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**Guide to
The Good Life
Chicago**

August 2025

Buy Black Month

South Shore

Buy Black

Gen-Z Restaurant Guide

Auburn Gresham

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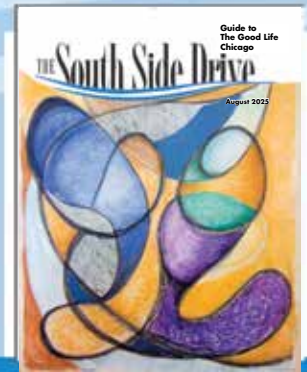


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August 2025

THE South Side Drive

GUIDE TO THE GOOD LIFE CHICAGO



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By Emma Young



The South Side Drive Magazine is published by Real Men Charities, Inc. This organization's mission is to build healthy families and communities. The magazine is designed to be a catalyst for economic development, reflecting a truthful image and examples that demonstrate the art of living. Month to month, we share the good news about Chicago's south side and Black culture and serve as the Guide to the Good Life in our city. We are placemakers and keepers of the culture.

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Publisher's Message



This month's cover art, a bold tribute to culture and community, was created by the talented Kiela Smith—southside muralist, visual artist, consultant, and co-founder of Artists Design for the Future. Her creativity reflects the vibrant energy of our community and this issue.

August is Buy Black Month, and with it, we recognize not just commerce—but commitment. We honor those who dare to dream, create, serve, and sustain. And we spotlight those building legacy and economy in the very communities they call home.

For the past decade, South Shore residents and neighbors from across Chicago have gathered at the South Shore Summer Festival—a joyful celebration of music, business, and unity. After the fight to save what was once South Shore Country Club and integrate the Beach, this became sacred space for our culture, from the legendary South Shore Jazz Festivals to many of our own Real Men Cook Father's Day celebrations, one most memorable with live artist performances including the legendary Oscar Brown Jr. with his young daughter, Maggie Brown.

In this issue, LaShawn Brown, SSA #42 Program Manager for the South Shore Chamber of Commerce, captures the energy of the upcoming 11th Annual South Shore Summer Festival. She also shares how the Chamber continues to be a vital engine of economic opportunity. It's fitting that we uplift this organization during

Buy Black Month, as they've stood at the intersection of culture and commerce for years.

Hampton University student and South Side Drive contributor, Karmen Hodge, gives us a taste of the southside through her Gen Z Foodie lens. Her guide to the Black-owned restaurants she's selected is a must-read—and a must-eat. After reading her article, you'll wander to carry it in with you to find a soulful, satisfying meal that supports hardworking, mostly first-generation entrepreneurs.

Natalie Noble reminds us that supporting Black businesses isn't just about spending—it's about investing. Her powerful article explains why ownership and capital matter, and how we can all be part of the movement to build generational wealth in Black communities.

We also spotlight BECOME, an organization that exemplifies what's possible when transformation is rooted in collective vision. Under the leadership of Dr. Dominica McGuire, BECOME has helped ignite real change in neighborhoods like Auburn Gresham. Their work proves that when communities are heard, healing and hope follow.

And finally, we pause to honor two giants we lost in July—people whose contributions lifted us all.

Renee Ferguson, a trailblazing investigative journalist, dedicated her life to uncovering truth and demanding justice. Her courage reshaped local media and empowered generations to speak truth to power.

Malcolm-Jamal Warner, who we first met as a beloved “Cosby kid,” grew into an accomplished actor and a strong voice for cultural pride, Black dignity, and social justice. We salute his mother who managed his career, and his father for, in Malcolm's words “setting me up to succeed,” by providing a solid foundation of Black history and insisting he read and write reports on Black achievers and Black leaders, especially his namesakes, Malcolm X and Ahmad Jamal.

May their lives inspire us. May their legacies guide us.

And may this issue of South Side Drive Magazine—powered by art, culture, youth, wisdom, and Black excellence—remind us that buying Black is more than a transaction. It's a declaration. A love language. A movement.

