensley-alive>. The teams consist of a design mentor and a group of students who are interested in learning graphic design, production, marketing, and entrepreneurship. The first set of t-shirts will be available to the public beginning June 25, 2019 at Gilmer Drug 413 19th St Ensley, Birmingham, AL 35218. By purchasing a t-shirt, patrons will invest in Ensley and future opportunities for workforce development of Birmingham students. Branding Ensley partners include, The Bethesda Life Center, Inc., Ensley Alive, [The Color Project Ensley](#), [We Are Artists](#), [Holy Family Cristo Rey Catholic High School](#), [Al “Thed Weller” Elliott](#), [Real Life Poets](#), [MNJ Studios](#) and Arnold Williams of [A.D.s Poet-Tree](#) and retailers in downtown Ensley with support from the Culture of Health Leaders program and funding made possible by the Robert Wood Johnson



Jothan Callins t-shirt launch, Tres at Cotton’s in Ensley

Foundation.

A jazz themed mural has also been commissioned that will be available for viewing for a limited time.