Located in the vicinity of Tower Grove South. The International Institute [IISTL], has helped immigrants and refugees successfully transition to America since 1919. However, it was only in the winter of 1978-79 that a formal refugee resettlement program was created in Missouri. Since then, the IISTL has sponsored a total of 22,000 refugees and serves 7,900 immigrants and refugees annually from approximately 75 countries, which now comprise about 6% of the St. Louis City and County’s 2010 foreign-born population. With a refugee population in flux as conflicts around the world designate new groups with refugee status, the Institute has helped resettle the Vietnamese in the 1970s, Bosnians in the 1990s, and most recently, refugee populations from Bhutan and Myanmar in Asia; Iraq in the Middle East; and Somalia, Ethiopia, and Congo in Africa.

With immigration reform efforts nationwide, the IISTL has collaborated with the St. Louis Mosaic Project to look at ways to ensure a good resettlement process for immigrants and less stressful adjustment to ways of life in a foreign land. IISTL offers resources that range from English as a second language programs to career counseling and employment, and medical and legal services. New research shows that the 40 million immigrants in the United States have created $1.7 trillion in housing wealth. In particular, in post-industrial cities, immigrants can be a catalyst in reversing decline and often contribute to the economy and stabilization of less desirable neighborhoods, helping these areas become viable alternatives for middle- and working-class Americans. This opens up new opportunities for current renters or young people to consider purchasing a home in areas once in decline. The data concludes that while immigration does increase home values in many areas, it is not adding to result in a type of gentrification that pushes the existing residents out of desirable communities.

For this studio, the SFS collaborated with The International Institute of St. Louis in a call for innovative design ideas to re-imagine the former building of the IISTL located at 3654 South Grand Ave. This architectural piece was built in 1930s as a car repair and dealership, with hydraulic elevators that lifted the cars from the repair shop at the lower level to the parking at the rooftop. Later, the building was renovated into doctor’s office space until 1999 when the Institute renovated it for office space use.

The site, at the southeast boundary of TGS, is expected to become a prime location as the international hub continues to expand southwards. With lack of affordable housing in high opportunity areas cited as a primary factor contributing to the ongoing housing apartheid, the question became, how could new approaches to the design and development of mixed housing began to sow seeds that could dismantle segregation and instead cultivate resilient communities? Students were asked to speculate on the future use of the 30,000 sq. ft. of vacant space, and produce a program for the building that included a housing component in response to both the IISTL and to the community overall needs. TGS’s demographic changes suggest that a new way of development must be imagined to sustain stability and vitality. In St. Louis, one of the neighborhoods that has exhibited such resilience, and become a major urban success story over the last 15 years, is Tower Grove South (TGS). Although once an area that struggled with high crime and poverty rates, TGS has become a thriving community that has demonstrated indicators of resilience and remained stable even in a distressed economy. Thus finding ways to cultivate economic and racial diversity must be a part of working towards a resilient, less segregated city.

TGS has all the characteristics of an ideal neighborhood: a stunning park within walking distance, two major commercial districts, fabulous turn-of-the-century architecture and a strong neighborhood association. Today, TGS is not only one of the top three most densely populated neighborhoods in St. Louis, but one that is characterized by racial and economic diversity. Its racial makeup consists of: 55% white, 21% black, 8% Asian and 4% Hispanic/Latino. In addition, there is a wide spectrum of ages, ranging from young families to people who have lived in the neighborhood for more than 30 years. Additionally, there are 7,308 housing units, that are 86% occupied, with a split of 46% and 52% respectively between owners and renters. The resulting mix of houses and housing as well as price points allows for socio-economic diversity. With a building stock of single family houses, duplexes and quadraplexes dwellings, small businesses, and variety of restaurants specializing in ethnic cuisine, this vibrant community is known as an international hub.

