

PIPELINE

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Lindsey Baber hopes to work in a Chicago school after student-teaching in a Little Village kindergarten.

'PIPELINE' BRINGS TEACHERS TO LITTLE VILLAGE

By Elizabeth Duffrin

Until this year, Lindsey Baber, an education major from Illinois State University in Normal, had never considered teaching in Chicago. Now there is no place that she would rather begin a career. "It's definitely something I'm pursuing," she says.

Baber is one of 19 seniors from ISU interning at Little Village and North Lawndale schools. The university hopes to equip more of its teaching candidates, who typically come from white, middle-class suburbs, with the skills and desire to work in urban classrooms. Interns are even encouraged to live in Little Village to learn about their students' cultures and the challenges they face.

Three other ISU programs seek to create new teachers from within the neighborhood, including TEACH, a club for students at six Chicago high schools; Chrysalis, which mentors entering ISU freshmen from those same schools; and Grow Your Own, which offers free college courses to 24 adults in Little Village in exchange for a five-year commitment to teach in high-need schools.

The programs are all part of ISU's Chicago Teacher Education Pipeline, a partnership among the university, the Little Village Community Development Corporation (LVCCDC) and Chicago Public Schools. ISU runs the state's largest teacher preparation program, graduating 1,200 to 1,500 education majors annually. But back in 2004, fewer than 30 of its graduates landed jobs each year in Chicago Public Schools, a district that employs nearly 25,000 teachers.

Stereotypes of city schools, based in part on negative media coverage, deter some, says Pipeline director Robert Lee. But many simply seek jobs in familiar places, usually within 50 miles of Normal or their home communities.

Making the big city feel like home is one goal of the Professional Development School Program. Students like Baber enroll in a year-long internship at one of four neighborhood elementary schools—Whitney, McCormick, Castellanos and Corkery. They complete their senior-year courses in a basement classroom at Whitney. An optional month-long summer program, split between Little Village and Michoacan, Mexico, introduces them to Mexican culture, history and immigration issues.

Student teachers find they like urban schools.

During the school year, most rent housing in Little Village through LVCCDC, partially subsidized by State Farm. Baber lives with five ISU roommates in a house across from Cardenas elementary.

Working in Little Village is a stretch at first for many ISU students, Lee acknowledges. "I can't tell you how many on-site visits I hosted with very worried students and parents," he says. But "once they got into the schools and saw that these kids were like many other kids, and that they were safe, a lot of their fears started to dissolve."

Of the 20 student teachers who completed the Little Village program in its first two years, 10 are teaching in Little Village and three elsewhere in Chicago, said Lee. McCormick Elementary has hired three of its interns so far.

"I would have liked to keep all four," says Principal Virginia Rivera. "They knew my school, my kids, the community."

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BANKS PLEDGE \$12 MILLION FOR BRONZEVILLE RETAIL

To jumpstart renovation of commercial buildings in a tight credit market, Quad Communities Development Corporation (QCDC) has carved out a \$12 million pot of loan and grant funds.

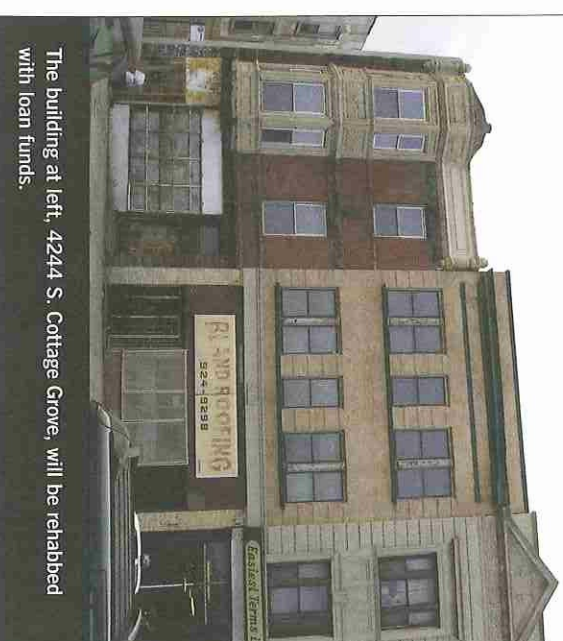
The NCP lead agency negotiated a public-private partnership with ShoreBank, Harris Bank and Citibank to provide low-interest loans to businesses and property owners on Cottage Grove Avenue and intersecting commercial streets.

By bringing new life to the corridor's weathered but attractive buildings, the Cottage Grove Restoration Initiative Fund "will make Bronzeville a destination where more people will want to live and work," said Tony Smith, executive vice president of commercial banking services for ShoreBank.

The fund is part of QCDC's larger commercial initiative, which includes more than \$80 million in planned new construction. "We have pipeline developments that will deliver close to 300 units of residential housing and nearly 75,000 square feet of commercial space to the corridor within the next 24 months," said Bernita Johnson-Gabriel, executive director for QCDC. "Our objective (with the new fund) is to immediately restore existing buildings and provide leasable space to a number of small business owners that have expressed interest."

Borrowers will be eligible for below-market interest rates, flexible repayment schedules and assistance on tenant recruitment. They also can take advantage of branded design elements created by the Little Black Pearl Art & Design Center, whose banners already decorate the street.

The CGRI Fund is offered alongside the City of Chicago's 43rd & Cottage Grove Small Business Improvement Fund, which provides grants up to \$150,000 for storefront rehabs. LISC/Chicago provided \$29,250 and technical assistance. To learn more, call QCDC at 773-268-7232.



The building at left, 4244 S. Cottage Grove, will be rehabbed with loan funds.