

NEIGHBORHOOD NEWS

WINTER 2023



JUDO: FOR WHEN LIFE KNOCKS YOU DOWN



Ross Center's Judo Academy teaches strength, self-confidence and discipline on and off the mat.

When students bow their heads and step onto mats for judo training at Muncie's Ross Community Center, they learn far more than martial arts throws. Students gain discipline, self-confidence and strength along with social connection and problem-solving skills.

Carey Mountcastle, who has taught the weekly class since 2016, said judo instills "maximum efficiency with mutual benefit and welfare," which means students work toward their full potential to contribute to the betterment of the world. The unarmed Japanese martial art is also centering and relieves stress, he added.

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SPREADING LOVE, ONE BRUSH STROKE AT A TIME

Muncie has become a canvas for striking, stylistic murals on building exteriors across town. Their vibrant colors and inspiring images uplift neighborhoods and encourage residents to slow down and admire their surroundings. Some murals invite meaningful conversations about Muncie's heritage and history.

A tour of murals on the south side of Muncie illustrates the heart behind the art. Through different styles and mediums, artists share how their work is a way to give a piece of themselves back to the city many of them call home. These artists are using their brushes to make Muncie as beautiful as the people who make it a community.



Muncie native Eric Ward created this romantic mural on the side of Tom Cherry Muffler on Eighth Street. The wall art depicts the old Tom Cherry building, where Cherry served racers across the Midwest.

"I'm bringing back people's memories," Ward said. "And that's what all these artists have actually added to this town, that's what they're doing. They're bringing the town back to life again. And bringing memories back."

SMALL SPARKS TO IGNITE BIG CHANGE

The 8twelve Coalition's Small Sparks grants funded 16 projects from residents (both youth and adults) that focus on community engagement, health and wellness, youth activities and more. Highlights from the 2023 recipients include new food storage solutions at The Common Market, new patio furniture at Rosebud Coffee House, fairy garden kits, and care kits for kids in crisis.

Muncie native Casey Eichenlaub is a man of action. He sees a problem and figures out a way to fix it. If the problem involves power tools, even better.

In 2020, Eichenlaub secured a Small Sparks grant from the 8twelve Coalition to build fence posts for his Thomas Park/Avondale neighbors. This year, he was awarded the grant to complete home repairs, mostly to water heaters and HVAC systems.

“Working and helping neighbors gives me so much life. Fixing homes is a way to give back to a community that has helped me from so much hardship,” he said. “Everyone needs help at some point, and people can change at any age; they just need a push in the right direction: “Who will you push?”

Eichenlaub's focus on service developed when he needed that push. Struggles with addiction led him to the Muncie Mission's Liberty Street Recovery Program, which is a year-long program that walks residents through 12 steps to healing and sobriety.

He graduated from the program in 2019 and began working as a project manager for ecoREHAB, a Muncie nonprofit that rehabilitates homes using

sustainable practices. Jason Haney, ecoREHAB executive director, said Eichenlaub's journey to recovery inspired the organization to partner with Eastern Indiana Works and Ball State University to create a Skilled Trades Education Program, or STEP, for at-risk, under or unemployed youth in Muncie.

The free, 16-week program provides participants with an hourly wage, educational advancement, and experience in the trades of carpentry, electrical, HVAC, masonry and plumbing.

Eichenlaub said the success of STEP inspired him to apply for the Small Sparks grants. That's how supporting others works, he added: “When someone gives you a hand, you want to give a hand to others.”

“Seeing how the program turned out and just the tiny impact it made on kids in the community, as well as it being implemented in a bigger scope in the ecoREHAB program, caused me to want to help do projects on my own,” he said.

The 8twelve Coalition calls out for Small Sparks grant applications on its Facebook page each, or you can email 8twelvecoalition@gmail.com to learn more about these awards, which are up to \$500 each year.



Casey Eichenlaub has received two Small Sparks grants to improve the homes of his neighbors.