Yvette Moyo


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South Shore Summer Festival: A Rhythm Rooted in Us

By LaShawn Brown - SSA #42 Program Manager, South Shore Chamber of Commerce

Each August, a familiar rhythm rises from Chicago's South Shore lakefront—DJ beats, laughter, soulful vocals, and the vibe of community in celebration. That rhythm is the South Shore Summer Festival, our neighborhood's largest and most anticipated cultural affair, returning this year for its 11th annual gathering on Sunday, August 24, 2024, from 12 PM to 8 PM at the historic South Shore Cultural Center Beach.

What began as a local showcase has grown into a signature tradition. Drawing crowds of up to 10,000 annually, this free and family-friendly event honors the rich artistic legacy of Chicago's South Side while casting a hopeful gaze toward its future. This year's headline performance by Grammy Award-winning artist October London anchors a dynamic lineup of local performers, DJs, art vendors, food trucks, and community service providers. It's our own version of Ravinia—only with a skyline view, right on the lakefront, and heartened by South Shore pride.

Festivalgoers can expect multi-genre grooves that reflect the depth of South Shore's musical DNA—from hip hop, blues, and jazz to R&B, neo-soul, Afro-Caribbean, gospel, and Chicago house music. Whether you're vibing on the lawn or dancing barefoot on the beach, the soundtrack connects generations and celebrates the diversity of Black musical expression.

Chicago-style stepping and line dancing, deeply rooted in Chicago's social tradition, also take center stage. These collective movement experiences remind us that our cul-

ture is not just preserved, but alive and evolving—right here at home.

The festival is produced by Special Service Area #42 (SSA #42) and administered by the South Shore Chamber of Commerce, with valued support from 5th Ward Alderman Desmon Yancy, whose partnership over the past three years has bolstered the festival's growth and the community vision behind it.

Behind the scenes, I manage much of the day-to-day planning and coordination that brings this festival to life—from vendor engagement and permits to timelines, logistics, and on-site execution—as part of the dedicated team at the South Shore Chamber of Commerce. It's part of a broader, year-round commitment through SSA #42 to provide essential services like armed security patrols, litter abatement, landscaping, corridor beautification, and public programming that supports South Shore's economic and cultural vitality.

These efforts are not just about beautifying the corridor—they're about building the local economy, restoring community confidence, and reversing long-standing disinvestment. Claritas Retail Market Power Report indicates that yearly, an estimated \$845 million in consumer spending leaks out of South Shore due to corridor vacancy, lack of retail offerings, and lack of site control. Our goal is to redirect that spending power back into our own neighborhood—supporting jobs, entrepreneurship, and culturally relevant businesses that keep dollars circulating at home.

The Chamber, as Lead Convenor of the South Shore Quality of Life Plan (QLP), has aligned its economic strategies—like the festival—with that broader vision for neighborhood revitalization which also includes Housing, Education, Public Safety, Health & Wellness and more. Under the QLP we engage stakeholders in shaping and implementing a community-rooted roadmap.

One of the most exciting components of the QLP is its corridor revitalization strategies. To meet this challenge, SSCCDC launched Corridor Live! South Shore, the pilot neighborhood for Community Desk Chicago's CorridorLive! Framework - a comprehensive model for neighborhood revitalization. CorridorLive! incorporates storefront activation, technical assistance, tenant recruitment, capital coordination, marketing, and physical improvements. The initiative is backed by public, philanthropic, and private investment, including support from the City of Chicago. Our goal is to expand this program to other commercial corridors throughout South Shore, such as Exchange Avenue and 75th Street.

The South Shore CDC has also launched the Community Investment Vehicle (CIV), a legal mechanism designed for residents to pool their resources together to acquire mixed-use buildings and regain control of community assets and many troubled or underutilized buildings. In partnership with Eric Williams of The Silver Room, we've also expanded programming with events like Connect+South+Shore, reinforcing that art, commerce, and community building are inseparable in our vision for revitalization.

We are also addressing critical vacancies—like the former Walgreens at 71st and Jeffery, which remains under lease until 2031. This is more than just a storefront—it sits at an anchor intersection and transportation hub for South Shore, connecting CTA and Metra transit lines, and is located less than a mile from the forthcoming Obama Presidential Center. We're actively working to prevent long-term vacancy and activate the space, ensuring this pivotal location reflects vitality, access, and opportunity—not abandonment.

With Metra connectivity, stunning beaches, golf courses, yacht clubs, and the Obama Presidential Center within walking distance, South Shore has the bones of an international destination. But it's our culture, our vision, and our unified strategy that will determine how—and for whom—that future unfolds.

