

L9WHA

Lower 9th Ward
Homeownership
Association



*As we preserve and protect our beloved, historic community,
we are committed to the **WHOLE** of the Lower 9th Ward homeowner.*

The Whole 9

A Homestead Exemption for Ms. Rosemary, food for Mr. Banks, Ms. Vanessa's yard, Ms. Bobbie's roof—this is what we mean when we say The Whole 9. We mean that all of our neighbors have what they need to be safe in their homes, to be comfortable in their homes, and know they'll be able to stay in their homes.

As we celebrate our 15th anniversary in 2021, The Whole 9 is new, but old. We are building on what we've been doing the whole time. It's the **Relationships** we've built, the **Partnerships** we've developed through all these years, that allow us to meet the needs of The Whole 9 now.

The Banks Family

Even before Gaynell Banks Brady became our Executive Director, her family exemplified The Whole 9. Through our **Outreach**, Florence Banks, Gaynell's mother, found out about the **Services** we were providing with real property assessments. Not only did she quickly obtain an age freeze for herself—she began telling her neighbors about our work.

Her husband, Charles Banks, soon followed suit. Through us, he learned about meal distributions at the church where our office is. It meant that, after taking his wife to dialysis, he didn't have to go to the grocery store and risk bringing COVID into their home. As a lifelong L9 resident, he knew who else needed this help and before long he was picking up meals twice a week—good healthy meals made by local restaurants—and delivering them to his elderly neighbors.



Mr. Banks on his way back from picking up the weekly food distribution offerings in the L9.

The Whole 9 is about listening. It's community members knowing what their neighbors need. It's our staff paying attention to what may be unspoken—is there something else we can help you with? Then it spreads out from there, as the people we touch become ambassadors for our work.

COVID-19 Response



Cars lined up for Covid Relief Food Distribution—that's Mr. Banks's truck at the front of the line.

When COVID-19 hit, our outreach team immediately began making calls to find out what residents needed. Over and over they heard—food. As a result, along with many partners, including Councilwoman Cyndi Nguyen, we helped establish the meals program that has meant so much to Mr. Banks. New Philippians MBC, many L9 volunteers, and Jose Andres's World Central Kitchen now provide hundreds of meals, twice a week. Our job is to make sure everyone who needs it knows about it.

So we turned our attention next to distributing information, in every way safely possible, on COVID-19 resources—including food, testing, unemployment benefits, small business loans, mortgage forbearance—and helping community members apply. In the process, we discovered that the only way to request stimulus checks was by going online. But 20% of New Orleanians don't have internet access—many of them the very people who wouldn't receive a check automatically. We therefore raised the alarm at a national level, bringing media attention to an issue with impacts far beyond the L9.

As we look to 2021, we will continue this work, with a particular focus on homeowners who are unable to make their mortgage payments.

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Partnership

One of the greatest strengths of The Whole 9 is that the L9WHA is **not doing it alone!** Over the past 14 years not only have we reached out into our neighborhood, built relationships with homeowners and provided them vital home preservation services, we have also built invaluable bonds with other organizations as well. Organizations like **lowernine.org**, which focuses on building homes for L9 residents still fighting to return from Katrina, the **Lower 9th Ward Neighborhood Association**, which advertises resources to make them accessible to all L9 community members, and so many more—including the **Urban Conservancy**. The Urban Conservancy *leads and collaborates to strengthen urban environments and local economies through equitable practices, policies and programs*. And this is exactly who Ms. Vanessa needed!



Ms. Vanessa's yard, after a cold front.

Ms. Vanessa

Cynthia Guillemet, our Community Engagement and Client Services Specialist, first learned of Vanessa Gueringer's situation during her routine block canvassing and neighborhood phone calls. Ms. Vanessa let her know that every time a heavy storm passes through the Lower 9th Ward, her front and back yards fill with water - she is unable to even get to her car. After a bit more conversation, Cynthia and our executive director Gaynell knew **Ms. Vanessa's yard would be the perfect project for The Whole 9.**

The L9WHA team reached out to the Urban Conservancy, which works alongside many other organizations to reduce flooding caused by rainfall and land subsidence. They came out to tour Ms. Vanessa's yard and when they shared their ideas we instantly saw Ms. Vanessa's face turn from stress to—this is the help I need! Her yard will become a safe and enjoyable space again.

