

THE 'GATE

Quarterly Newsletter Spotighting the Westgate Community

Welcome to the second edition of The Gate - our new Westgate newsletter. Hopefully some of you were able to read our inaugural issue, which came out online back in April. Since then, almost nothing has stayed the same in the world, and the same can be said for the Westgate Community Foundation.

Around the time of our first newsletter, the Omaha Community Foundation awarded our neighborhood a \$5,000 grant, in a partner-initiative with the Westgate Neighborhood Association. The purpose of this funding is for printing this newsletter and distributing to all the households in our neighborhood.

Soon after that it looked like COVID-19 was on its way out, and everyone tried to scramble together as much summer fun as possible. Only to have COVID come back again, and put our school and sports in jeopardy.

If you're like us, you're probably wondering what's next in 2020. We have no idea. And if we did we would be afraid to put it in print. We do know that, thanks to the aforementioned financial support from the Omaha Community Foundation, we're ready to start sending out this newsletter for the Westgate Neighborhood.

What follows is a brief rundown of Westgate news, upcoming events, neighbor spotlights, and anything else we thought folks would want in The Gate. It's only our second swing at it, so it's safe to say we're still figuring things out. If you like what you read, please let us know by visiting westgatecommunityfoundation.org and leaving us a message. If you have suggestions, or for some reason hate the idea of having a neighborhood newsletter, well...we'd like to hear from you too.

I would be remiss if I didn't mention a couple words about the Westgate Community Foundation. We were formed last year, in an effort to bring a more coordinated fundraising effort to Westgate initiatives. Since then we've hosted a pretty great National Night Out, worked with the Neighborhood Association on a couple endeavors, partnered with our neighborhood pool and elementary on some fundraising projects, and turned out this newsletter. We're just getting started, but we're hoping to support all the great aspects of Westgate in the years ahead. We're extremely grateful to the Omaha Community Foundation for helping us get this ball rolling. Anyone interested in seeking our assistance, (or pitching in on our work) is totally welcome.

Brent Koster | Westgate Community Foundation | Board President.

Neighbor Spotlight

THE GERKEN FAMILY

For Westgater's Drew Gerken and his wife Crystal, helping the community just comes naturally. Crystal is a Pre-K teacher at St. Cecilia Cathedral Elementary, and Drew works for the Omaha Fire Department. Or as Drew puts it, "Crystal teaches, and I put out fires. We're in the business of serving our community."

Drew and Crystal have lived in Westgate for 17 years. They moved into the neighborhood in 2003, and relocated to a new Westgate home in 2009. They call Westgate home because they love the friendliness and diversity of the neighborhood.

"People out taking walks, young people and older folks. We love Westgate. We love the pool, and the people we see there. It's centrally located, and it's a friendly place."

Being friendly is important to Drew. So important, in fact, that this full time firefighter, with all the social commitments that comes with a household of five kids, somehow made time to start his own nonprofit for the purpose of providing furniture for families in need.

Drew started The Furniture Project in 2013, and it has grown steadily ever since. Their mission is to not only provide furniture, but also inspire hope to show them that their neighbors care about them. Crystal serves on the board and plays a huge part in making the work of The Furniture Project possible. For the Gerken's, their work is about more than dropping off couches or tables.



"It's not about the furniture. It's about us showing that we care about you, that this community values every member within it."

Drew was recently featured by the show "Returning the Favor" with Mike Rowe that airs on Facebook Watch. As part of the episode, the show purchased additional furniture storage space for The Furniture Project, as well as a new moving truck.

This added capacity has allowed The Furniture Project to partner with many agencies and help more families.

"We're equal opportunity. We'll help anyone in need who reaches out."

We caught up with Drew for this interview while he was in the middle of moving a family on a 95 degree day.

"It's a good day. It may be hot, but it's a great day to move a family into a new home."

If you would like to donate furniture or learn more about this wonderful organization, visit www.the-furnitureproject.org.