Post-industrial cities are characterized by population, economic, and infrastructure decline. In addition, problems intrinsic to post-industrial cities often contribute to and are compounded by a higher degree of racial and economic segregation. Yet within these cities, there is a sample of stable and diverse communities that are resilient and continue to thrive in the face of these problems. Resilience can be seen as a measure of sustainability, representing a community’s ability to utilize available resources to respond to, withstand, and recover from adverse situations. Research has pointed to racial and economic inclusion as factors that can contribute to long-term neighborhood stability and vitality. In St. Louis, one of the neighborhoods that has exhibited such resilience, and become a major urban success story over the last 15 years, is Tower Grove South (TGS). Although once an area that struggled with high crime and poverty rates, TGS has become a thriving community that has demonstrated indicators of resilience and remained stable even in a distressed economy. Thus finding ways to cultivate economic and racial diversity must be a part of working towards a resilient, less segregated city.
Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank the International Institute President and CEO, Anna Crosslin, for providing us with a unique design opportunity and challenge. Additionally, we appreciate their generosity in providing funding to our project. Furthermore, we would like to thank our guest critics Lou Colombo, Mark Abbott, Liz Kramer, and Paul Costigan, along with Ariel Burgess, Megan Green, Cara Spencer, Sean Spencer, Rachel Witt, and Julio Zegarra for allowing us to interview of this project and community.

Publication Credits:

Editor:
Amanda Malone

Text Editor:
Suzannah Grasel

Historical Research:
Lindsley Etienne
Suzannah Grasel
Xinzhi Pan
Daniel Aguilera
Savannah Hecker

Urban Analysis:
Lindsley Etienne
Daniel Aguilera
Xinzhi Pan
Amanda Malone
Savannah Hecker
Suzannah Grasel

3654 S. Grand Blvd.
Savannah Hecker
Suzannah Grasel

Site Model:
Daniel Aguilera
Amanda Malone

We would like to thank the International Institute President and CEO, Anna Crosslin, for providing us with a unique design opportunity and challenge. Additionally, we appreciate their generosity in providing funding to our project. Furthermore, we would like to thank our guest critics Lou Colombo, Mark Abbott, Liz Kramer, and Paul Costigan, along with Ariel Burgess, Megan Green, Cara Spencer, Sean Spencer, Rachel Witt, and Julio Zegarra for allowing us to interview of this project and community.
In response to the massive influx of political and war refugees of World War I, the International Institute of St. Louis (IISTL) formed in 1919. Since this era, foreign immigration to the United States has continued to shift populations from all over the world to St. Louis. Currently, IISTL is the only refugee resettlement agency in the region. Their purpose is to aid the transition of immigrants both through physical resettlement as well as assistance towards US citizenship. Annually, the program resettles an average of 250 families into rental housing in addition IISTL also provides English classes, translators, job seeking programs, select job training programs, and micro-financing.

In collaboration with the IISTL, the SFS studio researched and reevaluated the use of the Institute’s former location, the Donna Brown Building. Through this endeavor, the SFS studio sets forward seven unique proposals for reinvigorating the use of the vacant building totaling 30,000 Sq.Ft. Each student proposal will set forth an anchoring building program and a housing component. The use proposed derives from a comprehensive research of urban parameters topical to the building site at multiple scales. Additionally, each housing proposal includes low-income, market and refugee housing. Both the housing and anchoring program seek meaningful connections to the scope of IISTL and to surrounding community.

The proposal should seek historical tax credits, mixed use and affordable housing credits to be a viable option for the IISTL. The following interviews pool together community stakeholders to understand the vision each voice had for the building and how it could affect the surrounding community to address their need and decision as the proposals were developed. In regards to the historic tax credit, each proposal must preserve the integrity of the two front facades, the interior and perimeter structural columns as well as the elevator penthouse original to the building. As it stands now, the Donna Brown building is the third adaptation to what was originally a Buick automobile brand location. In the 1960s the building vacated for a short interim, until it was converted into a medical facility for the remainder of the 20th century. This phase extensively modified the original building envelope and interior space. Under those circumstances the Sam Fox school studio collaborated with the International Institute and the Historical Society of St. Louis Missouri to thoroughly investigate the phases of the building under the different owners and the contributing factors to current state.
especially, unique family compositions. So if you have a family of four you need a two bedroom, unless the children are opposite sex. If the children are a girl and a boy then you are going to need three bedrooms. And now I'm told that sometimes that's a very lofty standard and that's something that is not attainable, but that is what we strive for in St. Louis. So for larger families, if we can't find housing in the city of St. Louis our larger families go out near Washington University, a little bit past Skinker Blvd and Ethel Ave. We call it Hodiamont, because it's on the street called Hodiamont. Those apartments have three and four bedrooms. Square footage is pretty small, but because they have large number of bedrooms where we can place clients into apartments easier...