The South Shore Summer Festival is more than an event.

It's a marker of where we've been, and a glimpse of what's possible when we lead with pride, work in partnership, and invest in the places we call home.

"The South Shore Summer Festival is the most highly anticipated annual event in the community, drawing residents and visitors from across the city. Its continued growth and success are evident in the rising number of attendees each year and the caliber of mainstream talent it attracts. In addition to providing vibrant entertainment, the festival delivers a meaningful economic boost to local small businesses, vendors, and merchants who participate."

Tonya Trice, Executive Director of the South Shore Chamber and founding Director of the South Shore CDC.



BLACK OWNED BUSINESS

Buy Black *Invest in Our Future*

By Natalie R. Noble



When we hear “Buy Black,” our minds

often go straight to fashion brands or favorite soul food spots. And while supporting Black-owned restaurants and clothing lines is beautiful

and necessary, the concept of Buying Black has to evolve. It’s time we shift our lens and understand that buying Black also means investing Black. Putting our dollars, resources, and networks into the sustainability and future of Black-owned businesses.

A recent article in Block Club Chicago reshaped how Real Men Charities and The Quarry principal view the Buy Black movement. The piece highlighted how some southside businesses are turning to crowdfunding as a lifeline to stay afloat amid rising costs and shrinking support. South Side Drive Magazine publisher, Yvette

Moyo, emphasized that community backing has to go beyond the cash register. It has to extend into advocacy, promotion, and investment. And she’s right.

I’ve spent the past eight years as the founder of NR Media Agency, where my mission has always been to amplify and elevate Black-owned businesses, particularly those rooted in the South Side of Chicago. Through marketing, branding, digital strategy, and one-on-one education, I’ve helped countless entrepreneurs understand the power of systems, resources, business credit, and capital. But even with those tools, success isn’t guaranteed without community.

I’ve lost clients not because they lacked talent or passion, but because the community didn’t show up. And when Black-owned businesses close their doors, it’s not just a loss for the owner, it’s a ripple effect. We lose jobs. We lose safe spaces. We lose ownership. We lose economic power.

That's why Buying Black must go deeper.

- Share their posts.
- Donate if you can't shop.
- Offer your network or expertise.
- Support their crowdfunding campaigns.
- Invest when possible.

We can't keep preaching about rebuilding the village if we're not also financing it. Investing in Black businesses is investing in Black futures. It creates jobs for our people. It helps us produce higher-quality goods and services for our communities. It builds pride and presence on blocks that have long been overlooked.

Investing in Black business also means investing in Black media. Subscribe to, advertise with, and purchase copies of publications like South Side Drive. A platform that amplifies our stories, our voices, and our victories. Our narratives matter, and keeping them alive is vital to the movement.

Economic power is a community effort, and we all have a role to play. Let's stop thinking of Buying Black as a one-time transaction and start treating it like a legacy-building decision.

Because when our businesses win, we WIN.

Natalie Noble is founder and CEO of NR Media Agency.



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Auburn Gresham: From Voices to Vision

A Blueprint for Community-Led Change

By Emma Young

Dr. Dominica McBride, author of “Becoming Change Makers” is a change-maker herself. For over twelve years, Dr McBride, through her organization, BECOME has been engaged in community transformation work throughout Chicago, and specifically in the Auburn Gresham community.

BECOME is a 501 C 3 nonprofit community transformation organization which Dr. McBride says “is grounded in the deep belief that the community has the answers, the brilliance, the wisdom, and the talent to create the conditions that they want and deserve. And so, we work with them through cultures, lots of practice, through compassion and using tools like evaluation, research, facilitation and strategy and solution building to co-create those solutions with community with organizations, evaluating them to make sure they’re creating the effective change that they want and help it to be sustainable.”

So far, BECOME, has done the work in over 50 communities across Chicagoland through partnership, through working in and with communities. BECOME has worked with over 90 organizations in Chicago and beyond. “We do both local and national work,” she said, “but we’re very much Chicago-based, with a passion for Chicago communities.

Although BECOME does a lot of work around the south and west sides of Chicago, she tells us that “on top of working with multiple communities, we have a long-term deep commitment to the Auburn Gresham



neighborhood.” That deep commitment is shown through twelve years of providing program evaluation, strategic planning, facilitation and training in Auburn-Gresham.