Community Developments

MERIDIAN DEVELOPMENT APARTMENT COMPLEX

The Omaha City Council unanimously approved plans for the 277-unit apartment complex proposed by Meridian Development LLC. It would replace the hotel and Shark Club on the northeast corner of Westgate. The hotel and nightclub have been closed for several years and demolition of the buildings is now complete.

The council's action was expected. The City Planning Board also had approved of the project.

Two representatives of the neighborhood spoke at the council meeting. One stressed the importance of reopening access to the property from 72nd Street, as the hotel and nightclub had. The property will have a single entrance and exit, at its northwest corner onto West Center Road, and the 72nd Street entrance will remain closed.

The City Planning Department required the project to have an opening on the southwest corner of the property, via neighborhood streets, for fire department access. Space is available at the corner of Oak Street and 72nd Avenue. It will be opened but secured by a gate that will be operational only by fire department personnel, according to the project's plan.

The City Public Works Department also wanted access for the entire apartment complex from the Oak Street opening, but the neighborhood vehemently opposed that and the developers were able to keep the opening restricted to the fire department.

The second neighborhood representative was the homeowner of an adjoining property, who stressed privacy issues. After the meeting, the developer said that some of the issues likely could be resolved.

Construction could begin this fall. Plans call for a combination of studio, one-bedroom and two-bedroom apartments on four or five levels, with a similar parking garage. www.meridiandevllc.com

NEW Business Spotlight

JJ Guitar Repair has moved into a new space at 8499 Frederick Street adjacent to Westgate! John Jensen, Westgate native, had a location at 60th and Grover and moved to the new location in July. In addition to guitar repairs, the business sells parts and used guitars, amplifiers and other related equipment. The store is open Tuesday-Saturday from 11:00 a.m. until 6:00 p.m. For more information, visit the website at JJGuitarRepair.com.

The popular food truck 402 BBQ is opening a physical location in the site of the former Crane Coffee shop located at 84th and Frederick Avenue. The current plan is to offer take-out only from 11 AM- 4 PM Monday - Saturday.

Started in March of 2014 by Kelly and her husband Todd Partusch, they have won many awards and offer unique hand made sauces.

www.The402BBQ.com

Community Developments

WESTGATE NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

The Westgate Neighborhood Association (WNA) is seeking new members for its Board of Directors! If you are interested, please reach out to Terry Anderson or Stephanie Elrod via Nextdoor or Facebook. The next Westgate Neighborhood Association meeting will be Tuesday, September 15, 2020 at 6:30pm in the parking area behind Westgate Elementary. Topics will focus on keeping our neighborhood clean, safe and beautiful. Speakers will be sharing information about recycling and composting. Bring a chair, mask and questions!

JOIN WESTGATE ON NEXTDOOR

The Nextdoor social media operation is a good way to connect with your neighbors and others who live in or near Westgate. Nextdoor is free, but those who want to become members need to sign up. Go to [Nextdoor.com](https://www.nextdoor.com) for more information. Nextdoor Westgate has more than 1,130 members, including more than half of the households in Westgate. Members also can see what's happening in several dozen other nearby Nextdoor groups.

WHERE TO FIND US

Please visit our website and sign-up for free electronic delivery of our newsletters and latest information on news and events!

EMAIL

westgatecommunityfoundation@gmail.com

FACEBOOK - FIND AND FOLLOW US

[Westgate Community Foundation](https://www.facebook.com/Westgate-Community-Foundation)

PHONE

402.739.5352

ONLINE

www.westgatecommunityfoundation.org

NEWS & EVENTS

SEPT 12 ST. JOAN OF ARC SAUSAGEFEST

St. Joan of Arc Men's Club has hosted their annual SausageFest the first Saturday after Labor Day for over 50 years. Due to COVID-19, this year's event will be drive-thru only (no walk-ups). Details are posted on the St. Joan of Arc Facebook page. If you have any questions, please call Kevin at 402-990-4759.

CANCELED NATIONAL NIGHT OUT

Unfortunately National Night Out which was scheduled for October 6th has been canceled. This has been a slowly growing event in Westgate that brings our community together. Our hope is to celebrate in 2021 at a central location further unifying our neighborhood. More details to follow next year.
www.natw.org