



# The University RECORD

May 19, 2015

January 12, 2015

## U-M Detroit Center is activity hub in resurgent city

By Kevin Brown

The University Record

Topic: **State & Community**

Tweet 2 Tweet 2

Share

5

print email

It was an epic transformation.

A young man from Southwest Detroit went from gang member to neighborhood leader and police cadet. And the University of Michigan's Detroit Center was the setting for one particularly poignant moment in his journey.

**+ MORE INFORMATION**

- [Detroit Center](#)

"He came to the Detroit Center and participated in a neighborhood safety panel comprised of community leaders. His story of transformation from a life of crime to that of a neighborhood activist transfixed the audience," says Rachel Williams, associate program manager of the School of Social Work Technical Assistance Center (TAC).

Detroit is changing. And as the city shakes off bankruptcy and revels in a downtown entrepreneurial revival, U-M's educational support activities, research, community service and partnerships in Detroit are surging too.

In fact, activities compete for space at the Detroit Center, the university's Midtown hub at 3663 Woodward Ave. "Sometimes we have to say no because we just can't accommodate all the requests," says Addell Anderson, Detroit Center director.



**The Detroit Center, 3663 Woodward Ave., is in Detroit's Midtown area. (Photo by Peter Matthews, Michigan Photography)**

---

Founded in 1817 in Detroit, U-M moved to Ann Arbor in 1841. To provide a focus for U-M activity in Detroit, the Detroit Center opened in 2005. On its 10th anniversary, 18 academic units interact with the center.

"We've really become the representation of the university's commitment to the city," Anderson says.

To underscore that commitment, President Mark Schlissel made Detroit the focus of his inaugural meeting with the President's Advisory Group. He asked business and industry leaders including downtown entrepreneur Dan Gilbert for ideas on what the university should be doing in the city.

"Many of the university's schools and colleges have research and teaching efforts in Detroit, and a large

number of student groups have volunteer programs that work alongside residents trying to lift up their city. We're serving as a sort of think tank for leadership in Detroit. We are letting 1,000 flowers bloom and people develop their ideas," Schlissel says.

As the flagship public institution in the state, Schlissel says U-M must continue to be thoughtful about what it is doing in Detroit, and bring leadership and coherence to that effort. The president suggests a one-day workshop where faculty and researchers could share their Detroit-focused projects, to develop synergy and collaborations.

"I want to use Detroit as an opportunity for the engaged learning we are committed to for our students, as a target of scholarship for our faculty, but also as a target of the service aspect of what a public university is supposed to be doing for the citizens of the state it serves," Schlissel says.

Anderson says Detroiters recognize that the Detroit Center is a vital part of the city. "We have no trouble filling a room for a lecture or program," she says.

---



**From left, Detroit Center Director Addell Anderson joins staff members Joshua Dykes, assistant facilities manager; Gerrard Rayford, public allies intern; and Mike Morland, communications director. (Photo by Peter Matthews, Michigan Photography)**

---

Throughout the year, the Detroit Center hosts to meetings, lectures, workshops, and performances annually drawing more than 20,000 visitors. Its programming links university and Detroit communities with Martin Luther King Jr. Day activities, the Concert of Colors, Detroit Tigers' Opening Day, the Thanksgiving Day Parade, Sounds of the Season, and Noel Night. The center sponsors a week-long, summer theatre camp for Metro Detroit youth, and maintains a Hall of Fame recognizing the significant achievements of Detroiters

who are university alumni.

## Welcome to the D

"This is not at all what I expected," some students say. For most, stepping onto the pavement at Woodward and Martin Luther King Jr. Drive is an adventure.

Housed in Orchestra Place, the Detroit Center takes up 15,209 square feet of the building's ground floor. The Detroit Medical Center looms to the east. The neighborhood is home to a Whole Foods Market, Starbucks, an acupuncture clinic and a yoga studio, craft cocktail taverns serving trendy small-plates cuisine, the Garden Bowl and the Majestic Theatre. The fledgling White Stripes performed there, on their way to joining Motown stars and Eminem as show business leaders and best.

"Before the students arrive, a lot of them think it's going to be dilapidated. When they see what's happening, they say it's great that Detroit is coming back," says Shari Robinson-Lynk, assistant director for engaged learning partnerships, Ginsberg Center, and Lecturer's Employee Organization adjunct lecturer with the School of Social Work and the Center for Global and Intercultural Study, LSA.

"When I was on the Ann Arbor campus recently, a colleague said to me it must be exciting to be in Detroit now. People might have said a few years ago it was a challenge to be here," Anderson says. Midtown also is home to renovated residential development. "You see couples walking their baby strollers," she says.

"What I've seen at the Detroit Center is people are doing amazing things to change their neighborhoods," Williams says.

The School of Social Work TAC since 2006 has promoted education, youth development, safety and community leadership in six Detroit neighborhoods — Brightmoor, Chadsey Condon, Cody Rouge, North End Central Woodward, Osborn and Southwest Detroit.

"Our role has been to build capacity to empower, but the true innovation and the commitment to change the neighborhoods has come from Detroiters," Williams says.

The TAC works hand in hand with neighborhood residents delivering skill building workshops, facilitating U-M engagement and providing individual coaching — all in support of resident leadership and the achievement of community goals. It also places AmeriCorps VISTA volunteers in neighborhoods to support youth employment and economic development efforts..

"We try to recruit volunteers that live in the target neighborhoods to build local leadership. One of our VISTA members started a midnight basketball program to keep young people engaged, safe and off the street. It's that demonstration of passion and the ability to give back that we help facilitate.," says Sonia Harb, TAC director.

