



# TRANSFORM MILWAUKEE INSIDER

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## MLK COMMONS IV: ANOTHER TRANSFORM MILWAUKEE SUCCESS

**M**ilwaukee's historic intersection of Martin Luther King Drive and Center Street was all abuzz last October, as hundreds turned out to celebrate the ribbon cutting of King Commons IV. The development features 41 new rent-to-own single family homes,

duplexes, townhouses and historic apartments with outstanding amenities. King Commons IV is the latest phase and is the largest development completed by Martin Luther King Economic Development Corporation.

WHEDA was involved in all four phases of the well-received project in Milwaukee's Harambee neighborhood, allocating \$960,000 in Low-Income Housing Tax Credits to help make the development possible.

Over the 10-year life-span of the credits, that's a \$9.6 million investment in the adaptive-reuse of a highly visible, historic building.

In addition, under WHEDA's Emerging Business Program, 14 area residents were hired to work on the development and over \$3 million contracts were awarded to emerging business firms during construction.

King Drive Commons IV is located within the Transform Milwaukee Initiative area. Wyman Winston, WHEDA's Executive Director complimented the city of Milwaukee at the standing room-only ribbon-cutting.

"The work that the city has done and its focus on this street with various partners, project by project, commons by commons, is transforming this corridor for the people who live here," said Winston. Other partners that collaborated on the project include Wisconsin Redevelopment, Miller Architectural Group, Universal Construction Solutions, National Equity Fund, Impact Seven, community leaders and residents in the Harambee neighborhood.

The project drew praise from Rachel Rhodes, vice president of National Equity Fund (NEF).

"Credit officers get terrified when they hear the words scattered site, urban infill, historic rehab. They hide under their desks because it's been done so badly in such

*King Commons VI, continued on page 3*



# SUCCESSFUL TRANSFORM MILWAUKEE JOBS INITIATIVE MOVES FORWARD

In his most recent budget, Governor Walker approved almost \$10 million for a new **Transform Milwaukee Jobs Initiative** with the goal of helping participants gain the work experience needed to obtain long-term, sustainable employment. Spearheaded by the Department of Children and Families, it will incorporate best practices or “lessons learned” from the original Transitional Jobs pilot program that ended on June 30, 2013.

“What we learned from the Transitional Jobs pilot was that people want to work, and businesses are willing to hire and train people if they are given the right incentives,” said DCF Secretary Eloise Anderson. “Through the Transform Milwaukee Jobs Initiative, we will not only be helping people gain the skills and experience needed to find steady employment; we will be helping to strengthen an entire community.”

The Transform Milwaukee Jobs Initiative benefits the low-income adults who participate in the program by giving them an immediate source of income while they work towards gaining the jobs skills demanded by their local market. In addition, many participants are eligible for a child care subsidy under the Wisconsin shares program. Businesses that agree to hire participants and employ them at least 20

hours per week benefit by being able to expand their workforce and through a wage subsidy of up to 40 hours per week at the minimum wage.

In late 2013, two agencies were chosen to take the lead on providing the services offered in the Transform Milwaukee Jobs Program to assist unemployed parents and low-income workers obtain job training and skill enhancement through subsidized employment. UMOS will concentrate their services on unemployed adults under the age of 24 or who are the parent or primary caregiver of a child under the age of 18 in the Transform Milwaukee Jobs Program service area, while the Milwaukee Area Workforce Investment Board will work with youths between the ages of 18 and 24 who have aged out of the foster care system.

The design of the Transform Milwaukee Jobs Initiative is unique because vendors are given great flexibility in developing their programs. One vendor might choose to offer skills development prior to obtaining an unsubsidized job while another might take a more aggressive approach with immediate job placements. No matter which model is chosen, the intense focus is on people who traditionally have had the most difficult time landing a job; low income adults, non-custodial parents, people re-entering the workforce from a corrections

setting, and teens aging out of the foster care/child welfare system.

In many cases, a transitional job provided to these individuals with barriers to employment will be their first positive work experience and will help them begin to build a work history. The results of the Transitional Jobs pilot program showed that the majority of participants were able to take the skills that they learned in their subsidized job and obtain unsubsidized employment in the private sector, although not necessarily with the same employer. This “on the job training” will provide participants with a stepping stone to future employment. Preliminary evidence demonstrates that this workforce development strategy can help those hardest to place in employment make successful and lasting connections to the workplace.

One of Governor Walker’s goals is to help move people from dependence to independence. Stable employment from transitional jobs helps provide a higher quality of life for working adults. With it comes increased self-sufficiency, a greater ability to care for one’s family, the power to purchase goods and services, and the opportunity to make a more positive contribution to one’s community. Long term, this is a financial boost for low-income families, and the economy as a whole.

## DON'T MISS TRANSFORM MILWAUKEE'S IMPACT VIDEO

The substantial impact of Transform Milwaukee has been captured in a video that dramatically shows the economic revival underway in Wisconsin’s largest city. The video chronicles specific sites



and developments, showcasing the imprint of revitalization Transform Milwaukee has left on the city to date.

Watch blighted homes being rebuilt. See new plans for the Aerotropolis. Imagine the potential for

72 shovel ready acres in the 30th Street Corridor. And so much more. Learn who and what’s behind the initiative’s impact that is shaping a new, exciting Milwaukee.

Visit Transform Milwaukee’s YouTube channel to see the video, [www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4IA\\_BX08yw](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D4IA_BX08yw).



# TM PARTNER SPOTLIGHT:



**GREG MEIER,**  
co-founder,  
*Revolution Labs*

## TM PARTNER PASSIONATE ABOUT ENTREPRENEURS

What's the inspiration behind an entrepreneur? For the co-founder of **Revolution Labs** in Milwaukee, **Greg Meier**, the motivation came from a broom, rewards of candy, and most important, his grandfather.

