BUILDING A ‘FRONT DOOR’ IN WEST BALTIMORE
The Story of the UMB Community Campus

A NEW VISION

University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) engagement efforts took a giant step forward in 2014 when UMB President Jay A. Perman, MD, followed his vision and established the Office of Community Engagement (OCE). The office is a tangible example of the University’s deep commitment to strengthening West Baltimore in collaboration with the neighbors who live there.

This relationship grew even stronger in fall 2015 when the University opened the UMB Community Engagement Center (CEC) in West Baltimore’s Poppleton neighborhood. The CEC reflected Perman’s desire to house many community engagement programs in one central place, bringing UMB’s assets and expertise within easier reach of our West Baltimore neighbors, and putting us nearer to the people our programs were intended to help. It was a unique approach that effectively built a “front door” for our neighbors to access University resources in their own community.

The CEC is a place where UMB staff, students, and faculty can leverage the University’s economic resources and human capital to help our neighbors in West Baltimore create a healthy, vibrant, and prosperous community. It opened up the University to the larger community, and it built and strengthened transformative relationships with new and existing neighbors.
I am committed to building on Dr. Perman’s legacy of community engagement. We will ensure that his work in this area not only will endure but will thrive.

- BRUCE E. JARRELL, MD, FACS
  interim president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore

STRENGTHENING OUR SHARED COMMUNITY

Among UMB’s critical relationships in West Baltimore is the one it shares with the SouthWest Partnership. Formed in 2012 by a group of community leaders addressing issues of disinvestment and disfranchisement, this coalition of seven SouthWest Baltimore neighborhood associations, community members, and anchor institutions aligned to position their community as a vibrant part of Baltimore’s future.

In 2014, these neighbors expressed a need to be more involved and included when anchor institutions made decisions that would impact their community. They needed a way to feel connected, and they defined what they needed: after-school programs, a place to find jobs, health and fitness programs, and other critical community resources and services. UMB’s role as one of the anchor institutions, coupled with a growing sense of urgency, soon produced new efforts to leverage the University’s influence in a way that served the needs of the West Baltimore community, as defined by its neighbors.

Today, the CEC serves 6,500 households living primarily in the communities that comprise the SouthWest Partnership coalition: Franklin Square, Poppleton, Hollins Market, Barre Circle, Pigtown, Mount Clare, and Union Square. The 3,500-square-foot center provides vital health, wellness, employment, education, and social services to nearby residents, and partners effectively with neighbors to create and sustain projects that strengthen West Baltimore community development and external investment.

EXPANDING OUTREACH

But at 3,500 square feet, the CEC has outgrown its space. In the four years since its doors opened, the center has recorded nearly 40,000 visits from men, women, teens, and children who engage with its services and programming.

UMB leaders and West Baltimore community members are excited to see the Community Engagement Center expand into a historic, 20,000-square-foot building that is being renovated around the corner on Poppleton Street. The new space is seven times larger and will make room for a richer portfolio of community-driven programming that children, families, and neighbors in West Baltimore have been asking for: an exercise/dance studio, a large multipurpose room for community meals and events, a safe play area for children, a wellness suite, and a more robust computer lab.

A groundbreaking ceremony was held in October 2019 and the new CEC is scheduled to open in the summer of 2020.

According to Perman, the Community Campus initiative is about the relationships we’re building and the trust we’re restoring. It’s about how our neighbors feel about their relationship with UMB. Are we earning their trust and partnership? Where do we still face challenges?

“We still have much more to do,” says Perman, who left in January 2020 to become the fifth chancellor of the University System of Maryland. “I think most people – University colleagues and neighbors alike – would consider our relationship in West Baltimore a work in progress. May it always be so.”

WE CAN DO IT TOGETHER

We hope you will join the growing number of UMB Community Campus benefactors deeply committed to transforming the lives of children and families in one of Baltimore’s most challenged, yet resilient communities.

FOR MORE INFORMATION, PLEASE CONTACT:

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