



*This is Germantown Heart & Soul is project of*



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
Tuesday, November 15, 2016

**“This is Germantown Heart & Soul” Winter Community Gatherings**  
Ask Residents to Guide Neighborhood Development in Northwest Philadelphia  
Through Creative Participatory Planning Process, beginning November 19<sup>th</sup>

Germantown, Philadelphia, PA – **This is Germantown Heart & Soul**, a project of [Germantown United Community Development Corporation](#) (GUCDC) and [Just Act](#), will host a series of community gatherings throughout Northwest Philadelphia’s Germantown neighborhood this winter beginning on November 19, 2016. The Germantown community is invited to participate in a unique interactive group storytelling experience. Unlike traditional civic meetings and town halls, the events – called **Story Circles** – use theater as a planning tool and center on capturing the wishes, needs, and ideas of residents as they share personal stories of meaningful experiences in Germantown and what they view as essential for growth of the neighborhood’s vibrant but struggling shopping district. *A calendar of events is included below, with additional dates to be announced.*

Story Circles will be facilitated by a multigenerational “Storytelling Engagement Team” comprised of Germantown residents, with support from the Just Act Ensemble. The collected stories will guide Germantown United CDC’s future work and plans for successful, community-responsive business corridor revitalization and contribute to efforts underway to make the central business district a people-centered main street destination for the Germantown community and visitors from outside the immediate neighborhood.

“This is Germantown Heart & Soul aims to create a shared sense of belonging that ultimately improves local decision-making and strengthens social, cultural, and economic vibrancy,” said **Emaleigh Doley**, Commercial Corridor Manager at Germantown United CDC. “Germantown is one of the city’s largest neighborhoods, with a population of 44,000. It’s important to recognize that the immediate needs of residents living in the Chew and Belfield area of East Germantown might differ from those in West Germantown’s Penn-Knox section, for example. That doesn’t mean the Eastside and the Westside have nothing in common. We also all share the business district.”

A core goal of the project is to connect both the formal and informal networks contributing to community improvement efforts and operating at the micro level – from block captains to Registered Community Organizations (RCOs) and neighborhood civics with limited boundaries.

“These story sharing events build upon an interest and commitment in helping communities adapt and implement positive changes based upon the vision and experiences of all community members and create new opportunities for residents and community stakeholders to meet in-person,” said **Lisa Jo Epstein**, Executive Director of Just Act.

*This is Germantown Heart & Soul* made its public debut in the spring of 2016 through a series of successful pop-up story booths held along the business district at a variety of spaces, from the bustling intersection of Germantown and Cheltenham Avenues to the annual Juneteenth Celebration, the oldest nationally celebrated commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States, organized by the Johnson House Historic Site. The Story Engagement Team was formed in the summer and fall of 2016 and has been meeting regularly to train for and plan the upcoming Story Circles events. The

**Germantown Life Enrichment Center**, a community-oriented recreational and educational facility in the heart of Germantown at 5722 Greene Street, generously donated meeting space for the team and is one of several *This is Germantown Heart & Soul* sponsoring organizations.

**With the addition of the more intimate Story Circles series, *This is Germantown Heart & Soul* will:**

- Build, diversify, and strengthen resident engagement with and collective participation in civic process to increase impact and positively affect neighborhood-wide planning decisions;
- Strengthen resident readiness for, and engagement in the Philadelphia City Planning Commission's "Philadelphia2035" District Planning process for the Upper Northwest, slated for 2017-2018;
- Expand who participates in public processes related to real estate development and neighborhood revitalization by engaging isolated and diverse resident groups;
- Cultivate and/or improve relationships, social community cohesion and stewardship of place.

The collected data will also become the highlight of "**Community Cataloguing Data Jams**" – events in January 2017 where participants will listen to transcripts of stories from their neighbors to collectively identify and catalogue shared visions for what the community values.