...When the clients arrive, we go to the airport, meet them, pick them up, and take them to their apartment...Unfortunately in St. Louis most of our arrivals are between 10:00 PM and 2:00 AM, so we tell them to go to sleep. When we come back the next day we do an extensive home orientation. We then will bring them to the Institute for health screenings. The city of St. Louis provides health screens for tuberculosis, hepatitis, HIV, a variety of things, and parasites. Then we will start our orientation...

...We have three weeks worth of orientation that clients go through. We have job readiness classes that they participate in. We register them for English as a Second Language (ESL) classes. We register the children for school at the Chapman Academy just up the street from the Institute. That is the school that provides ESL education classes for all of our clients, kindergarten through high school. The classes are taught in English, but they have a language support. Typically they stay there for about a year, depending on how well they are acclimating, and then they will go out to the neighborhood schools that they live in. We try to get them in other ESL classes but not all schools have this kind of program. It is a very structured and very supportive environment for the children...

...For clients that wish to start a business we work with them to put a business plan together. We determine if it's feasible enough, and then we assist them in developing their own business. Once there is a business plan, we can provide small business loans. That business can be a taxi driver, a mechanic, a hair braider, whatever. We don't make the connections for that to happen, we help the client understand what needs to happen. If they are going to be a business owner, then they have to have a level of English where they're comfortable going out into the business world and getting what they need. Now we help them understand all of the legal criteria. For example, if they want to open a restaurant, we make them aware of what the city is looking for in the health inspections. We assist them. We give them the tools. We do not do it for them...

The International Institute of St. Louis (IISTL) has a resettlement contract through the Department of State. We are the largest resettlement site in the state of Missouri and the only resettlement agency in St. Louis. Through this contract the state mandates we fund housing and set up housing for brand new [immigrant] arrivals. Prior to any arrival, we make sure that the housing is safe, complies with local occupancy regulations, is set up and utilities are turned on. IISTL works with roughly about two maybe three hundred private landlords. Many of the landlords - I would say it is about a 50/50 split - have been former refugees themselves. So they understand the process and they want to give back. We do not sign any leases with landlords or property companies or managers or whatnot. We rent the apartments month by month, and if you know anything about housing in St. Louis, the city is typically one-bedroom four-family flats of some sort. There is very few single family housing which is sometimes a problem. For families of two I can get away with one bedroom. Once you go past two, you need two and three maybe even four bedrooms...
Megan Green
15th Ward Alderwoman

I am not from St. Louis. I moved here about eleven years ago to do the Corps Fellows Program and decided to stay. So if you’re not familiar with the Corps Fellows Program, basically it’s a post-grad work program in Public Affairs and so you get to spend six week placements in every sector of society learning how they work together and don’t work together. So I was here for non-profit placement at City Academy. I worked at the Division of Homeless Services for the county, the Plumbers and Pipe Fitters Union, and Great Rivers Greenway. I had to do a group project placement for my perpetration over McCaskill’s first senatorial campaign, for Hillary’s political campaigns, and for a final project you have to find somebody to hire you for six weeks to do a project. I worked with an organization called Civic Tasks. We were looking at some different dynamics within our educational system and how we might be able to use socio-economically integrated education to create transformation in St. Louis...

...When I started that I thought I was just coming to St. Louis to do that program and then I would leave, probably go out to the West Coast to go to Law School. However, through that program I just saw so much disparity. Growing up I had the option to travel a lot. My dad was a university professor and he would often go to conferences in other countries. We would get to go with him and that exposed me to poverty in other countries. I didn’t realize that level of poverty existed in the U.S. until I got to St. Louis and saw how stark of a dividing line there was. I recognized that we still have people that are living this way and the government is to blame for a lot of it, which is one of the main reasons that I stayed and became a teacher in St. Louis. I got in there and was buried, so I decided to start working on my Masters in Education Leadership at St. Louis University (SLU). My undergrad major was Political Science and now I am working on a Doctorate in Educational Policies, because I still think that is one of our biggest issues. After I was a teacher, I ended up being the development director for a homeless shelter. Then I went back to education and started working in early childhood trying to expand access to early childhood education...

...Regarding racial justice issues, I think we’ve come a long way in the two years since Michael Brown, but we still have a lot of work to do in terms of our neighborhood organizations: how they operate, we welcome people who are different into our organizations, don’t use coded language and things that I think a lot of us who are maybe younger and a little bit more social justice oriented get. Then you have the old guard who are very afraid of new people and activists moving into this area and hurting their home values, bringing in some unfavorable elements or whatever. Consequently, we have this constant kind of battle, and then you know what the secondary battle is: we have a lot of crime in our community. As an elected official in a city with very high crime it is difficult to be critical of the police and the way they conduct themselves while wanting to reduce crime...