In the meantime, Ms. Vanessa—who can tell you the family history of everyone on her block—will be telling them about the help we offer and letting us know about their needs.

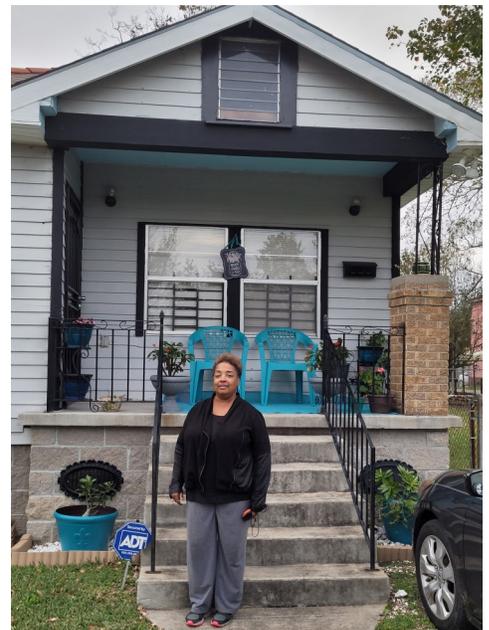


Community Partners

- **Bonin Law Firm** - we are connecting local residents with attorneys who have stepped forward to do estate and title work for homeowners free of charge.
- **L9 Housing Table** - we chair this group of L9 leaders that's addressing the housing needs of our neighborhood in a holistic way.
- **Assessor's Working Group** - we are active participants in this city-wide coalition that's challenging policies that harm low-income neighborhoods.
- **Lucas Construction** - we have partnered with this local builder on quality construction of new homes.

Ms. Linda

Ms. Linda Carter's dad lived in his home on Reynes St. for years, but had to evacuate for Hurricane Katrina. Though he has passed away, Ms. Linda still wants to rebuild. Before she can do so, she needs to file a succession. She contacted Ms. Cynthia for help, who scheduled an appointment for her when the Bonin Law Firm held a clinic in the neighborhood. Because of our partnership with the firm, Ms. Linda is now working with an attorney pro bono to settle her father's estate so she can rebuild his home.



Ms. Vanessa in front of her home, which her uncles built for her mom

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Outreach

During the Pandemic, what we've heard over and over again is: **we miss being together!** We miss eating, we miss talking, we miss communing together, we miss gathering around the Table. And as it is for many of you, in the L9W this type of connection is vital. Not only is this the historic strength of our community, but now more than ever we need each other.

So we have spent these months trying to figure out the best way to get out and reach out to those hardest hit by this isolation. It's not just about the information we share. It's not just about bridging the digital divide that separates many of them from the services they need. **It's about the human connection**, the voice on the phone checking on you, the smile when Ms. Cynthia brings you a mask.

It's been a learning process! We've tried phone calls, personal letters, postcards, Facebook, online newsletters, community meetings on Zoom, and distributing information through churches, at the polls, and at food distribution and testing centers. We've found that no one method is good for everyone. But all of them combined are keeping our community together.



Ms. Rosemary's block — and the street where our Executive Director grew up and played.

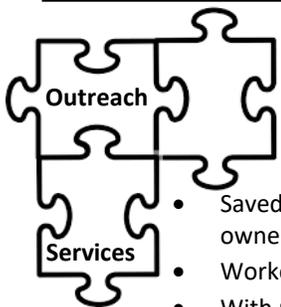
Ms. Rosemary

The youngest of 13 children, Ms. Rosemary inherited her home from her mother and, as Hurricane Katrina approached, she didn't want to leave. Instead, she was praying the rosary at her church when her daughter tapped her on the shoulder. "You can go free-willingly or you can go hog-tied," Theodora told her.

Though Ms. Rosemary's son stayed behind to protect the house on Lamanche St., in the end it was beyond saving. But Ms. Rosemary was committed to rebuilding her mother's home and she relied on Ms. Hilda's wisdom to do it. Looking back on the process with M.A., Ms. Rosemary said "my mother always told me, 'you have to have the patience of Job.'" And that she did.

