



**Hear It Through The  
*Grapevine!*  
The Newsletter For  
**Brookdale Orchard**  
*Feeding the Mind Body & Soul*  
Volume I, Issue 1  
November 20, 2023**

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*In Due Season***

*"So let us not grow weary in doing what is right,  
For we will reap at harvest time if we do not give up."*  
Galatians 6:9 NRSV

Amazing affirmations happened for me over the past two weeks while in the very midst of my weariness. Physically weary from nearly a month of pulling "all-nighters" (beyond my all-day responsibilities), trying to get our Brookdale Orchard website built and launched. Intellectually weary from the double standard policies, practices, and too often willful neglect when it comes to economically marginalized communities. Emotionally weary from the paradoxical anonymity in which I live and work while in full connection with family, friends, and my immediate and extended communities. Weary, yet not drained.

During a recent conversation encouraging my young pastor to take time away for himself and his family, I shared the story of how one year I left Dallas to come to Cleveland to be with my family for my Christmas into the New Year holiday, without having confirmed a speaker for the South Dallas Cultural Center's annual M. L. King Day Breakfast. As director of the center, I produced the breakfast which had gained the reputation as being a "must do" event, with seats selling out primarily through corporate sponsorship of tables even before the speaker was announced.

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**Welcome to the *Grapevine!***

For those of you who were accustomed to receiving your emails from Ladybug at Kumbayashore, she has permanently moved off the lake and returned to the nearby inland orchard! Yep, she's back! And as verbose as ever! Some have said that they don't want or have time to read lengthy narratives, but we keep writing for those who do, because typically they are those who donate and/or support us in other ways.

In April 2021, having shut down Kumbaya on the Shore due to Covid restrictions, the *Ladybug Lessons, Lyrics and Litanies* missive was titled "Work While You Wait," in which you were invited to the dedication of the first garden in Brookdale Orchard, a community mission established in 2016 by St. Matthew United Methodist Church and the resident controlled Rockefeller Park Community Restoration and Development Association, Inc.

Since that time, we have acquired twenty additional parcels of land bringing our footprint to 22 lots over three streets, dedicated our second garden, a 14,600 square foot memorial garden sponsored by current and former families and congregations associated with the orchard community, established a weekly gardening club of women residing in/or connected with the Orchard community, employed a small part-time grounds crew of men who live in the neighborhood and walk to work, conducted a six-week Summer School Without Walls and

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## Welcome to the *Grapevine* (continued from page 1)

twice-weekly fall Wisdom Garden for neighboring 3<sup>rd</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade children and youth, served as a summer week-long mission site for twenty-three teams from six states: Indiana, Ohio, Michigan, New York, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin, and perhaps most significantly, we have secured a building anchoring our site plan which will serve as our education and production center in achieving our vision to establish a produce and by-product market brand of jams, jellies, juices and pastries from the harvest of a community-controlled, income earning fruit and vegetable orchard in the heart of Cleveland's inner-city Hough neighborhood.

Now in its 6<sup>th</sup> edition since August 2020, our *Brookdale Orchard Prospectus* distributed to offices from whom we were seeking alliances, municipal and civic support, and funding, has not been sufficient for broadening our audience and funding base. In the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, if you don't have a functioning website, you simply don't exist in the eyes of some folk. The great irony is that there are organization with websites that look good but lack evidential support that who they say are, is real! It is for this reason that our prospectus and our website are photo-documentaries of our eleven-year journey.

As not to belabor this introduction, I welcome you to virtually visit us at [brookdaleorchard.org](http://brookdaleorchard.org) with hopes that you will join our mission!

If you didn't know, now you know. Because you've heard it through the *Grapevine!*

[brookdaleorchard.org](http://brookdaleorchard.org) is live!

### Subscribe to *Grapevine!*

If someone on the *Grapevine* mailing list forwarded it to you and you wish to continued receiving the free monthly newsletter, please subscribe at [brookdaleorchard.org/join-the-mission/](http://brookdaleorchard.org/join-the-mission/)

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## In Due Season (continued from page 1)

That particular year, we had invited the Honorable Barbara Jordan to speak, and subsequently jumped through every hoop her staff put before us to make it happen, including providing a private plane. Indeed, when that request came to my desk I cried "uncle!" But one of our board members had access to a plane and "made it so." Well into her years and further deteriorating in health than publicly admitted, her staff finally gave up piling on mandates discouraging us and gently declined our invitation. I packed up my son and myself and headed home. Was I confident that we would secure a speaker in three weeks? No. But I emphatically knew that not a darn thing was going to happen over that next week.