The work that Dr. Dominica and her organization has been doing with and in the Auburn-Gresham community expresses their passion and commitment through an amazing report called, The Culturally Responsive Community Transformation initiative (CRCT).

The CRCT, which I’ll refer to as the Report, in its executive summary, introduces Auburn Gresham as a historically rich and resilient neighborhood in Chicago which stands as a community with boundless potential despite facing challenges such as economic instability, violence and health disparities. It states that despite facing these challenges, the people of Auburn Gresham possess profound wisdom, strength and the capacity for transformation.

The Culturally Responsive Community Transformation initiative by BECOME was generated in collaboration with True Believers Community Connections (TBCC) and the Greater Auburn Gresham Development Corporation (GAGCD).

The Executive Summary explains that “over two years, BECOME engaged more than 150 residents and local stakeholders through “Hope and Community Chats,” to capture their insights, needs and hopes for the future.



The collective feedback revealed a powerful desire for community-driven change across four priority areas: youth development safety, economic vitality and community care.”

The Report focuses on the community vision for Auburn Gresham, which is “to build a ‘beautiful, flourishing village’ where residents care deeply for each other and their surroundings.” In this vision, Auburn Gresham is a community of abundance and unity, where relationships, resources and skills flow through families, homes and local businesses, fueling shared dreams and collective success. Auburn Gresham is imagined as a place of peace, safety and self-governance – where residents own their neighborhoods, from homes and green spaces to businesses and community hubs. “It is a community grounded in healing and resilience, rising above historical challenges to create a prosperous future for all.”

Dr. McBride creatively harkens back to African American cultural wisdom and the symbol of the Sankofa bird to bring us back to the beginning of Auburn Gresham’s evolution of change, through the voices of long-time residents who tell of how Auburn Gresham transitioned

from a predominantly white community to a majority Black neighborhood over seventy-five plus years.

The Report speaks of the devastating shifts in violence, relationships, ascetics and poverty over the decades, and the gains in art infrastructure development and resources which have been recent occurrences.

It is evident from the Report, that the residents crave healthy community relationships. They emphasized the importance of caring for those most vulnerable, those who are struggling and insuring they have their needs met. Keeping neighborhoods clean and well-maintained through caring for yards, open spaces, empty lots and streets. They spoke of uplifting art and nature, and having more celebrations to celebrate the community for its strength and culture.

One of the most important concerns voiced by residents was family, which many said was their main source of happiness that uplifted, supported and ultimately saved them. All family, to these residents, is not biological. Many spoke of how they have “made family,” creating their own extended family network and how they would



Other priorities highlighted in the plan are Youth Essentials, centering on education; Community Safety, focusing on creating and/or scaling practices of community safety, where community members address issues, create and maintain peace and are equipped to respond to what is happening in the neighborhood before, or in place of calling the police, and economy, beginning with strengthening relationships with business owners and cultivating entrepreneurs from the community.

Operating from the belief that the systems that are operating in our communities now are oppressive, and there is a need to build new systems and structure for the well-being and liberation of community residents, Dr. Dominica states that this Report is just one step in their system building process. They chose the name of the organization as BECOME because pursuing the plans through the voices of the community will lead to the community becoming the places of their dreams.

The awesome transformation that has taken place in the Auburn Gresham community is evidence of what can become when shared visions, shared hopes and shared values bring a community together for change.

To learn more about BECOME, or to read the Report in its entirety, visit Becomecenter.org.

like people on the block to do that for each other.

A couple of the community respondents were:

Moses Williams, who serves as the executive director of Stein Learning Gardens an urban farm initiative in Auburn Gresham. His work with gardens aims to address food insecurity, by providing fresh produce and educating the community on sustainable agriculture.

Coretta J. Pruitt, aka CJ. She moved away from Auburn Gresham, the community she grew up in, to pursue higher education in community technology. Twenty-eight years ago, she returned and actively participates in community activities such as block club parties, CAPS meetings and advocates for community safety.

