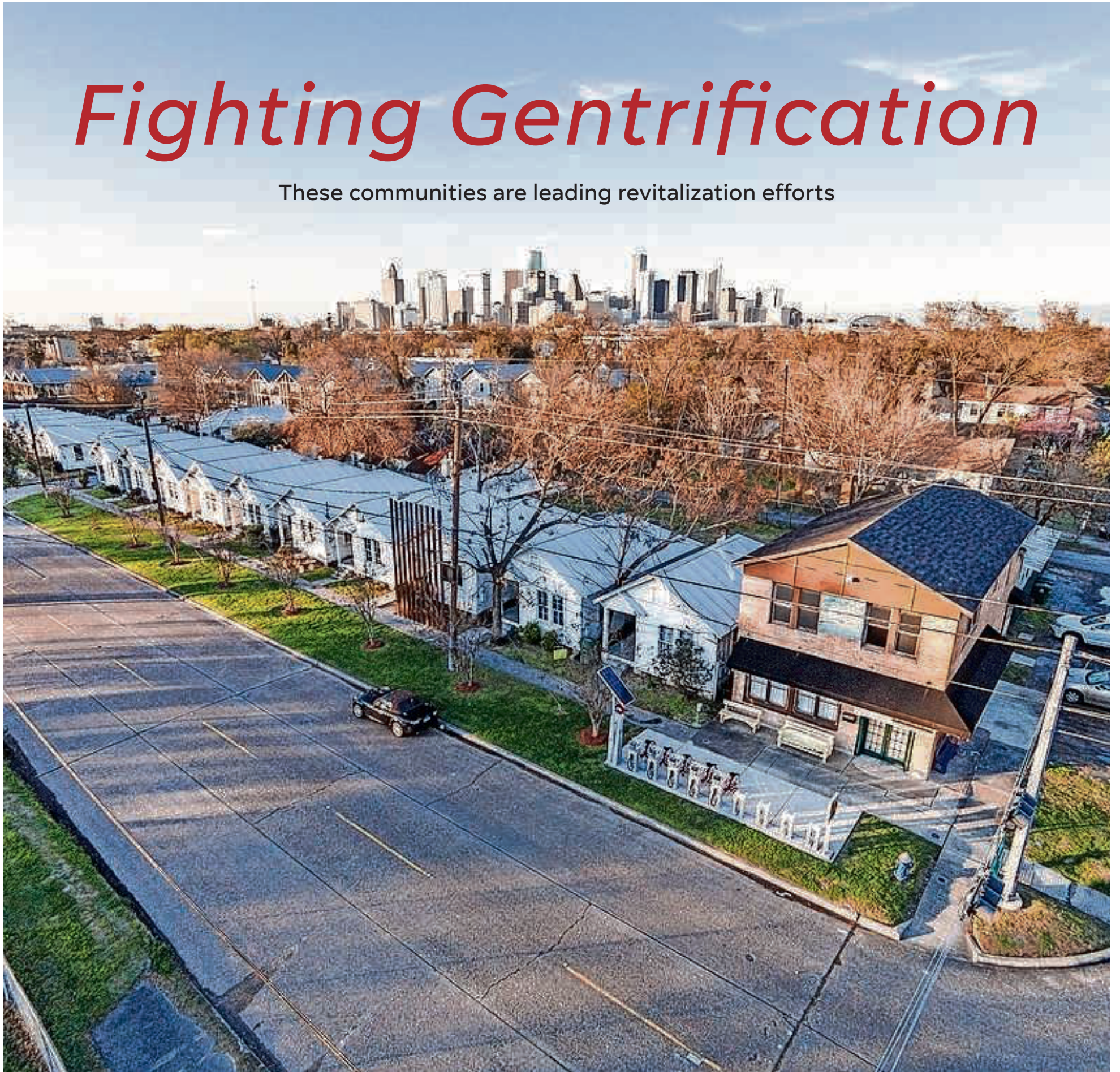


# *Fighting Gentrification*

These communities are leading revitalization efforts



**Project Row Houses occupies a significant footprint in Houston's Historic Third Ward, one of the city's oldest African American neighborhoods. The site encompasses five city blocks and includes 39 structures that serve as a home base to a variety of community-enriching initiatives and neighborhood development activities. PETER MOLICK/PROJECT ROW HOUSES**