Like now, I was working day and night as an over-time mother, the over-time director for the Cultural Center, a part-time seminarian, and a part-time assistant pastor for the then 6,000-member congregation of St. Luke Community United Methodist Church. Weary, needing a break and to be rocked in the proverbial bosom of my mother – not Abraham as the Negro Spiritual would sing, I needed the comfort of being with my family and especially my mother. So, putting work and worries behind me, I came home.

Making this long story short, a couple of phone conversations and delayed commitments later, less than two weeks before the breakfast we announced our King Day speakers. Yes, plural. Martin Luther King, III and Adam Clayton Powell, IV. If we could have gotten a larger banquet hall on such short notice, we probably would have sold out again. People were literally in the lobby, trying to get a seat. But who remembers the accidental, yet amazing feat of pulling off such a coup? Better still, who cares? "Does anybody really know what time it is? Does anybody really care?" \*

On November 6, after having wheeled a barrow of shovels and posthole diggers to Daniel E. Morgan school where we've been working with 6<sup>th</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> graders developing a teaching garden, I recognized a familiar face entering as I was leaving. I mentioned to the principal who was standing at the door with me that the woman entering was my Smith alumna mate.

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Dallas Weekly April 1996 Cover Story

## In Due Season continued from page 2

I had forgotten that she told me that she tutored reading at the school on Mondays. As she drew closer and greeted me with a big hug, the principal told her that I was working with the students on a garden. Joanne, my alumna mate, excitedly responded with *“you have the right lady,”* then went on to reference my work for the revitalization of Rockefeller Park and the Cleveland Cultural Gardens nearly forty years ago.

In 1986 I had to make a choice. Having finished paying for my house, I placed two options before me. Either continue working as an admissions director at Oberlin College and buy the black Jaguar I always wanted or resign and come home to develop a restoration and revitalization plan for the park and gardens which were being neglected by both the City and the cultural communities they represented. What is a natural crown jewel meandering through the inner core of Cleveland connecting our premier center of culture in University Circle to cross-country Interstate 90 and Great Lake Erie, had then become a dumping ground for trash, disposed appliance and furnishing, construction debris, burned out stolen cars, and even dead bodies! People would just dump their stuff over the park’s slope from the streets above. With fond memories of days spent in the beautiful and culturally educational gardens during my childhood and youth, I chose the latter.

So, again like now, I surrendered my time and energy to developing a vision and plan for a cultural arts festival to help bring dignity and life back to the park, and distributed it to the mayor along with 43 city, civic, corporate community relations and funding offices for consideration of their support. When the first four favorable responses came back from the mayor (who later became Ohio’s governor, then US senator), the two largest philanthropic foundations and the city’s corporate growth association, I knew that it was a done deal albeit *“not without struggle,”* beginning with the politics and the six-month process to get me on the City’s staff and payroll. It was the exact length of time I’d budgeted to be able to meet my financial obligations without a salary. None of this has been without financial sacrifice and struggle. \*

**“She’s administrator, program developer, fund-raiser, bookkeeper. She’s also secretary, newsletter writer, politician and spokeswoman, and, she says, during the kids’ all-day summer program, the “principal.” And, when the city froze the budgeted position, custodian.”**

**Linda Crosson, *Dallas Morning News*  
Close-Up Profile February 28, 1993**

Spending the first year organizing: establishing the Rockefeller Park Cultural Arts Association and subsequent board of directors and advisors; coordinating over 150 cultural, social, civic, and local government organizations and offices to implement a week-long arts education, performance and exhibit festival at the heart of the revitalization plan to showcase the cultures and customs of Cleveland’s nationally, racially, and ethnically diverse communities; and hustling that money to make it so! Two years later, the Association mounted its first, (and sadly its last) cultural arts education festival scaled down to two

temporarily designated pedestrian-access only park. Five months later, as the City restructured its budget, the festival remained in the department’s plans, but my salary did not. Watching the fruit of my unrelenting labor transferred to a departmental position with long-time standing, I was offered use of the office I’d occupied to continue administering the Association’s activities, including raising funds for the festival and a salary for myself. As the young folk say, I bounced!