...St. Louis has an increasing problem with homelessness. Ten years ago we made this plan to eliminate chronic homelessness in St. Louis and we did really well for about the first six years. Then the last four years we have gone completely backwards. However, during that time we have had a number of city programs that offered supportive housing go under. We have seen a dramatic decrease in the amount of housing and services for people struggling with addiction. St. Louis has a huge heroin problem and at the moment we have only ten inpatient beds in the entire city. If you are on drugs you might steal something and go to jail, they will lock you up for a couple of weeks, but you will never get any treatment. They don’t give you any services when you are leaving jail, so you go right back into the same cycle. What I see a lot of need for is housing for people who are coming out of jail. A lot of landlords will not rent to you if you have any kind of offense on your record, particularly if it is a drug offense...
"...I am the Executive Director of the Lutheran Bellman’s Group, which is a non-profit primarily low-income housing developer that uses tax credits to leverage tax credits for the greater good. We are currently working on a charter school expansion of the Arts Center in the Gravois Park neighborhood, and other developments like a restaurant and an incubator that would hire from the immediate community down on Chippewa. Primarily we use tax credits and other incentives for development in areas that would not otherwise have that level of development."

"...I also own a cafe about two blocks north of here, the Gelateria on South Grand. I have had that business for probably about 10 years now. I live maybe nine blocks north of here just off of South Grand two houses in. My whole life is in South City. I’m involved in the South Grand Improvement District, and I am President of the Board among a variety of things. Sean Spencer and I are working on a coalition of different Community Development Corporations (CDC’s) and other non-profits for the redevelopment of the Gravois corridor, which is just south of here..."

"...We have a project that is called East Fox Homes. It is in Tower Grove Park and Fox Park. Messiah Lutheran, my church, is the owner and sponsor of that. Messiah is at Grand and Pestalozzi, which is also just north of here. Due to our relationship with the Nepalese within the community, we work with them first to see if they were able to be a part of the project. After that, it was open to the broader neighborhood as well. Currently, we are probably about 2 months into a 12 month construction project. The first year has been coming on around the first of the year, and then phasing in over another six months after that. The project consists of 12 buildings, 47 apartments, one commercial space, and it is targeted towards the refugees and immigrants population...."

"...The building is probably around 3,500 to 4,000 Sq. Ft. on one floor. On the first floor, 60% is commercial and 40% residential. Within that commercial space there are two small meeting rooms and one larger classroom, as well as some flex spaces, and workstations for some of the people who would be working there day to day...."

"...The commercial space of 2,000 Sq. Ft. is going to be a co-working space for a variety of non-profits. It is going to be anchored by two community-based non-profits: one being the church. Its purpose being the organization that brings in other groups to do financial literacy and other programs like that. It doesn’t make sense to be overlapping much with programs that the International Institute is doing unless it is somehow restricted there. Therefore, we are working closely together. The other group that we are working with is a group that does after school programming at a couple of local charter schools nearby. They would be doing a summer programming. The after school program will not be there on site. They are going to have a computer lab that can provide access to Wi-Fi, and there will be a classroom space. They will have access to two charter schools: one in Fox Park and one in Tower Grove East...."
September 09, 2016 at 1:38pm

"...Gravois Park is a phenomenal neighborhood. I think it is one of the best neighborhoods in the city because we have phenomenal urban assets. When people think of why they want to live in an urban setting, versus a suburban or even countryside, they think of density. With density, you have diversity, walkability, proximity to parks and commercial districts, and things of that nature. Gravois Park has all those. We are the single most densely populated neighborhood in the entire city with around 12,000 residents per square mile. When you look at density, a good marker is about 10,000 residents per square mile. We have seventy-eight neighborhoods in the city of St. Louis, but only seven of them have a density of that capacity. Two of those neighborhoods are Dutchtown and Gravois Park. The other neighborhoods in that grouping that are very successful are: Shaw, Skinker DeBaliviere Place, Tower Grove South, all really successful neighborhoods. Gravois Park has the density, but we also have the ability to grow because almost 30% of our housing units are vacant right now. That is both an opportunity and a hurdle. We have hundreds of structurally condemned buildings that are owned by the LRA, as well as privately owned properties that are falling to pieces. When you go through the neighborhoods previously mentioned, one of the most interesting things about Gravois Park in comparison is the diversity of the built environment..."

