

Omaha Community Leaders Reflect on City's Past, Look Toward Safer, More Unified Future

OMAHA, NEBRASKA, USA, July 23, 2024 /EINPresswire.com/ -- The North Omaha many remember from the 1990s paints a starkly different picture than the North Omaha many know today. Gen-Xers likely recall that the era was heavily influenced by gang activity, drug trafficking and other poverty-related ills Today, the city has a more optimistic story to tell.

In the '60s and '70s, North Omaha was once a thriving location for Black business, politics and community, with areas like North 24th Street buzzing with arts, media and culture. As the birthplace of activist and community leader Malcolm X, Omaha was home to a community of upwardly mobile Black professionals. Despite its cultural vibrancy, the city was not immune to the racial tensions plaguing the nation. What once was an economic powerhouse was stripped down and forever changed due to segregation and racial prejudice. As a result of overall neglect, poverty in Omaha increased and with that came more crime. Economic growth came to a halt and the once bustling area became a ghost town.

“There was a lot of entrepreneurial commercial activity up and down 24 Street,” said Mike Maroney, president, Omaha Economic Development Corporation. “There were a lot of black owned businesses. It was just one thriving community.”

Omaha has been shaped by the contributions and struggles of its Black residents. Throughout the civil rights era, Omaha's Black residents demonstrated resilience and determination in the face of adversity. Their activism contributed to significant strides in desegregation, voting rights, and access to education and employment opportunities. In the decades since the civil rights movement, Omaha has undergone profound changes, grappling with economic shifts, urban development and persistent inequalities. While progress has been made, disparities in areas such as housing, healthcare, and criminal justice continue to affect Black communities



Omaha Police Chief Todd Schmaderer shared insightful information during the Empowerment Network's State of North Omaha & State of African-Americans Summit 2024.



Strides towards keeping our city safe have been made, but the work isn't over. Through collaborative alliances, we'll continue to partner with organizations committed to keeping North Omaha safe."

Willie Barney, CEO of the Empowerment Network

disproportionately.

"The Omaha Police Department is a diverse group of men and women who strive to keep Omaha safe," stated Todd Schmaderer, Omaha chief of police. "We believe there is a shared responsibility between the community and the police department to work together to reduce crime and improve quality of life in our city ."

Through improved police-community relations supported by the synergy of community partnership led by Empowerment Network, Omaha is well on its way towards writing a new narrative that vastly differs from the story of

its past.

Between 2011-2022, the city has seen a 30 percent decrease in homicides. In addition, the number of reported shooting victims in Omaha decreased by 51 percent from 2009 to 2022. Citywide shooting incidents involving an individual or group also dropped 53 percent from 2009 to 2022.

Omaha's Black residents continue to enrich the city's cultural tapestry and drive positive change. From entrepreneurs and educators to artists and activists, the participants of the Black community remains integral to the city's identity and vitality.

Through its innovative initiatives and collaborative efforts, community staples like the Empowerment Network, a grassroots organization dedicated to empowering residents and improving the quality of life for African Americans in the city since 2016, have made significant strides in reducing crime, enhancing community engagement and fostering economic development.

"There have been significant strides made in reducing crime in our city," said Willie Barney, CEO and founder, Empowerment Network. "However, the work isn't over. Through collaborative engagement and alliances, we'll continue to partner with organizations committed to uplifting North Omaha and keeping our community safe."

In May 2023, MBK Omaha, which is led by the Empowerment Network, was recognized by the My Brother's Keeper Alliance as an MBK Model Community. Each MBK Model Community represents a tangible example of the systems-level impact that communities can have when working to achieve the [MBK Milestones](#). The MBK Milestones are six key life milestones that research shows are especially predictive of later success, and where interventions can have the greatest impact. Omaha was chosen because of their demonstrated impact in MBK Milestone Six: Remaining Safe from Violent Crime.

Through Empowerment Network programs like Step-Up Omaha, Omaha 360 and Omaha Youth 360, the organization places Omaha youth and young adults ages 14 to 21, in mutually beneficial paid summer and year round jobs and work experience opportunities. Having access to jobs and exposure to new career paths decreases the opportunity to commit crime and enter into poverty, said Jonathan Chapman, who currently leads the summer program.

“Step Up Omaha is lighting the way for our youth, giving them the tools for success in today's world,” Chapman said. “Every summer, we're not just teaching skills – we're building leaders, responsible citizens and future entrepreneurs. Our synergy with the MBK Alliance's goals is clear: empower, uplift, and inspire our Black, Latine and Indigenous Boys and Young Men of Color. It's more than a job program; it's the groundwork for a lifetime of achievement.”

As Omaha continues its journey of transformation and renewal, support and commitment from Omaha Police Department and community organizations like Urban League of Nebraska, Boys & Girls Club of Omaha, Omaha Economic Development Corporation, Family Housing Advisory Services, Charles Drew Health Care Center and the NAACP (to name a few), remains instrumental, said Barney. The support also serves as a poignant reminder of the enduring legacy of resilience, strength and hope that continues to live and breathe in the community of North Omaha. To learn more about the Empowerment Network, visit <https://empoweromaha.com/>.

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