GETTY IMAGES

### Lynn Brown

Long-term economic injustices have left many historically African American communities around the country in disrepair. Efforts to revitalize these neighborhoods have often led to widespread gentrification, which increases home values and prices out former residents, destroys local culture and obscures important moments in history. However, in a few areas, community organizations are pushing back on this trend and offering residents ways to improve their own neighborhoods while also honoring and preserving their cultural roots.

In the Bronzeville district of Chicago — also known as the city’s “Black Metropolis” — the Quad Communities Development Corporation (QCDC) works with community partners to improve the quality of life for the neighborhood’s current residents. The organization particularly focuses on the area’s small businesses, which are largely women- and minority-owned. “We provide whatever is needed,” says Rhonda McFarland, QCDC’s executive director. “Our services include group trainings, workshops, information sessions, one-on-one technical consultations, resource identification and referral matching.”

One important aspect of the organization is that it also works directly with developers and landlords, many of whom are not from the community, to help ensure that they’re renting out space to small business owners from within it. “We’re really curating spaces and curating businesses that are next to each other that will help each other thrive,” McFarland explains.

In Houston, Project Row Houses works with under-resourced communities, including the city’s historic Third Ward, to offer neighborhood development and community enrichment opportunities such as historic preservation, small-business incubators and arts programs.

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Project Row Houses’ Eldorado Ballroom is located at 2310 Elgin Street in Houston. The historic venue, which has welcomed generations of Third Ward residents for dancing, celebrations and special occasions, has undergone a complete rehabilitation. LUCILLE’S HOSPITALITY GROUP



Rhonda McFarland, executive director of Quad Communities Development Corporations (QCDC), works to ensure current communities are getting the resources they need. KAYEKAYE PHOTOGRAPHY



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**Rhonda McFarland**  
executive director, Quad Communities Development Corporation in Chicago



Raised vegetable beds are tended at Lucille's 1913's community garden in Houston. LUCILLE'S HOSPITALITY GROUP



**Houston chef Chris Williams is the founder of Lucille's Hospitality Group. The philanthropic division of his company, Lucille's 1913, partnered with Project Row Houses to revitalize the Eldorado Ballroom.** DAVID "ODIWAMS" WRIGHT/LUCILLE'S HOSPITALITY GROUP

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Its most recent project, in collaboration with Lucille's 1913, the philanthropic arm of Lucille's Hospitality Group, was the restoration and reimagination of the historic Eldorado Ballroom. Built in 1939, the building was once a hot spot for Black musicians such as Ella Fitzgerald, B.B. King and others, as well as a community linchpin. Today the building also houses the Hogan Brown Gallery, an exhibition and education space for local artists, and Rado Market, a café and community market, as well as the restored music venue located upstairs.

Lucille's 1913's founder, chef Chris Williams, says the ballroom's significance is the top draw in the community. "We're trying to re-create these partnerships that we know existed back in the heyday of the ballroom," he says. To this end, the venue and gallery offer space for local talent to mingle and learn from the greats, the café offers picnic baskets that encourage visits to the nearby Emancipation Park and "all profits go back into programming and subsidizing people from

the community who want to host events here," Williams says.

In Baltimore, the Downtown BOOST Program is helping African American entrepreneurs start small businesses in the city's downtown area, including the historically Black Howard Street corridor. The program offers grants of up to \$50,000 that can be used to build out space in historic downtown buildings or to help with the setup of retail space. The program also offers affordable leasing in one of seven locations. The outcome is exponential, not only serving to increase the number of Black-owned businesses in the city and helping to revitalize an area in disrepair, but also preserving the overall historic character of the neighborhood itself.

These and other programs offer proof that uplifting, rather than uprooting, a neighborhood can be done. The benefits of working with the local community go beyond just financial assistance. These community projects work to preserve the history, character and soul of these neighborhoods, and serve as a blueprint for future efforts across the country.