

# Vision, perseverance and elbow grease work wonders at Cleveland's Gordon Square -- editorial

By [The Plain Dealer Editorial Board](#)  
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This should be an important and joyous week for the residents of Cleveland's Detroit-Shoreway neighborhood -- especially those who live in what is becoming known as the Gordon Square Arts District. There, a dedicated team is pioneering ways to use the arts to spur economic development and attract residents that could become a national model, especially in the innovative collaborations to make it happen.

And anyone who cares about the city's future, understands its pivotal importance to the region's economic health and appreciates the marriage of vision and old-fashioned hard work ought to be joining in the applause for Gordon Square's rebirth as a hip and happening place -- with more arts development to come.

The celebration began Saturday with a ribbon-cutting for streetscape improvements -- trees, wider sidewalks and specially designed benches, pavers and lights -- along Detroit Avenue between West 58th and West 73rd streets.

This Thursday, a red-carpet gala will showcase the stunning restoration of the 87-year-old Capitol Theatre, just north of Detroit on West 65th Street; its three screens open to the public Friday.

Just east on Detroit, renovation of the Cleveland Public Theatre complex, which includes the city's oldest professional stage, is under way. Just west, pre-development work is proceeding on the future home of Near West Theatre, for 32 years a community treasure.

Total price: \$30 million. And that just scratches the surface. Since 2006, when plans for the arts district were unveiled, more than two dozen restaurants, art galleries and other boutiques have opened in the Gordon Square area. Market-rate and subsidized housing has been built -- and sold, even in these tough times -- on the promise of easy access to Lake Erie, downtown and the arts district. In all, it is a prototype for urban vibrancy.

It is also an amazing comeback for an old, industrial neighborhood that long appeared -- to outsiders, anyway -- headed inexorably downhill. But like any urban community that defies the odds, Detroit-Shoreway was blessed with residents who never stopped believing.

Thirty years ago, when the Gordon Square Arcade literally began to crumble, the easy solution would have been to raze it, along with the adjacent Capitol Theatre. But two pillars of the community -- the Rev. Marino Frascati, then pastor of Our Lady of Mount Carmel, and Ray Pianka, then head of Detroit-Shoreway Community Development Corp. and now a Cleveland Housing Court judge -- had a better idea: They bought the dilapidated landmarks and set in motion the area's long climb back.

The climb has been neither easy nor straight up; redevelopment rarely is. Just three years ago, a wave of homicides had doubters saying, "I told you so." But community leaders and the nonprofits collaborating on the arts district refused to quit.

Even now, the project remains a work in progress. After this week's big party, they'll simply roll up their sleeves again.

But if you're looking for a reason to believe in Cleveland, make a trek to Detroit-Shoreway. Take a stroll. See a show. Eat some great food. See what smart, persistent public-private partnership -- and a lot of faith -- can do.