

Anchor Institutions Join to Restore Economic Vitality, Improve Quality of Life in Hartford's Southside Neighborhoods

For more than 35 years, the Southside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance (SINA) has played a critical role in revitalizing Hartford's Southside. Originally consisting of Hartford Hospital and Trinity College and later joined by Connecticut Children's Medical Center, SINA has served as an essential link between these anchor institutions and the neighborhood organizations and residents in a 15-block area adjacent to Hartford's downtown. Although the alliance's activities and priorities have evolved over time, its commitment to holistic community development in the three low-income neighborhoods surrounding the anchors — Frog Hollow, Barry Square, and South Green — has not **wavered**.

SINA's major efforts have addressed housing, economic development, public safety, and leadership development. In undertaking these activities, SINA has served in many roles, including as a convener of community partners, affordable housing developer, advocate for community interests, and grant and scholarship provider to organizations and individuals in the neighborhoods it serves. The benefits of SINA's work have accrued not only to the residents of these Southside communities but also to the three institutions **themselves**.

The Beginnings of an Association

Recognizing that their own vitality depends on the health and prosperity of the adjacent neighborhoods, the major Southside anchors incorporated as SINA in 1978 to address eroding social and economic conditions that in large part resulted from a decline in the area's manufacturing base. In its early work, the alliance collaborated with other community organizations to create a neighborhood newspaper, the *Southside Neighborhood News*, and to found the Spanish American Merchants Association (SAMA), a coalition of Hartford's Hispanic business owners. With SINA's convening assistance, SAMA would later complete a mile-long streetscape improvement project along Park Street, Southside's primary commercial corridor. Another important early SINA activity was funding a development study that would serve as the foundation for the Learning Corridor, an education-focused campus built in 2000 between Trinity College and the two **hospitals**.

The Learning Corridor consists of four magnet schools, a theater, a family resource center, a Boys & Girls Club of America chapter, and recreational facilities, including a swimming pool, playground, and skating rink. The Learning Corridor was an ambitious revitalization project planned by SINA and the community to reverse neighborhood distress brought on by the national economic downturn of the early 1990s. The SINA members contributed \$10 million toward the project and helped raise an additional \$104 million from other sources (table 1). For SINA, the

Learning Corridor was the centerpiece of a comprehensive strategy introduced in 1996 to help revitalize the physical condition of the surrounding **neighborhoods**.

Table 1: Financing for the Learning Corridor

Trinity College	\$5,000,000
Hartford Hospital	1,666,667
The Institute of Living	1,666,667
Connecticut Children's Medical Center	1,666,666
State Department of Education, City of Hartford	94,403,339
State Department of Public Works	9,170,175
State Department of Environmental Protection	475,954
Total	\$114,049,468

Housing

Before the Learning Corridor project, SINA principally contributed to housing development by supporting the Broad-Park Development Corporation, an affordable housing developer working in Southside neighborhoods. SINA's own housing development work began in 1990 with the rehabilitation of 42 Vernon Street, a nine-unit apartment building. After a hiatus in housing activity while the Learning Corridor was being developed, the alliance undertook its second rental project, Cityscape Apartments, in 2004. The project rehabilitated 74 units in 12 buildings in the Frog Hollow neighborhood. In total, SINA has rehabilitated 83 rental units for low-income **families**.

After completing Cityscape Apartments, SINA ceased developing rental housing to focus on creating homeownership opportunities. According to Melvyn Colón, SINA's executive director, this shift attempted to address the Southside neighborhoods' high poverty rate and low rate of homeownership — 51 percent and 16 percent, respectively, according to the 2010 U.S. Census. Any strategy to improve the income mix and homeownership opportunities in these neighborhoods, says Colón, comes with the significant challenge of avoiding **gentrification**.

Although gentrification is not yet evident, SINA is implementing a proactive antigentrification strategy that offers rental and homeownership opportunities to low-income households. The alliance has had some success in improving the income mix in the neighborhoods through its homeownership initiative, Cityscape Homes, which centers on both the

renovation and new construction of one- and two-family houses. These homes are sold to low- and moderate-income families with financing from local, state, and federal governments as well as some private-sector partners. Cityscape Homes has targeted key blocks at risk of blight such as Colonial Street between the hospitals and Trinity College, where SINA successfully developed 10 single-family houses. In total, the alliance has developed and sold 65 homes to date and is seeking financing for 11 additional **houses**.

The college and two hospitals have made homeownership possible for their employees by instituting the Homeownership Incentive Program (HIP). Each SINA member provides five \$10,000 grants annually for downpayment on a home in Southside. HIP has assisted with the purchase of 15 homes, 2 of which were developed by the **alliance**.

Economic Development

While continuing its housing programs, SINA has recently set economic development as its next major initiative. One or two projects are planned in the short term to meet the communities' retail needs and better connect residents and businesses to the resources of SINA members, including hiring and purchasing opportunities. According to Jane Baird, director of government relations at Connecticut Children's Medical Center and SINA board chairman, economic development is critical for the Southside neighborhoods, the college, and the hospitals. A more economically vibrant community with business and employment opportunities for residents will also be more welcoming to employees at the **institutions**.

Public Safety, Community Leadership

SINA's anchor activities extend to improving public safety and developing the leadership skills of employees and neighborhood residents. Improving public safety was an impetus for SINA's founding and one of the motivations for developing the Learning Corridor. For example, when the Connecticut Children's Medical Center opened in 1996, its managers were concerned that public perceptions of neighborhood crime would deter potential patients and employees. The alliance contributes to community policing efforts by providing grants to the local police department for equipment and convening regular meetings among law enforcement, community residents, and security staff at the institutions. In addition, SINA promotes leadership potential through the Recognition, Education, Achievement, and Community Health (REACH) program. REACH awards annual scholarships to students at the area high school and at Capital Community College. REACH also gives out Neighborhood Service Awards, which recognize outstanding community service by residents and staff at SINA member **organizations**.

Recognized Model

SINA's holistic approach to community revitalization has benefited both Hartford's Southside and the anchors themselves. Baird notes that SINA has increased the college's and hospitals' impact within the community: "All three of the member institutions feel that we get better efficiency of dollars spent doing this collectively than we would [get] on our own." The alliance's approach has been recognized as a national model. In 2000, the American Planning Association awarded the organization an **Outstanding Planning Award** for Special Community Initiative, and SINA

has received research **attention**. In addition, SINA's work has inspired the formation of a similarly designed coalition, **Northside Institutions Neighborhood Alliance**, to revitalize Hartford's Asylum Hill **neighborhood**.

Link: http://www.huduser.org/portal/casestudies/study_06262015_1.html

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