Among the 16 projects in 2023, kids decorated fairy gardens to beautify their yards.

COVID-19 AND FLU VACCINES

Fight the Flu — for Free

The CDC recommends everyone 6 months and older get a flu vaccine every season to prevent sickness and missing work and school. If you get the flu, the vaccine can make symptoms less severe and reduce the risk of hospitalization.

Open Door Health Services provides FREE flu shots for ages 5+ at special events throughout East Central Indiana. Go to opendoorhs.org/flu for a list of flu shot events near you. (Flu shots are also available at Open Door sites, and insurance will be billed when available).

Time to get Boosted: COVID-19 Sites

Vaccination remains the most effective prevention against hospitalization and death from COVID-19. If it's been at least two months since your last COVID vaccine, and if you haven't had the updated vaccine, then it's time to get the updated vaccine.

The CDC recommended everyone 6 months and older get an updated COVID-19 vaccine to protect against the potentially serious outcomes of the virus. Learn more, and find your eligibility, at cdc.gov.

Established Open Door Patients

Open Door offers no-cost COVID-19 vaccines to established Open Door patients. Vaccination is by appointment. Call 765-286-7000 to schedule your appointment.

Community Vaccination Clinics (open to the public)

Open Door offers the updated COVID-19 vaccine to any eligible community member from noon-6 p.m. on the second Thursday of each month through March (Dec. 14, Jan. 11, Feb. 8 and March 14) at its downtown Muncie location, 333 S. Madison St.

While you will not receive a bill, insurance will be billed when available; be sure to bring your insurance card if you have coverage. Vaccinations are available to everyone 6 months and older.

THANK YOU FOR YOUR STORIES AND VISION

In the spring and summer of 2023, the 8twelve Coalition wrapped up a five-year data collection process to learn more about resident perceptions of the quality of life in the neighborhood and how it has changed in the past few years.

Thank you to all those who took time to complete the survey and offer feedback during the listening sessions and focus groups. The coalition is made up of residents and organizations working together to improve quality of life in South Central and Thomas Park/Avondale. Hearing from residents is vital to address issues and to celebrate successes.



Many residents shared stories of the neighborhood being seen as the “other side of the tracks,” with vivid memories of intergroup tensions and threats of violence.

We heard you, and we are working hard to analyze the data and stories we collected during this process. We look forward to sharing the results and next steps with you soon.

FACES OF SOUTH CENTRAL

Meet your neighbors + Tell us your story



“Our community is strong because we know we can look to each other when things are difficult and count on each other to face challenges together.”

— **Lezlie McCrory**, South Central Neighborhood Association president and pastor of civic engagement at Urban Light Community Church



“The people and community the 8twelve Coalition serves is one of the most underrepresented communities in Indiana. The needs are so great and varied that no one agency or group can even begin to make an impact, but together we can make a difference.”

— **Jason Newman**, chief executive officer of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Muncie

Email us at 8twelvecoalition@gmail.com to tell your story or share a memory, concern or hope for the neighborhood.



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8TWELVE COALITION OPEN HOUSE INVITES NEIGHBORS TO CONNECT, SHARE AND GROW

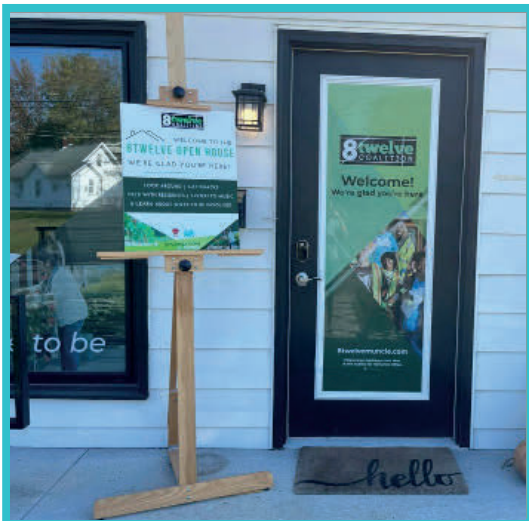
On a beautiful, warm October afternoon, community members gathered for an open house to celebrate the 8twelve Coalition office space, at 1424 S. Hoyt Ave. The office includes space for the 8twelve staff as well as meeting space for neighbors and partners working together to improve the quality of life in the Thomas Park/Avondal and South Central neighborhoods.