We have worked with Ms. Rosemary since 2014. It took 5 years to prove she was eligible for additional Road Home rebuilding funds and to work with a contractor to complete construction, but in early 2019 Ms. Rosemary moved home. Since then, in accordance with our Whole 9 approach, we've continued to provide services to her, including making sure she has homeowners and flood insurance, providing documents to Road Home to remove their lien on her property, lining up title work so she could get a Homestead Exemption, reducing her tax assessment, and qualifying her for an Age Freeze. As a result, her taxes have been reduced by \$1000/year for the rest of her life. She is now safe in her home and knows she'll be able to stay there.

When Gaynell joined our staff and learned of all we've done for Ms. Rosemary, she was delighted. "She's family," she said—and it wasn't just figurative. Ms. Rosemary married a cousin of Gaynell's, on her father's side, and the families have been close for years. **It's another example of The Whole 9, where helping someone be secure in their home also embraces them in deep and lasting family relationships.**



In addition to our services related to COVID-19, this year we intensified our focus on real property taxes, which are frequently inflated in our neighborhood. With money scarce and a home more important than ever, L9 homeowners can ill afford to pay more than their fair share. As a result, in 2020 we:

- Saved 12 homes, like Ms. Rosemary's, from being over-taxed and possibly lost, at the same time relieving their owners of a source deep stress and anxiety
- Worked with the Assessor's Office to make sure they provided access for homeowners during the pandemic
- With partners from across the city, challenged the Assessor's decision to slash assessments for large hotels due to COVID-19 while providing no such relief to homeowners and small landlords

In 2021 we will expand this work beyond the Assessor's office to focus on the tax collection and tax sale process, which also disproportionately harms our neighborhood.

Our Services

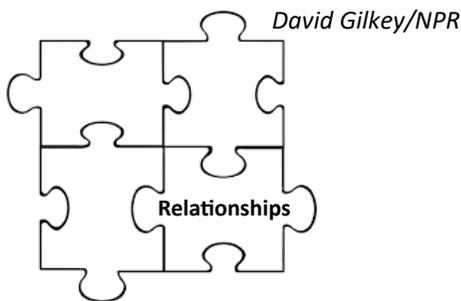
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Building Relationships

One of the hallmarks of the Lower 9th Ward Homeownership Association is the long-term relationships we have with our clients. **They know that, as a grassroots, neighborhood-based organization, we exist to make sure that, if new problems arise with their homes, we are here to help.** It is in that vein that we have continued our valued relationship with Ms. Bobbie Banks, who inspires us as much as we assist her.



Ms. Bobbie collects the mail in front of the home she fought to rebuild after it was destroyed during Katrina.



Ms. Bobbie

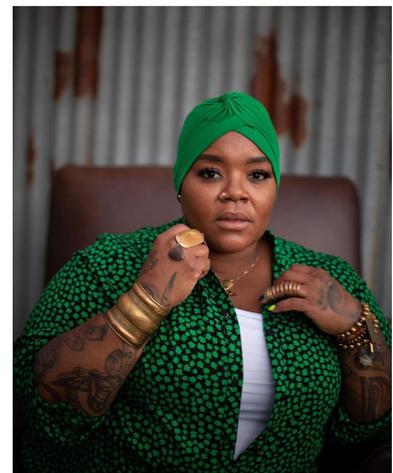
In a recent newsletter, we shared the story of Bobbie Banks, who **truly exemplifies the heart of the Lower 9th Ward.** Since 2014, we have worked alongside Ms. Bobbie to preserve the home where she raised her family. When we called to check in with her recently, she told us that her home had suffered damage during Hurricane Zeta, the most recent storm to hit New Orleans. Her roof and her sheetrock needed to be repaired.

Because of the relationship that had been built over the years, Ms. Cynthia's outreach, and the partnerships we have built in the neighborhood, we were immediately able to reach out to lowernine.org, which has been helping homeowners rebuild since shortly after Hurricane Katrina. They are in the process of evaluating the work that's needed on Ms. Bobbie's home.