Shortly thereafter, I left for Dallas to help care for my best friend’s three-month-old baby when a high-profile trial for which she served as lead attorney was granted a change of venue, requiring her to be away from her husband, children, and home. What was intended as a short three to four months stay in Texas turned into a decade. And although I thought I’d left things in the good hands of the board, following the successful launch of an intended annual event, The Rockefeller Park Cultural Arts Association festival never took place again. All that was left was a mayoral proclamation saluting the event and my leadership as founder and executive director. Championed by former members of our advisory board, the Museum of Art’s inaugural *Parade the Circle* festival was held the following year in adjacent Wade Park and thirty-four years later, is still going strong.



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## In Due Season continued from page 3

As for Rockefeller Park, the passengers in the thousands of cars driving over the parkway daily, and the hundreds of pedestrians strolling, skating, biking, or jogging through – the majority of whom do not look like the black residents surrounding it, have no clue of the turning point that initiated the restoration of the park to its rightful place of beauty and peace thirty-seven years ago. Most assuredly, they know nothing of the dreadlocked head black woman who gave up a Jaguar to help pave the way for their joyful experience. When there is talk about the process of the park's revitalization there is no mention of my name, nor those who worked with me, in neither written nor spoken word. Like the black-owned businesses that once lined the cross-town corridor of the main streets above, it has vanished from the narrative and memory. Even as I share this story, I ask myself why even bother to tell it? But if you are still reading you must know that there is a reason why.

*Emotionally weary from the paradoxical anonymity in which I live and work.*

On Tuesday, November 7, despite school being closed for elections, some of our Daniel E. Morgan School student gardeners showed up for their Underground Railroad Quilt Codes of Freedom picket painting lesson that they missed the week before. After which, I cast my vote in the gym turned polling station and walked home. Although not the same building, the Morgan election's location is where I cast my very first vote fifty-three years ago at the age of 18. Our gardening students were amazed to learn that I attended Morgan from second to sixth grade and participated in the gardening club way back then when the original building was brand new. They were even more amazed that I'd gone away to college, lived, and worked in "big cities" yet chose to come home to live in our low-income, darn near no income inner-city community. Through thick and thin, good, bad, and 'sho 'nuff ugly, I just won't give this neighborhood up!



After feeding myself and my fur-babies also known as the Brookdale Orchard canine police crew, I sat down to retrieve email including an astonishing surprise. A staff member in the Smith College Alumnae Constituent and Records office forwarded an email requesting an interview with me from a student double majoring in Political Communication Studies and Radio, TV, and Film at the University of Texas at Austin. In part, his email read:

*"Blending my passions for film and museum studies, I'm currently producing a documentary short about my cataloging internship at the Texas Archive of the Moving Image. During my time at TAMI, I've had the privilege of cataloguing files from the Dallas Municipal Archive, including segments related to Mittie Imani Jordan's involvement with the M.L.K. Jr. Breakfasts. Because of her recurring presence in the archive, I would love an opportunity to discuss how the footage relates to Mittie's extensive career and what it means for her to be a subject in such a collection."*

### **Knock me over with a feather!**

In 1991, when I packed up personal belongings from my desk at the Dallas Zoo where I served as Curator of Education, and relocated at the request of the Department of Cultural Affairs to the South Dallas Cultural Center as director, one of the first items I removed from the box to place on my new desk was my 'Scripture-a-Day Calendar.' The text for that particular day was Galatians 6:9, the King James Version. *"So let us not be weary in well doing; for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."* The New International Version reads: *"Let us not become weary in doing good, for at the proper time we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* Nearly four decades later, and eleven years into developing this new mission and vision called Brookdale Orchard, I work faithfully and fervently while waiting for the harvest. In fact, our stated core values are *"to do well while doing good!"*

As an amazing affirmation that I am on the right path and moving in the will and way of God, the same Galatians scripture was the text for *Our Daily Bread* devotional on November 6 – the day my alumna mate spoke of my labor in the gardens thirty-five years ago, and the day the young documentarian emailed Smith with interest in discussing my labor in a concrete vineyard in Dallas. *"Let us not become weary...in due season we will reap a harvest if we do not give up."* **God is still speaking!**

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**In Due Season** competed from page 5

Now that you've heard some of the litanies of this Ladybug's journey, I offer a few lessons learned:

- Establish holidays for yourself and keep them. Walk away from the work for a few days. Most likely, it will be there when you return, and nobody will have died because it didn't get done while you refreshed and refueled.
- Share the stories of those who came before you. Say their names, uplift their cause, honor their vision. Remember that you are only standing in the gap between those who paved the way before you, and those who will finish the road and the race after you are gone.
- Honor your "calling," persevere with faith and integrity, and don't give up on your mission, your vision, your goals, and your values.
- Always distribute your plans to more than one entity, because there are those who lack vision but are abundant in human and funding resources who will snatch yours, slap their name on it and not look back. Wait, wait, there's more. And smile in our face. Not to mind. *"Truth pressed to the core will rise again! Because a lie cannot live forever" \**

As for the lyrics in this Ladybug's triple L's, like the quote on truth above, they are not mine.

*"God of our weary years, God of our silent tears,  
thou who has brought us thus far along the way.  
Thou who has by thy might, led us into the light,  
keep us forever in the path we pray. Lest our feet  
stray from the places, our God, where we met  
thee; lest our hearts drunk with the wine of the  
world, we forget thee; Shadowed beneath thy  
hand, may we forever stand, true to our God,  
true to our native land."*

James Weldon Johnson, 1921  
closing lines of *Lift Every Voice and Sing*

And always, *find joy in the journey*, that's my plan and I'm sticking with it.

Mittie Imani  
November 20, 2023



Mittie Imani Jordan is the developer and director of Brookdale Orchard. For more information about Mittie, visit the Organization section on our This Is Us page at [brookdaleorchard.org/this-is-us/](http://brookdaleorchard.org/this-is-us/)

Photo by Valerie Rogers Gooden

### \*Notes for In Due Season

*Does Anybody Really Know What Time It Is?*  
Songwriter **Robert William Lamm**. Recorded by **Chicago**. 1969 debut album, *Transit Authority*.

*Not Without a Struggle: Leadership Development for African American Women in Ministry* by **Bishop Vashti McKenzie**. 1996, Pilgrim Press

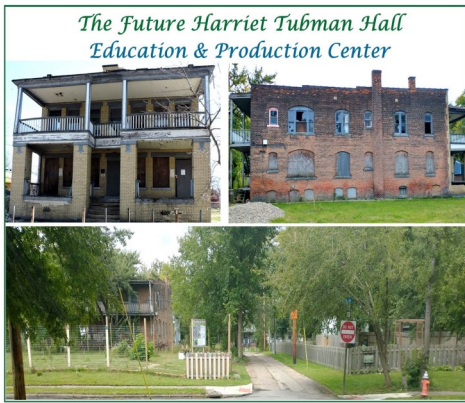
"There is no progress without struggle," a quote from **Fredrick Douglas**, abolitionist, *North Star* editor and diplomat for the U.S. government, in an 1857 address on West India Emancipation

There are so many but let me say the names of a few **on whose shoulders I stand** as related to this missive: for the Rockefeller Park cultural arts education festival, aka *Gardenfest 88* – The Cleveland **Cultural Gardens Federation** whose One World Day annual parade and afternoon festival – while limited in representation beyond European nationalities – began forty-two years before RPPCA's 1988 festival, and **Commissioner Dave Coyle** who boldly bridged the gap between the politics of Cleveland City Hall and our Division of Urban Forestry; for the South Dallas Cultural Center – **Artis and Elaine Thornton**, who envisioned, organized community, and lobbied the City of Dallas for the establishment of a center focusing on the history, art and culture of the predominantly black South Dallas community, and Office of Cultural Affairs Assistant Director **Mildred Honore** who, like Commissioner Coyle, navigated the red tape of Dallas City Hall's bureaucracy to allow us to paint outside the lines; My mentor and "father in ministry," **Reverend Dr. Zan Wesley Holmes, Jr.** whose passion and commitment for *Community* beyond the sanctuary doors led St. Luke members to incorporate the word in the name of the congregation; for St. Matthew's Mission Ministry and Brookdale Orchard – the late **Corliss Fitch, and Linda Higbee, Sandra Beard and Diane Shelton** who organized, coordinated and facilitated community programs and meals, and the afterschool *Wednesday Connection* for children and youth which evolved into *Bridging Connections* for youth, out of which Brookdale Orchard grew.

