Neighbors First
When Emonia Barnett met with fellow Lindsay Heights resident, Paula Bost, to discuss Paula’s skills and talents several years ago little did they know that conversation would lead to a new community-owned take-out café, the Taste of Lindsay Heights.

Paula is one of 93 Lindsay Heights residents who have shared information about their skills, interests, and passions. These “assets” are the connective tissue for the Community Wealth Building Campaign (CWB), a neighborhood-focused, resident-driven economic development strategy launched by Walnut Way in 2019. Starting with resident assets and connecting them to resources and opportunities both within and outside the neighborhood fuel wealth creation and community well-being. In its third year, CWB has laid a foundation for the Lindsay Heights neighborhood to overcome 50 years of exclusion and disinvestment.

CWB In Action
Paula is a baker and her rum cakes along with other neighbors’ fruit parfaits, salad bowls, cookies, fresh juices, and spring rolls - along with a menu filled with other healthy and tasty items (and great coffee) are available at the Taste of Lindsay Heights, 1617 W. North Ave. The café is the product of eight neighbors meeting for a year and a half working on their cooking skills and business plans. With Walnut Way providing space, equipment and other resources, the community celebrated a wonderful grand opening on October 2nd, 2021.

In addition to cooking skills, the asset inventories uncovered artists in the neighborhood
who wanted ways to earn money from their creative work. The CWB team discovered a way to channel that energy into an apparel printing business called Designaway. Using direct to garment printing technology and a flexible e-commerce platform, Designaway prints t-shirt and hoodies as well as designs websites for artists to sell their own creations. The social enterprise is providing employment and business experience right next to the Taste of Lindsay Heights in Walnut Way’s Wellness Commons at 1617 W. North Ave.

Through its outreach efforts, CWB organizers have been meeting with neighborhood institutions like Hopkin’s Lloyd Community School. Answering the question of how CWB can directly impact students, the Children’s Community Wealth Building Campaign emerged as a way to teach 5th graders about entrepreneurship, cooperative work, design, marketing, and community engagement. With support from Designaway, teachers, and the CWB team, students will build an e-commerce website and sell t-shirts with their printed designs. This innovative project is supported by the Greater Milwaukee Foundation.

Resources for Residents
Increasing wealth requires connecting residents to resources and each other. CWB has engaged organizations like the YWCA, WWBIC, and the Zilber Family Foundation to offer matched savings and business startup grants. The Side Hustle Training series delivered expert knowledge on how to start and grow a small business and personal finance coaching has helped individuals improve their credit scores and budgeting. Through these and other activities, neighbors support one another and the community benefits.

Business Opportunities
Small or large, businesses can’t grow without new customers and the CWB team strives to find opportunities to connect its entrepreneurs to buyers. One has been Walnut Way’s Harvest Day, a community celebration at the Fondy Farmers Market.
CWB neighbors set up shop at the market stalls and enjoyed a busy day on September 11, 2021. CWB’s reach into the community has connected the cooking entrepreneurs with new catering opportunities and exposure to a larger market. Partnering with the Milwaukee Art Museum, CWB artists will soon begin to offer their creations in the museum store. CWB also is exploring e-commerce platforms that will allow neighborhood businesses to expand online. The sites will not only offer low-cost e-commerce access but will provide staff to coach and deliver technical support to business owners unfamiliar with how to run an online business.

Connections
Since 2019 CWB has developed a vital network of neighborhood residents, organizations, and resources that provide opportunities for business growth and neighborhood economic development. The connectivity between people has created new energy and opportunities for cooks, caterers, artists, contractors, wellness practitioners, and more. The network grows stronger and valuable with new connections. We invite all who touch the Lindsay Heights community to join us and prosper.

For more information or to get involved, reach out to Community Wealth Building Coordinator, Chandra Ellis, cellis@walnutway.org or call 414-264-2326 ext. 14.