While the core mission of the L9WHA has always been preserving and promoting homeownership, we also recognize that in order for the neighborhood to be filled with homeowners again, it must be a vibrant place where people want to set down their roots. It's people like Ms. Bobbie that are making that happen. Despite contractor fraud, toxic drywall, issues with her assessment, and now storm damage to her roof, she continues to stay strong and stay connected.

Ms. Tonya

Tonya Boyd-Cannon and her husband John embody the relationships that are central to The Whole 9. They worked with us to receive the rebuilding grants they were entitled to, then brought in L9 natives Lawrence and Claudette Lucas to handle the construction. Since then, they seem to be everywhere in our community! Soon after they moved home, Tonya joined our Board. Now, with the loss of Linda Jackson, she has become the President. With the support of her husband, she is working closely with Gaynell to plan for the future of our organization and our community, leading the charge for other families to receive the services they need.



15th Anniversary

As we close out 2020 and look toward the new year, we are excited to be kicking off The Whole 9 initiative to celebrate our 15th Anniversary. What an incredible way to honor the legacy of our founder, Linda Jackson, by doing exactly as she would have done: getting out into the community, building relationships with our neighbors, and helping not only with homeownership preservation and creation, but the true revitalization of the historic L9!

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Our Team

The Lower 9th Ward Homeownership Association is directed by an active and diverse Board, with a balance between residents of the L9W, making up a majority, and community partners with strategic expertise in fundraising, community development and nonprofit management.

Our staff and board are the heartbeat of the **Whole 9** initiative. Each member plays a strategic role in serving every L9 homeowner to the best of their unique ability. From designing outreach campaigns, to raising funds to supply services, to creating relationships with vital community partners, the L9WHA team bands together to make the **Whole 9** initiative a reality.

Board

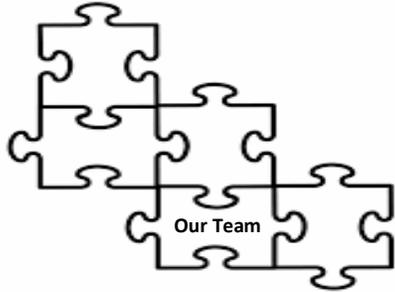
Tonya Boyd Cannon, President
Educator at KIPP McDonogh
15 School for Creative Arts
Professional Singer

Betty Bell
Department of Children and
Family Services (retired)

Tegan Jones, Secretary
Freelance writer/editor
Social media expert

Steve Marshall
Assistant Director at the U.S.
Forest Service

Charles Stern Jr, Treasurer
Partner at Steeg Law Firm



*Our new Executive Director Gaynell Brady - a long-time L9 resident - is the mastermind behind the **Whole 9 initiative**. She recognizes the benefit of not only serving the whole homeowner, but also the multiplication of impact when a variety of people and organizations come together to make a difference in a community. We are so fortunate to have her leading our team.*

Staff

Gaynell Brady
Executive Director

M.A. Sheehan
Housing Director

Margaret Braun
Housing Advocate/Paralegal

Galethea Baham
Outreach Specialist

Cynthia Guillemet
Community Engagement and
Client Services Specialist

Carol Davis
Faith-based Outreach Specialist

Sarah Bruzzi
Development Coordinator/
Outreach Specialist

Tashal Williams
Administrative Coordinator



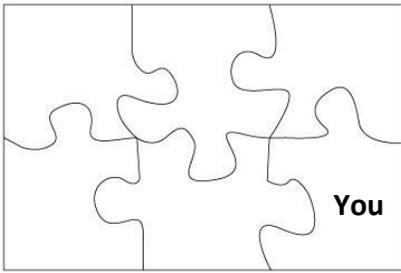
Sarah made these cards to celebrate what's special about the L9.

