

The Ascent™

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 **Jacob's Ladder™**
Community Development Corporation

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Come up a little higher Belt Line needs a voice that says “we..., I..., they matter”

Hello, I'm Hester Johnson Moore, a native Memphian raised in the South Memphis area of Carver High School and downtown. I was recently named director of Jacob's Ladder's Belt Line Youth Enrichment Center.

I was the 14th child of Lorse and Rance Johnson. Early on I knew that I wanted to make a difference in my community.

I started helping alongside my mother, who would fix baskets for neighbors if she heard the family was in need. She once took in a neighbor's son in for three months, feeding and clothing him until his own mother returned.

At the age of 16, while I was a student at Carver High School and during the sanitation strike of 1968, I, along with students from surrounding schools, was trained at historic Clayborn Temple to participate in boycotting downtown stores

during the strike. I and hundreds of others with Martin Luther King Jr. were about to march on City Hall when that ill fated riot broke out.



I am an actress, poet, storyteller, graduate of The University of Memphis in theater and communication and American Academy of Dramatics Arts in New York and mother of two sons, Jabari and Ahmad of Dallas. I have always emphasized to my sons the need to be aware of human rights and the needs of those less fortunate. Being the director of Belt Line Youth Enrichment Center is testimony to my life. I want to make a difference to anyone that is eager to make a change. My goal is to be a vehicle for that change. Belt Line Community, like so many communities and the people in these communities, needs a voice that says “we, I, they matter.”

The vision that Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. had for his four children in his 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech is the same dream that we all should have in 2008. Part of that dream is that all children black and white can live and learn together given that opportunity to explore beyond the boundaries of a front yard or a depressed community.

Specifically, my vision as the director of the new Belt Line Youth Enrichment Center is that the youth of this community take advantage of services provided by the center as a means of having a sense of what it is like being outside the community. We don't see the Playhouse on the Park or the Ballet Mid-South, or Chef Chez on the street corners of Belt Line, but we will have at the Belt Line Youth Enrichment Center, a master cook to teach cooking, a graduate of University of Memphis



Rev. Bill Marler with the group of University of Memphis urban anthropology students that helped Jacob's Ladder with the Belt Line community survey.

Theater and Communications School to teach theater, a former teacher and coach to teach woodworking, and a professional teacher to teach basic computer skills. It is my hope that the word would get around that all of these classes are free and open to all children that want to participate,

Recently, Dr. Keri Brondo's Urban Anthropology class from The University of Memphis co-participated in a survey initiative in the community. We went up and down many streets knocking on the door of every resident that we thought would answer. Our goal was to gather as much feedback as possible from the community on classes that they would like to see at the center.

We were not surprised when some citizens wanted to talk more than others when given an opportunity to speak when no one had ever asked before. Some of their suggestions included a park, a drug program, a community computer room, after school tutoring, business opportunities for the youths in the summer, and many more. Most said that the children needed something to do. The volunteer efforts of Dr. Brondo and her class are greatly appreciated in seeing this vision through.

At the end of the day, I watched two little girls play in the empty lot across the street -- a lot filled with patches of dirt mixed with overgrown grass, trash and broken beer bottles. The girls were joyfully laughing and playing. As a mother, I wanted to scream out, “don't go near the glass,” or “that place is filthy, don't go over there.” I could do neither. I could only watch these girls play in what they had created for themselves -- an imaginary playground that was real to them.

Let us all join together to make a difference in the lives of those girls and all the girls and boys in Belt Line.



Members of Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity from around the U.S. and Canada helped out at Jacob's Ladder's Belt Line Enrichment Center on January 5.

Pi Kappa Alpha lends a hand

On Saturday January 5, 21 young men from eight states representing the Pi Kappa Alpha International Fraternity came to the Belt Line Enrichment Center for an entire morning to donate their energy and skill to a landscaping project. Their chapter executives conference brought them to Memphis; their willingness and desire to work on a community project brought them to Jacob's Ladder. They dug, shoveled and wheel barrowed a small mountain of mulch around the center, sculpting as they went (See picture above.).

"The Pikes accomplished in three hours what would have been an all day effort by a landscaping company," said Jacob's Ladder Executive Director Rev. Bill Marler. "Their beautification efforts extended beyond the center to the community garden across the street and to a neighbor's property. These young men left a mark on this community, and we wish them well as they develop into tomorrow's leaders."

"The students were from eight U.S. states -- Illinois, Indiana, Ohio, South Carolina, Florida, Colorado, Mississippi and Pennsylvania -- and Canada," said Sandra H. Newsom, Office and Information Technology Manager for Pi Kappa Alpha International Fraternity, which is headquartered in Memphis. "The schools represented included DePaul University, Rose-Hulman Institute of Technology, Ohio State University, Winthrop College, Florida International, Colorado State University, Millsaps, Northwestern University, Delta State University, Pennsylvania State University & University of Western Ontario."

"What a great experience it was," Newsom told Marler. "It was a terrific work project and all the Pikes seemed to really enjoy the morning. It was exactly the kind of project that I was looking for. It was great working with you and I look forward to more projects in the future."

"The participants were in Memphis to attend a training event held annually for top chapter officers," said Newsom. "Community service is an important component of the Pike experience and a community service event is held in conjunction with most fraternity events."

The Pi Kappa Alpha Fraternity, founded at the University of Virginia in 1868, has grown to more than 225,000 initiated members, 212 chapters and colonies, and 120 alumni associations according to Newsom. Pi Kappa Alpha annually sponsors educational and leadership development programs attended by more than 2,000 undergraduates and alumni (via the Pike University program), maintains the largest fraternity housing loan program in the world and benefits from the support of its alumni through their tax-deductible support of the organization's affiliated fundraising arm, the Pi Kappa Alpha Educational Foundation, Newsom said.



From left Belt Line resident Eunice Wheeler, Enrichment Center Director Hester Moore, volunteer artist Pam Santirojprapai, and volunteer artist Carrie Peeples work on a mural in the new Enrichment Center at the corner of Midland Ave. and Boston St. in Belt Line.



Longtime Belt Line resident Eunice Wheeler, 76, who once was a tenant in the house that is now home to Belt Line Youth Enrichment Center, places her permanent hand print on the inspirational mural on the main office wall of the center. The mural was created by Pam Santirojprapai and Carrie Peeples.



The new Belt Line Youth Enrichment Center at the corner of Midland Avenue and Boston Street in the Belt Line Community stands ready for its Grand Opening to be held on March 1.

Please join us on Saturday, March 1, from 11 a.m. until 4 p.m. for the Grand Opening of the Belt Line Youth Enrichment Center, 2646 Midland Ave. Share in our fun, food, music and fellowship.

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