"...Driving around you will see big beautiful three-story homes with six or seven bedrooms next to a four-bedroom flat that may have four single bedroom units. That is an inherent built in diversity and can bring socio-economic diversity which is really a huge asset. The asset that people want in their neighborhood you actually see that diversity when you look at the census data. In conclusion there is economic diversity within our neighborhood, and there's also racial diversity which is not very common in St. Louis. It's a tremendous asset..."

"...On another note, home ownership is usually an indicator of a stable neighborhood. When you own a property, you are invested in it, you care about it, you will clean up your alley and you are going to be there for a long time. Renters are a different story, usually. If you are a renter you are stereotyped to not be as engaged in the Ward. However, 75% of our housing units are not owner occupied according to assessors data that compares the address and billing address for the owner. If they do not match up they are not an owner occupied unit, and on the other hand if it matches up it is owner occupied..."

"...We have a lot of renters. That is innate to our built environment since if you have a four-family flat it is probably not going to be owner occupied. When a developer wants to come in and develop the Alderman of that specific ward tells them that they are not going to support tax abatement for a project if it is not going to be owner occupied. Consequently, most buildings do not get renovated. I guess the idea would be that you could divide the building in half and make it two condo units; yet that is very difficult in a neighborhood like Gravois Park where the economics do not make that much sense. We saw the housing bubble crash and the hardest hit aspect of that was the condo market. It became very difficult to get financed to buy a condo because the condos almost doubled the foreclosures than the housing market did so the banks became very reluctant to lend..."

"...You may have seen that New York Times covered lending practices in St Louis very recently, and in particular the unwillingness on the part of banks to lend specifically to some neighborhoods and zip codes. This is a form of redlining which is illegal. That investigation is ongoing and continues to be done by organizations like EHOC. Redlining has a long history. Going back in time, redlining was basically policies put in place designed to segregate people. This happened all over the country. It happened in St. Louis. The purpose was to segregate people racially and segregate people socioeconomically. For example, if you look at the city of Ladue and how their land use policy works, you will notice that you cannot build a house on any lot less than an acre. Therefore, you cannot build an apartment. The policy is put in place specifically so you are unable to build small housing units. It might not look like segregating policies on the face value, but that was the purpose and that was their design. There are similar policies put in place in other neighborhoods and they are very effective. When you talk about redlining in terms of banks there are effective lending policies that are crafted in a way that have the appearance of following the law, but preclude lending from going into lower-income zip codes such as Gravois Park..."
…Originally there were between 35 and 40 Community Development Corporations (CDCs) in the early 1980s. They were community-based development organizations that focused on a myriad of different activities such as youth services, job outreach, technical training, and real estate. Back in the 80s the city of St. Louis received about 35 million to 40 million dollars a year just to put that money back into neighborhoods. Now the amount is about 17 million. However, it is a much more transparent process now to get this type of funding for CDCs. Under those circumstances organizations like ours need to be self-sustaining. This means going out and working in the community to find different ways to generate revenue while also work towards our community goals…

…In our case, we were originally called the St. Margaret of Scotland Housing Corporation. We took on the worst of the worst properties, looked at the vacancies, the lighting, and the overall visual appearance of blocks as people came into our neighborhoods. We started making decisions on whether each place was suitable for clients, their families, and their businesses. In the last three years we combined three CDCs to build up our leverage as a developer in the community with a credible asset base. We combined the South Grand Community Corporation, the Shaw Neighborhood Housing Corporation (formerly the St. Margaret of Scotland Housing Corporation), and the Southwest Garden Housing Corporation. Those three neighborhoods are now consolidated into this organization. It is a place-based organization that is not a neighborhood association. It is an non-profit organization that has a small Board of Directors representative of their neighborhoods…

…There’s one thing that we call in real estate development the “halo effect”, if one area is doing well, prices tend to go up as people start to look nearby or around that area. A good example is where this library (Carpenter Library) is located specifically in Tower Grove Heights. This location’s popularity increased just over the last five or ten years. Street-scape enhancements, the lighting improvements, and everything that Rachel Witt has probably spoken to you earlier can happen in other parts of the South Grand area. However, you have to get people that are dedicated to making it work to drive investment. If you look at South Grand in Tower Grove in particular, this is a major commercial thoroughfare that provided incredible services to the residents around it. The area is still densely populated and the services are still needed. With this in mind, people gravitate towards the areas that are a little bit nicer, have more stores with more consistent hours, and more services in one place…

