



WHY I'M HOPEFUL ABOUT DETROIT IN 2009

Faith, determination, courage – and working together -- can lift our city

“...., it is ultimately the faith and determination of the American people upon which this nation relies. It is the kindness to take in a stranger when the levees break, the selflessness of workers who would rather cut their hours than see a friend lose their job which sees us through our darkest hours. It is the firefighter's courage to storm a stairway filled with smoke, but also a parent's willingness to nurture a child, that finally decides our fate.”—President Barack Obama.

By Luther Keith
Executive Director, ARISE Detroit!

Even before newly inaugurated President Barack Obama issued his call for a new era of “personal responsibility,” and urged all Americans to become involved in efforts to improve their communities, thousands of Detroiters and hundreds of organizations were already embarked on a mission of transformation.

Now, hopefully, more people who have been sitting on the sidelines will join hands with their neighbors in churches, community groups, block clubs and social organizations and dedicate themselves to “Be Part of The Change.”

This is not about politics; it's about people, creating a better America – and for those of us who live here – creating a better Detroit.

That's why I am so hopeful about Detroit's future in 2009, despite the many daunting challenges we face.

I'm hopeful because of people like **Agnes Reed**, who didn't know anything about ARISE Detroit! until she heard one of our promotional spots playing on recently on a local radio station.

“I liked what I heard because it was about making our neighborhoods better,” said Reed, who is president of the Lenox Block Club on the far east side of Detroit in the Jefferson Conner area. Reed phoned the offices of ARISE Detroit! and I was lucky enough to answer her call. She is a refreshing reminder that that despite a bad economy, crime, high unemployment and schools that need a makeover, there are thousands of Detroiters like Reed who are not just committed to staying the course – they want to chart a new and better course for the city they love.

Reed is active in a wide number of community efforts and wants to see a cleaner, safer community. She's would welcome volunteers to help with clean up of blighted neighborhood eyesores. "We all need to be doing something," she said. Amen! Reed promises to spread the word about ARISE Detroit! And we are going spread the word about her and the Lenox Block Club!

I'm hopeful because I know there are many people like Reed, often unsung and behind the headlines, who are part of a growing "Transformation Community" in Detroit, hundreds of organizations and thousands of individuals working in ways large and small to create a better Detroit.

I'm hopeful because of the passion of people like **Tiffany Tilley** of the MANNIE Project, **Fred Hart** of Brothers Against Guns, **Weusi Olusola** of Pioneers For Peace (now battling cancer) and **Lynda White** of the Arc of Nonviolence all of whom have turned personal tragedies into organized efforts to reduce crime and violence in Detroit.

I'm hopeful because of the commitment of **Amy Good**, who 20 years ago grew tired of seeing teenage girls sell their bodies on the streets of southwest Detroit and pulled some friends together to form Alternative For Girls to offer housing and educational opportunities.

I'm hopeful because of the dedication of **Jeron Campbell**, a young Ford Motor Co. engineer, who started the Aces program, to help Detroit students boost their college entrance scores, and **Mark Mayberry**, a former educator, who started Exam Experts for the same reason.

I'm hopeful because even with all the problems with Detroit public schools, there are many people like **Sharlonda Buckman** and **Minnie Davis** of the Detroit Parent Network, **Charlie Anderson**, **Alan Dozier** and **Pandora Brown** of Communities in Schools of Detroit and **Penny Bailer** of City Year Detroit who refuse give up on our children and continue to use their resources and volunteers to point our youngsters toward a brighter future.

I'm hopeful because of **Terrance Collier** of The Rapping Mentor and the Good Boys, who with his sons gives positive message rap performances.

I'm hopeful because of **David Sawicki** and his wife **Lisa Lapidis** of Youth Under Construction and **Rae Glover** and **Susan Storey** – a Cody High School teacher - of the Better Detroit Youth Movement, who use entertainment, music and dance to promote self esteem and educational achievement with our young people.

I'm hopeful because of **Rick Sperling**, who founded the Mosaic Youth Theatre of Detroit, to use the performing arts to teach young people not just to sing and dance, but also to become better people.

I'm hopeful because of **Nat Pernick**, a suburbanite who has launched the Detroit College of Promise – with Cody High as the first school – to guarantee college scholarships for city public school graduates, and **Leslie Andrews** –a Detroiter -- who is making higher education available for city youngsters through the United Negro College Fund.

I'm hopeful because of the unflagging efforts to revive neighborhoods on the east side of Detroit by **Toni McIlwain** of the Ravendale Community, **Mike Fisher** of the Detroit Community Initiative and **Shirley Burch** of Community United for Progress.

I'm hopeful because their efforts are matched on the west side of town by **Olivia Shakoor** of the Crary St. Mary's Community Council, **John George** of the Motor City Blight Busters, **Mary Banks** of the Brightmoor Alliance and **Kim Tandy** of the University Commons Organization.

I'm hopeful because of **Carol Shoch**, a former music teacher, who started the Detroit Children's Choir to bring the joy of choral singing to Detroit students.

I'm hopeful because of **Terry Blackhawk** and **Nandi Comer** of the Inside Out Literary Arts Project, which has brought the love poetry to city schools.

I'm hopeful because of **Paul Miles**, a talented local blues musician who has used his skills to raise money for ARISE Detroit! and other local non-profits and produced a song called Motown Still Our Town to boost the spirits of Detroiters.

I'm hopeful for these and countless other reasons.

I'm hopeful because I believe in Detroit. I believe in you.

--Funded by the Skillman Foundation, ARISE Detroit! is a coalition of more than 400 community groups, block clubs, churches, businesses and media outlets promoting volunteerism, community activism, and positive media images to create a better Detroit. Learn more at www.arisedetroit.org or phone, 313-921-1955.