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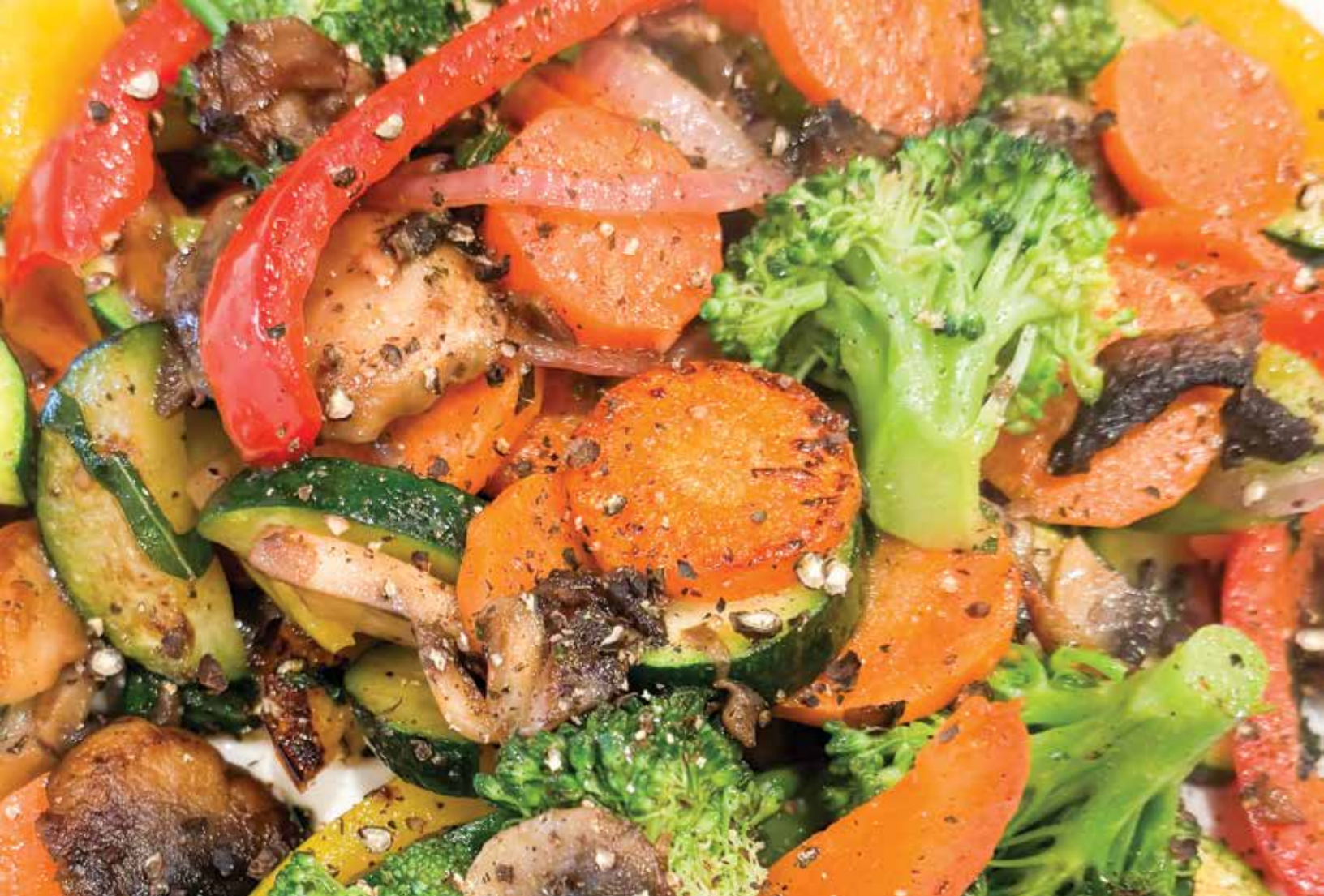
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A Generation Z Guide *To Black-Owned Restaurants*

By Karmen Hodge



I chose these southside Chicago restaurants because they represent more than just good food—they reflect the heart, history, and culture of Black Chicago. Each spot offers a unique taste of tradition, innovation, and community pride, whether it's through soulful recipes passed down through generations or creative twists on classic dishes.

These Black-Owned establishments are deeply rooted in the neighborhoods they serve, providing not only delicious meals but also spaces of connection, resilience, and cultural celebration. Supporting them means investing in local legacy, flavor, and entrepreneurship.

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