Krewe of House the 9

As we seek to serve **the Whole 9**, we celebrate YOU, our partners. We therefore have created a community of sustaining donors called, in true New Orleans fashion, the Krewe of House the 9, and **we invite you to join the Krewe!** Simply go to our website at L9WHA.org/Donate and give at least \$10/month. For more information, please call us at 504-943-6000. **As a member of the Krewe, you will be one of our most important supporters—making it possible for each resident of the L9 to be connected to all the resources they need.**

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Vital Partnerships



The Whole 9 Initiative is all about partnership - partnering homeowners with resources. **And it is because of you and your partnership that this initiative is even possible.** Each of you are a part of this program, playing your own unique role, and we couldn't do it without you. So, THANK YOU! Thank you for stepping in making the Whole 9 Initiative a reality! *And to quote Ms. Rosemary: "God bless you and love you, love you, love you."*

2019 Krewe of House the 9 - Sustaining Donors

2019 Grants

- | | |
|----------------------------|-------------------------------|
| Abby Arnold | Jim Emlet |
| Alex Wilson | Jim C. Hogan & Judy Smith |
| Anita Lee & Jim Armstrong | Joyce and Dave Thomas |
| Anne Moore | Julie Lafargue |
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| Carolynn Fowler-Smith | Laurie Egger |
| Chuck Stern | M.A. Sheehan |
| Ellen Taylor | Marge Anderson |
| Gigi Sohn | Mark Clark & Victor Branham |
| Grace Hall | Margaret McCaleb |
| Jamie Little | Mary Taylor & Jen Kirby |
| Jane McCord | |

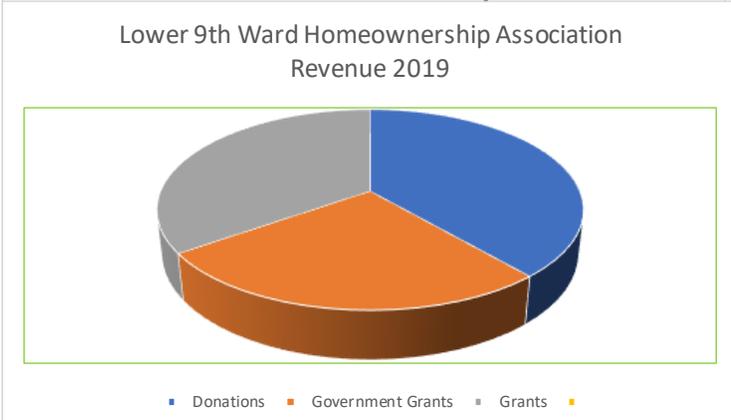
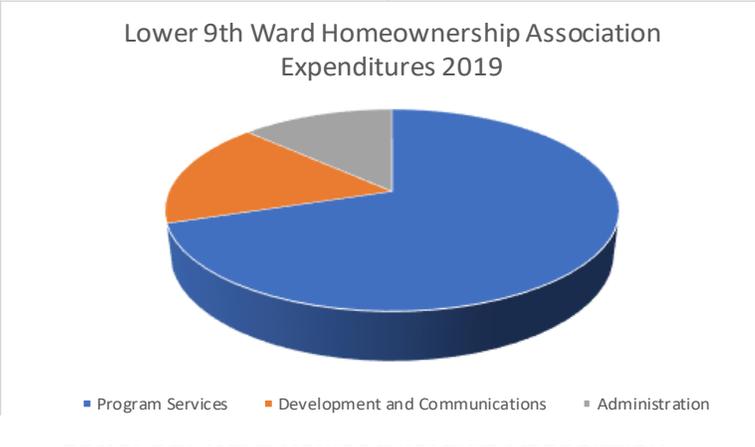
- Meredith Higgins-Hargrave
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 Rhonda Cook & Amy Carroll
 Robert Giannasi
 Roberta Gratz
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 Sharon Swindell
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- Ben & Jerry's Foundation
 HUD Sec. 4 Capacity-Building Grant through Enterprise Community Partners
 Pew Matching Grant
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2019 Individual Donors

- | | |
|---------------------------------|------------------------------|
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| Barbara Helmick | John Koerferl & Vicki Judice |
| Candace Gingrich | Julia Rampone |
| Christina O'Grady | Kari Rowe |
| Tina O'Grady & Phillip Williams | Kathleen McKinney |
| Christiane Geisler | Laura Tuggle |
| Cindy Geisler | Lawrence & Claudette Lucas |
| Cynthia Guillemet | Lynn Frank |
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| Daniel R. Sheehan | MaryBeth Aldrich |
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| Jill Fleming | |



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