The expression *"truth pressed to the core will rise again"* is most notably attributed to **William Cullen Bryant**'s 1878 poem "The Battle-Field" and later quoted by **Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.** in his "Our God is Marching On" speech on March 25, 1965 at the Montgomery, Alabama capitol following the culmination of the march from Selma.

For more lessons from the Ladybug, visit  
[Brookdaleorchard.org/ladybug-lessons-litanies-lyrics/](http://Brookdaleorchard.org/ladybug-lessons-litanies-lyrics/)

## The Campaign for Tubman Hall



Without fanfare that we cannot afford, we have launched the funding campaign to raise \$500,000 to restore and retrofit a 1921 building anchoring Brookdale Orchard to serve as our education, training, and brand production center.

While jumping through the algorithms and deadlines of philanthropic entities, without financial resources for fund development staff (it's a "catch 22"), we need to include funding support from individuals, congregations, and social organizations, and offer several levels as giving corresponding with the Orchard's signature symbols of the Underground Railroad Quilt Codes of Freedom.

We are especially hopeful of significant support from the black community as the building will be named Tubman Hall in honor and recognition of Harriett Ross Tubman, who committed her life to the physical, emotional, and mental emancipation of enslaved – and some free – black people in America. Everyone's gift will be publicly recognized on the branches of the "Tree of Life" sculpture to be displayed in the lobby. For more information on this and our other funding campaigns, please visit [brookdaleorchard.org/education/](http://brookdaleorchard.org/education/)

**Thanks4Giving!**

### Brookdale Orchard

With a **mission** to improve the quality of life for our people and the appearance of our neighborhood, and to preserve the integrity of the natural environment as a place for peaceful community growth and gathering, the **vision** for Brookdale Orchard is to establish a produce and by-product market brand of jams, jellies, juices, and pastries from the harvest of a community-controlled, income earning fruit and vegetable orchard in the heart of Cleveland's Hough neighborhood.

Established in 2016 as an inter-generational *Bridging Connections* program youth garden, Brookdale Orchard is an urban agricultural enterprise of the Rockefeller Park Community Restoration and Development Association—a resident-established non-profit corporation and St. Matthew United Methodist Church, celebrating 76 years in ministry with 62 years as a partner in community support and programming in our Hough neighborhood bordered by Superior and Wade Park Avenues, and East 79<sup>th</sup> Street to Rockefeller Park. The orchard currently sits on seventeen parcels of land within those borders, spanning three city blocks from East 86 to East 89 between Brookdale Court and Wade Park Avenue.



### Nan Kennedy's 90<sup>th</sup>

Many of the recipients of this first edition of *Grapevine* were subscribers of *Shorewaves* and patrons and program participants at

Kumbaya on the Shore and are familiar with our faithful friend and Waterloo Arts co-founder, Nan Kennedy. Last month, I had the joy of gathering on the Lake Erie shore with a few of Nan's family members and friends to celebrate her 90th birthday. A highlight of the afternoon was Ward 8 Councilman Michael Polensek's presentation of a City of Cleveland Proclamation to Nan acknowledging her nonagenarian achievement and, along with her late husband Myles, her pioneering leadership in the development of the amazing north shore Waterloo Arts District. Happy Birthday, Nan! Looking forward to celebrating your 100<sup>th</sup>!

### William Rogers' 100<sup>th</sup>



Speaking of centenarians, I was overjoyed to join in the celebration of my first cousin, once removed, as he marked the great milestone of reaching 100 years of age! Still living independently with assistance from his family, Billy (yeah we have the nerve to still call him by his youthful nickname) walked into his (supposed to be surprise)

party with only the assistance of his cane, "clothed in right mind" and sporting his World War II Veteran cap. He spent much of the evening sharing stories of his long-life including years in the U.S. Army and subsequently as a U.S. Postman, with comical anecdotes of how the latter were at times more dangerous than the war! Happy Birthday and congratulations cousin Billy, and thank you for your service, sir!

Beyond providing agricultural education, training and employee ownership opportunities for neighboring residents, the Orchard's primary **goals** are to foster self-esteem and respect for others, bridge inter-generational relationships, promote appreciation for fresh food sources, sustainable environments, and the cultural and artistic heritage of African American people, and to embody our **core values** are to do well while doing good feeding the mind, body, and soul.

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