…In regards to the state historic and federal tax credits for business you have to be able to meet the expectations of the Board members that are reviewing your project. You may not be able to do all the things with the building that you are thinking about. You might have to keep the front if it is divided up in a certain way or certain windows in certain places. All of those things are going to have to be reviewed. However, there are some ways to get around some of that, but that would be a determining factor on whether you could get the credits. The historic state and federal tax credit program is an incentive. We often hear that it is the single reason that city neighborhoods have come back, because the developer collects 25 cents for every dollar spent on eligible expenses. Such expenses are basically the entire building envelope excluding anything that you put in that could be removed. Appliances, washers, dryers, and refrigerators are examples of what is not eligible under that credit. Everything else from drywall to paint to flooring to subflooring, kitchen cabinets or counters, and bathrooms are eligible. That is the economic driver or incentive that is being used in city neighborhoods right now…”

…Our project on Manchester Rd, right next to Layla’s restaurant, is a more modern infill. We used the nearby buildings on the street as a datum for the maximum developing height. That would be one consideration for the studio. There are limitations to everything, so you have to look at it one way. The incentives are there but not if you want to develop it for something different. Ask what is the best use of this building? What is the best use previously given to the building? What could be the best use now? You do not have to get too out of the box. Just say you know this has been a learning institution for the last 20 years and that is probably the best use. We look at a lot of schools for redevelopment; some are great for residential conversions but some are better just as schools…”

September 06, 2016 at 3:42pm

Sean Spencer
Tower Grove Neighborhood Community Development Corp. Executive Director
"...I worked in non-profit for a few years and then went to Widener University, outside of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania, for my masters. I received a Masters in Public Administration, emphasizing in Local Government and Economic Development. It is very interesting that I can use all my background degrees for my job at South Grand Community Improvement District. I have been with the District now for over ten years and since I started here, a lot of changes have occurred..."

"...Being a Community Improvement District (CID) we are a political subdivision of the state of Missouri. The reason why CID is a governmental entity of the state is because a third of our budget comes from state sales tax. Half a cent of every dollar spent in the district stays in the district. Two-thirds of our budget come from the property owners. They pay a certain assessment rate on their property tax bill based on square footage of their property so that money is used to employ me full-time. We have an office on South Grand. We do audits, insurance policies, along with a lot of administrative stuff. However, what we mostly focus on is maintenance, safety, and capital projects. For example, we've put LED's on all the buildings in South Grand so at night the whole district lights up. We are in charge of all the cleanliness, and for this we hire our own street sweeping company. They clean the street, the parking lots, the sidewalks, then empty both the cigarette urns and trash cans. We even have a company that powers washes the sidewalk and vacuums the pervious concrete areas..."

"...I describe the pervious concrete as rice krispie treats as when it rains it's like a sponge. It absorbs. The water soaks directly into the ground instead of going to the stormwater, which helps MSD with stormwater runoff issues. We have our own landscaping company. We do not allow the city to trim the trees so we have our own arborists who trim the trees every December or so. We have an irrigation company that manages the irrigation system and the fountain at the Ritz Park. So, we maintain all that. The city doesn't do anything within South Grand CID..."

"...I like to describe my job as the a cover of a book. That is to say make sure that cover looks as pretty as possible for you to want to open that book. The local businesses are the pages in the book. So, it's my job to get people along South Grand and it is their job to get them in the door. We design a brochure, we have a web site, and we are on social media..."

"...As a community improvement district we cannot apply for grants because we are a governmental entity. For this reason we formed a non-profit arm called the South Grand Cultural Alliance. The Board of Directors consists of local residents and business owners. In any community you have to keep up with the changes in the times. So right now, our concentration is creating focus groups in South Grand and the surrounding neighborhoods. Why do you live here now? Why did you move here? We want to make sure one day when we do an entry marker to the district, that it reflects the history and the people in the community. We want our community identity to leave a legacy and be part of the history of St. Louis..."