"Residents are high energy and deeply committed to their neighborhoods. Residents are involved in foreclosure prevention, community arts activities, block clubs, advocacy around the education system... The level of activism and innovation is awesome and inspiring," she says.

Harb says the Detroit Center promotes integration between U-M's different schools and projects. "It's a forum for collaboration. Lectures, workshops, the launch of a new research project, health screenings — there's always something going on at the center," she says.

## Thursday night at the Detroit Center

Katelyn Hoisington, a U-M alumna who teaches middle school at the YES Academy in northwest Detroit, removes her coat and unpacks a laptop. She is attending a Federal Teach For America certification program session for young teachers in the Detroit schools. Hoisington says that beyond the instruction, anecdotes that fellow teachers share are also useful.

"One night, a teacher was talking about how the kids get noisy between classes and it's hard to get them to settle down," Hoisington says. The teacher found a solution. "She got kids in each of her classes to compete, to see which group could be the fastest to be silent. The teacher would write the time on the blackboard. It worked."

In the main meeting room, a weekly Detroiters Speak program on the city's water issues has begun. On this Thursday night, activists tell a group of 70 Detroiters and U-M students that people suffer when water is shut off. They also risk losing homes when unpaid water bills are attached to property tax bills.



**Glenda McGadney, a community member who attends programs at the Detroit Center, talks during a Detroiters Speak program on water issues in Detroit. The ongoing discussion series is sponsored by the Detroit Center and the Residential College's Semester in Detroit program. (Photo by Peter Matthews, Michigan Photography)**

Michael A. Manning, a biomolecular sciences senior from Macomb, asks the panel if this is happening in other cities, and what is being done.

"I was surprised to hear that the water company was not contacting residents before shutting off their water. Being able to see the emotion and hurt that these people were feeling really allowed me to empathize and understand the gravity of this issue," he says.

Looking on is Craig Register, associate director of the Residential College's Semester in Detroit program, funded by the Office of the Provost and open to all U-M students. It allows them to live and study in Detroit for one semester. Semester in Detroit and the Detroit Center present Detroiters Speak.

"We seek to provide some balance to the larger, incomplete narratives we often hear, read or see in the mainstream news about Detroit and Detroiters," Register says.

There is tremendous educational value in bringing together U-M students and Detroiters for common conversation and learning, he adds.

There's also value to Detroit. Since 2009, Semester in Detroit students have partnered with more than 50 community organizations, and interns have performed more than 25,000 service hours. After completing Semester in Detroit, more than one in three U-M alumni live or work in Detroit.

Detroiters Speak returns Jan. 22. Faculty, staff and students can take the Detroit Center Connector Bus to attend the sessions.

## **Windshield reflections**

The Detroit Center Connector bus service between the Ann Arbor campus and the Detroit Center has been operating since September 2013. Robinson-Lynk says she looks forward to "windshield reflections" during the hour ride to Detroit, with her Ginsberg Center students bound for engaged-learning assignments.

"I ask them, what have you heard? What do you think you will see? I encourage them to notice and reflect upon the visual differences between Ann Arbor and Detroit. Guiding them to critically think beyond what they see — to thinking about the policies and structures, which may have led to these visual disparities — have been profound learning opportunities. Likewise, the post-reflections have been equally transformative," she says.



**Marcus White, a Master of Fine Arts candidate in the School of Music, Theatre & Dance, uses the Detroit Center to work with collaborators and community partners. (Carlos Funn photo)**

Through America Reads, presented by the Ginsberg Center, U-M students tutor youth in grades K-3 in the Detroit Public Schools, to boost literacy skills and confidence. Erin Byrnes is director of America Reads, which hosts an annual Local Artists Under 10 event at the Detroit Center.

"I vividly remember the elementary students walking into the center with their eyes aglow at their artwork. Each child guided their loved ones to their art, and talked about the book they'd read that the piece was based on. The event was special because it brought so many people together in the city of Detroit," Byrnes says.

Marcus White, a Master of Fine Arts candidate in dance in the School of Music, Theatre & Dance, uses the Detroit Center to work with collaborators and community partners. "Pearls," the first phase of his dance-based "Visibility Project," recently received the Michigan Dance Council's Maggie Allesee New Choreography Award.

"The team at U-M is extremely supportive in ensuring I have work space in Midtown. Being in the city allows me to be within communities I work with and serve. The location of the Detroit Center allows me to feel the impact," he says.

**Tags: [Detroit Center](#)**

## LEAVE A COMMENT

---

FIRST NAME \*

LAST NAME \*

EMAIL \*

Will not be published.

COMMENT \*

SAVE

## TOPICS

[All Headlines](#)

---

[Academics](#)

---

[Arts & Culture](#)

---

[Athletics](#)

---

[Campus News](#)

---

[Human Resources](#)

---

[Information Technology](#)

---

**Obituaries**

---

**Police Beat**

---

**Regents**

---

**Entrepreneurship & Innovation**

---

**Global Engagement**

---

**Health & Medicine**

---

**History**

---

**Research**

---

**State & Community**

---

**Sustainability**

---

**MOST POPULAR**

**U-M will sponsor annual e-waste recycling event April 23-25**

**Paved trail connecting Matthaei to campus gets boost from MDOT**

**Are those jerks at work dragging you down?**

**Golden Apple winner delivers inspiration, laughs and tears**

**Campus Memorial to honor students who died in the past year**

---



**About**

---

**Contact**

---

**Advertise with us**

---

**Past issues**

---

**MICHIGAN DAILY**

**MICHIGAN NEWS**

**MICHIGAN RADIO**

**MICHIGAN TODAY**

**HEALTH SYSTEM NEWS**

**ATHLETIC NEWS**

© 2015 The Regents of the University of Michigan