Meier's grandfather ran away from home during the Depression of the 1930's when he was only 13. He would later open Charlie's Deli in Dayton, Ohio. Meier, a youngster at the time, would sweep the store parking lot knowing he'd be thanked with candy.

Charlie's Deli still operates today with patrons craving corned beef on rye lined down the street. Meier notes he was always in awe of his grandfather who went from being a Depression runaway with no special education to a successful businessman. Not surprisingly, Meier says he's always had an entrepreneurial bug. And it's never left.

A UW-Madison graduate, Meier co-founded the first seed accelerator in Wisconsin. He is also an adjunct faculty member at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, serves as an advisor to numerous early-stage companies and non-profit organizations and frequently speaks about entrepreneurship and

economic development. His work has been supported by the National Science Foundation, U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, NASA, the U.S. Department of Education, the National Institute of Health, Wisconsin Economic Development Corporation, Wisconsin Housing and Economic Development Authority and private investors.

Started in the summer of 2013, Meier's Revolution Labs is an accelerator that utilizes what it believes are the best teaching methods for entrepreneurs to begin a business. In addition to training, the accelerator also supports its clients with experienced mentors, small startup grants and world-class business models.

Entrepreneurs are defined by Meier as a unique, small club that prefers action over inaction. Inherent in their DNA is a pay forward mentality whereby they repay a good deed to others. They are organized and more knowledgeable about how to start a business.

"You want a lot of people like us in your community," said Meier.

He credits WHEDA for its support of Revolution Labs and sees great potential for Transform Milwaukee.

*Greg Meier, continued on page 4*

*King Commons VI, continued from page 1*



From left to right, WHEDA Executive Director Wyman Winston joined Impact Seven President Brett Gerber, MLK-EDC Executive Director Welford Sanders, sculptor Zenos Frudakis and Mayor Tom Barrett in the freedom garden to unveil the Martin Luther King bust.

public ways," she said. "Now I get to say, 'Look, it was done right and it's phenomenal.' A community is changing as a result. You have all these very public failures, but here's a public success. This should be the map for how it should be done — not just in Milwaukee and Wisconsin, but throughout other Midwestern cities."

Winston reminded the audience that while we best remember King for his civil rights work, he also focused on economic development, encouraging a triumphant march to the realization of the American dream.

One of King's goals was to see economic depression dissolved, with people of all colors living side by side in decent, safe, sanitary housing. So he sought conditions in which families can grow and have respect in the community.

A new statue of King sculpted by Zenos Frudakis was unveiled at the ceremony outside in the freedom garden. Throughout the project's community room, there are other reminders of the late activist, photos and quotes printed on the walls including this excerpt from King's 1965 commencement speech to Oberlin College that sums up the King Drive Commons IV project very well:

"The time is always right to do what's right."



# COLLECTIVE IMPACT UPDATE

On January 30, 2014, the Transform Milwaukee Collective Impact Engagement held their third session at UMOS in Milwaukee. Attended by active members of the community, including stakeholders in the health and human services, education, business and workforce development arenas, they met with a common agenda of focusing on economic development. These community partners are active



participants eager to “Transform Milwaukee” and focus on Milwaukee’s assets, particularly its human capital as well as the region’s strong business and manufacturing infrastructures. The session began with opening remarks from WHEDA’s, Executive Director, Wyman Winston, as well as remarks by

Secretaries Reggie Newson of the Wisconsin Department of Workforce Development and Eloise Anderson of the Wisconsin Department of Children and Families.

Additionally, Matt Kures with UW-Extension’s Center for Community and Economic Development led a presentation on the economic landscape in Milwaukee and drove home the mission for which Transform Milwaukee was created. Next, the team from GRAEF who has been engaged by WHEDA to develop and implement a TM strategic plan, discussed how they plan to collaborate with the Collective Impact group regularly in the coming months. Finally, Jerhonda McCray, of Aristocrat Events and Business Solutions led a breakout session. She focused small group discussions on economic development and asked each community partner how their organization might work toward accomplishing the common goal of greater economic development for Milwaukee. The session ended with a nomination process where the individuals were allowed to nominate “Champions” who are seen as leaders in the community and can help drive the group towards their goal.

Greg Meier, continued from page 3

“There’s tremendous entrepreneurial capacity in Milwaukee, a lot of opportunities,” said Meier. “There’s a substantive gap in what we would expect from entrepreneurs in our community. All these ideas and human capital need to find their way out.”

“The idea of bringing together like-minded people should have no expiration date,” said Meier. “This has to be forever in Milwaukee. You absolutely need a Transform Milwaukee to get a revival going.”

WHEDA’s initiative will be successful, says Meier when there’s a collective alignment to support entrepreneurs. His Revolution Labs website says, “We believe central cities in America have tremendous potential to create innovative startups.” Meier contends there’s an obligation to bring resources to innovative entrepreneurs. Some would argue such an investment is too risky. “Not pursuing entrepreneurship in my mind is a far greater risk,” said Meier.

To the always-optimistic Meier, the world of entrepreneurship has had an impact like nothing else in history and is open to everyone.

“No one can ever say you can’t do it.”

## WHEDA COMMITMENT UPDATE

Since Transform Milwaukee was announced, WHEDA has invested \$88 million and leveraged another \$98 million in direct investment, for a total of \$186 million.

**\$88M**  
WHEDA investment

**\$98M**  
in direct investment,  
for a total of \$186M  
to date.

For more information about Transform Milwaukee, please contact:

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