"...Many of the property owners are Bosnian and they are part of the Bosnian Chamber of Commerce. They are talking with each other knowing we need to do something to improve the business district and get more people here. They have that communication. Yet when you try to form a taxing district a community no one is talking to each other. It's kind of difficult but part of my job. At the moment we are trying to develop north we need 51% approval but we are at 33% right now. We are just going to see eventually if we can get the signatures we need to make it happen. Specifically what we decide to go north or south. I just think that they need a forum or a business association to foster the community to get together, talk to each other and get to know each other. The community board could decide and oversee how the local money is spent. However, if they're not even talking to each other or telling us what their needs are, how are we to go in and tell them what they need to do? It's paramount to determine what do they want and what does the community want around the neighborhood?"

"...We had so much vacant property being rehabbed. So, I think for the IISTL's particular site on South Grand we need to think more about commercial and job opportunities. Again, Gravois Park is a dense neighborhood. I think you need to do something related to creating jobs for the people in the neighborhood. There are a lot of other developments happening around the adjacent neighborhood..."
"...Four and a half years ago I decided to start a business. I've always been very interested in social change and social enterprise, a way in which you can earn a living and yet get something good in whatever capacity you can. So I was fortunate enough to connect with a non-profit organization based in St. Louis called Partners for Just Trade (PJT). PJT is a member of the Fair Trade Federation. I did a lot of volunteer work with them, so I learned a lot about fair trade and about social enterprise change."

"...I wanted to launch a fair trade business. Like anyone living in the US knows, funding is everything. So I got $1,000 out of our savings account and I went to buy a few pieces from Fair Trade suppliers. I wanted to try selling them at an event and see what happened. By the surprise, almost half of the table was gone by the end of the day. So I invested back into the business by buying more items. Before I knew it, two and a half years later I had built a business that was probably $20,000 worth of inventory and a yearly revenue close to $100,000. This was just on a part-time basis because I was still full-time employed. I had a family and I just finished my MBA, so it was very clear at that point - two years into this - that in order to continue to grow the next logical step would be opening a bricks and mortar store..."

"...The community around here is just super supportive and the Zee Bee Market was a great alternative for those looking for quality, hand-crafted products from around the world that also happened to serve a social cause. So it was like the perfect scenario. There's not a lot of competition in terms of gifts because there are mostly restaurants around here..."

"...So when I started with $1,000 investment it was a little bit of 'let's see if this works'. I had to try to be very diverse in terms of the content, so I bought a selection of housewares, jewelry, handbags, and kids products to sell. There was a little bit of everything. To my surprise, a pleasant surprise I have to say, almost everything sold well. I did not go for a model that was super low and cheap in terms of price. I wanted to do something in the middle of the road or higher, because I wanted to sell the experience of Fair Trade which is quality and uniqueness. Customers did not hesitate to pay $30 or $40 for an item such as jewelry that was exquisitely made. So that was a good lesson and as I continued on this mobile retail mode, every time I would bring products I had to test them. For example, you had let's say 100 units, you could tell which retail the customers gravitated towards. So then you buy more of what they want and less of what they don't want..."

"...As a partner of PJT, you have to bank on a minimum of 90% of your inventory to be sourced from Fair Trade Federation suppliers. This means that the bulk of the inventory should be handcrafted by artists from around the world. With the remaining 10% the business owner can choose to support anyone whom he or she feels is appropriate; artists that fit within your business model or your mission. I have been approached by some artisans who have come to the US as refugees, who are very talented, and he or she would like to create products. The piece that we need to work on as a for-profit business is to make sure that if I pay X amount of dollars for what somebody has created, that first it is 'fair', and second it is something that can be a good fit for the store. Whatever cost I pay I translate into a retail equivalent and then I ask, 'Is this a price that my customer is willing to pay?'..."

"...Before I started and decided to launch Zee Bee Market as a fair trade business I was toying with all these ideas. I had hoped to start a business that would employ homeless or prison convicts who have left the system or people who were just desperately wanting to find jobs and could not. I was hoping to put these folks into spaces where they could create things. Whether their skill is in ceramics, woodworking, welding, or whatever ability they have to offer a sort of training space to create beautiful things that can be eventually sold. Not because I wanted to give anybody a handout, but to give them chance to rejoin society, to get dignified work, and earn a living."

"...The community around here is just super supportive and the Zee Bee Market was a great alternative for those looking for quality, hand-crafted products from around the world that also happened to serve a social cause. So it was like the perfect scenario. There's not a lot of competition in terms of gifts because there are mostly restaurants around here..."