Attendees enjoyed snacks, learned about ways to support the coalition's work, and listened to a brief message from 8twelve Director, Jena Ashby.

South Central neighbors James Sandberg and Lincoln Arthur provided live music, while Thomas Park/Avondale neighbor Michelle Heimlich photographed the event.



Neighbors shared how to support the 8twelve's mission to improve the quality of life in Muncie.



The office includes a lending library and meeting space for residents.



8twelve Director Jena Ashby officially opens the office on Hoyt Ave. The Greater Muncie Chamber of Commerce helped with the ribbon cutting.

HALLOWEEN IN SOUTH CENTRAL

South Central neighbors enjoyed a spook-tacular time on Halloween during the 8twelve Coalition's Sixth Annual Trick or Treat at the Jefferson Street Pocket Park. The South Central Neighborhood Association served up hot dogs, and neighbors decorated porches. Thanks to all who participated!



THAI KITCHEN: SPICING UP SOUTH CENTRAL

Fresh and flavorful made-to-order dishes that bring neighbors to the table

Paxon Vong opened Thai Kitchen 20 years ago to offer Muncie a diverse fusion of Southeast Asian cuisine. The native of Thailand makes every dish to order, with notes of sweet and sour, salty and spicy flavors paired in soups, stews, noodles and rice dishes.

“I want to keep something in a small town like Muncie,” Vong said. “You order, I cook. It has to be healthy and fresh.”

Michaela Williams said Thai Kitchen “gives Muncie heart.” The 27-year-old grew up a few blocks from the unassuming restaurant and has watched it draw customers for the past two decades. Williams now works there, “not for the money” but for the connections she makes with neighbors and regulars.

“Working here has impacted my view of the community. I’ve become close with a lot of the people who eat here,” Williams said. “The food brings people together, and that speaks a lot to the effort and consistency Vong has put into this place.”

Vong said Muncie “has everything he needs” and is “kind of perfect.”

Thai Kitchen, located at 1413 S. Walnut St., is open from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. and then again from 5-9 p.m., Monday through Saturday. Call 765-288-4786 to place an order.



Owner and chef Paxon Vong draws from his childhood in Thailand to create every dish on Thai Kitchen's menu.



Thai Kitchen, located on 1413 South Walnut St., has served authentic Southeast Asian cuisine for the past 20 years.

JUDO CONTINUED ...

“You come in from the hustle and bustle of working and raising a family, and all of a sudden you’re on the judo mat and the only thing you focus on for two hours is judo,” said Mountcastle, who is a financial adviser at Northwestern Mutual.

Long-time judo student, Madison Norris, said judo has enhanced her academic and personal growth. The 16-year-old started training at the academy in 2015 as a fun physical activity for “someone who is not huge into sports.”

Judo has become one of her favorite activities to remain physically fit and mentally focused. Norris said the instructions have taught her to focus and develop a solid work ethic.

“Other kids who do judo, and myself included, are always the kids who have A’s because we put in the work and take the extra time to do stuff that other kids are like ‘bare minimum was enough for me,’” said Norris, who attends Muncie Central High School.

The academy meets from 5-7 p.m. every Monday and Wednesday, and is open to anyone age 5 and up. The class costs \$20 a month per student, with \$5 for each additional student in a family. Scholarships are available.

Learn more about the judo and the center’s other programs at rosscentermuncie.org or stop by the center at 1110 W. 10th St. in Muncie.