

IUPUI NEWS CENTER

Indianapolis recognizes and celebrates the history of diverse Southside neighborhood

Published: December 7, 2012

INDIANAPOLIS -- A three-year partnership between Indiana University-Purdue University Indianapolis faculty and students in the [Department of Anthropology](#), and African-American and Jewish residents formerly of Indianapolis' Southside neighborhood, will culminate in two important events this month.

At 7 p.m. Monday, Dec. 17, in the Public Assembly Room of the City-County Council Building, District 19 City County Council member Jeff Miller will read a resolution commending the spirit of cooperation that characterized the relationship between the former African-American and Jewish communities of Southside from the early 1900s through the 1960s, when they not only lived side by side in the neighborhood but shared deep bonds of friendship.

From 7 to 10 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 20, former community residents, students and others will gather at the Jewish Community Center, 6701 Hoover Road, to celebrate the release of "The Neighborhood of Saturdays: Memories of a Multi-Ethnic Neighborhood on Indianapolis' Southside." The book recounts the history of Southside as told through the eyes of the African-American and Jewish people who lived in that community.

Using archival research and conducting oral history interviews with community elders, IUPUI [anthropology](#) students working under the direction of Susan B. Hyatt, associate professor of anthropology in the IU [School of Liberal Arts at IUPUI](#), collected and assembled a wealth of material that tells the story of this neighborhood that was once an important gateway to Indianapolis for both European immigrants and migrants from the South, who all came seeking better opportunities for their families.

The book is being published by local publishing house [Dog Ear Publishing](#) and will be available for orders by the end of December on the website.



IUPUI student Lindsay Schaiper and Southside project participant Beatrice Miller

[Print-Quality Photo](#)

Media Contacts

Diane Brown

IU Communications
317-274-2195
habrown@iupui.edu

Susan B. Hyatt

Department of Anthropology
317-373-7774
suhyatt@iupui.edu

IUPUI News Center

251 North Illinois St.
Suite 300
Indianapolis, IN
46204

Web:
<http://newscenter.iupui.edu/>
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The unique nature of this project, and the ways in which it brought together former neighbors who, in some cases, had not seen one another in 50 years, garnered national attention when The New York Times religion correspondent Samuel G. Freedman visited Indianapolis last spring and published a story about the research, "[Christians and Jews Rediscover Interracial Haven](#)," in the April 8 edition of the newspaper.

In addition, working with the IUPUI University Library's Digital Libraries Team, under the direction of Kristi Palmer, students scanned and compiled more than 400 documents and photographs from the old neighborhood. These images are available on the [Program of Digital Scholarship](#) website.

Although the neighborhood has changed since that time, through successive waves of development, upwardly mobile migration and the construction of Interstate 70, the history of Southside represents an important period where, despite the prevalence of racial and religious divisions in other parts of the city, people came together across those boundaries to offer one another support and companionship. The fact that all of the children went to primary school together reinforced those ties. As project participant Beatrice "Miz Pete" Miller said, "We had a community. We didn't look at color; we never did that. We weren't brought up to think of ourselves by those means. We didn't meet strangers. We met people."

The book project was initially funded by a Community Venture Fund Grant from the IUPUI Solution Center, the campus's office for outreach and community engagement. Neighborhood residents then raised additional funds to support the publication through their own fundraising appeal. A diverse coalition of local groups and neighborhood organizations also played key roles in bringing this project to fruition. They include Babe Denny Neighborhood Group, Bethesda Missionary Baptist Church, Concord Neighborhood Center, Etz Chaim Sephardic Congregation, South Calvary Missionary Baptist Church and the Southside Picnic Committee.

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