## CALENDAR OF EVENTS

**The current calendar of events is included below; additional dates will be added.** All Germantown residents and community stakeholders are invited. Events are open to the public. Food and refreshments will be provided, along with live music and good cheer. Attend one or attend them all. For an up-to-date program calendar visit [facebook.com/thisisgermantownheartandsoul](https://www.facebook.com/thisisgermantownheartandsoul). Contact Germantown United CDC at 215-856-4303 or [heartandsoul@germantownunitedcdc.org](mailto:heartandsoul@germantownunitedcdc.org).

- **Saturday, November 19 from 4 – 6 p.m.**  
Location: Providence Baptist Church, 87 E. Haines Street, Philadelphia, PA 19144  
Sponsoring Community Organization: **Providence Baptist Church**
- **Monday, December 5 from 7 – 9 p.m.**  
Location: Awbury Arboretum, 1 Awbury Rd, Philadelphia, PA 19138  
Sponsoring Community Organization: **Awbury Arboretum Neighbors, Chew and Belfield Neighbors Club, and Awbury Arboretum**
- **Tuesday, December 13 from 7 – 9 p.m.**  
Location: Germantown Mennonite Church, 21 W Washington Lane, Philadelphia, PA 19144  
Sponsoring Community Organization: **Pastorius Community Garden, Men Who Care of Germantown, Germantown Mennonite Church, and Germantown Mennonite Historic Trust**

*"Places are spaces that you can remember, that you can care about and make part of your life. The world should be filled with places so vivid and distinct that they can carry significance. Places could bring emotions, recollections, people, and even ideas to mind."*  
– Donlynn Lyndon. 1996. *Chambers for A Memory Palace*. The MIT Press.

### About Germantown United Community Development Corporation

Germantown United Community Development Corporation (GUCDC) is a community-based nonprofit organization whose mission is to promote and facilitate the revitalization of the business district in the Germantown neighborhood of Northwest Philadelphia through a sustainable, creative, and community-driven approach to economic development. Vibrant commercial corridors or "Main Streets" contribute to strong neighborhoods. They provide a place to work, shop, and meet your neighbors. Through our

Targeted Corridor Management Program contract with the city's Commerce Department, Germantown United CDC provides assistance to businesses, brings planning and resources to the corridor, oversees activities to make the corridor clean and safe, and works to attract new businesses to the area. We are actively working to bolster and reinforce the vibrancy of the business district to meet the needs of the surrounding community and attract visitors from outside the immediate neighborhood. Germantown United CDC is also exploring opportunities to strengthen and diversify the mix of commercial uses in the business district, the potential to reuse vacant or underutilized properties, business and job attraction strategies, and available sources of funding to support recommended revitalization strategies.

**Website:** <http://germantownunitedcdc.org>

**Social:** [facebook.com/germantowncdc](https://www.facebook.com/germantowncdc) | [twitter.com/germantowncdc](https://twitter.com/germantowncdc) | [instagram.com/germantowncdc](https://www.instagram.com/germantowncdc)

### **About Just Act**

Just Act is a distinctive hybrid of artistic and community engagement committed to social justice. Our Ensemble of artist-educators facilitate unique theatre-based programs with non-actors that activate and nurture meaningful dialogue, reflection, healing and action around complex, often divisive social issues. Just Act is committed to building and fortifying inclusive, restorative civic engagement through partnerships across sectors and differences. Informed by Theatre of the Oppressed and other art and activist strategies, our work is a creative catalyst for community activism and personal change. In all we undertake, Just Act renews and deepens the capacity of social change seekers and makers to stand up for justice on personal, inter-group and systemic levels with compassion and renewed courage. In these times of anxiety, bustle and disconnection, Just Act offers refreshing, participatory “refuel zones” to creatively pause and attend to tension and fractured relations – particularly around race, culture, and socio-economic disparities – to reweave connections and grow empathy, understanding and action plans.

**Website:** <http://www.justact.org>

**Social:** [facebook.com/justact.today](https://www.facebook.com/justact.today) | [twitter.com/JustActToday](https://twitter.com/JustActToday)

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