

From Blight to Beauty Along the Dexter–Linwood Cordon

By Cecily McPherson

Vibrancy, community, safety: three aspects that Ron Matten, founder of Demographic Inspirations–Detroit, envisions for the future of the Dexter–Linwood Cordon.

The Dexter–Linwood Cordon spans eight residential blocks between Linwood and Dexter, just under a mile from the Joe Louis Greenway, in Detroit’s Hope Village neighborhood.

Within these eight blocks, Ron has acquired several vacant lots that have fallen into serious disrepair. When Ron began his beautification efforts, waste piled as high as buildings and overgrown vegetation encompassed walkways.

In some areas, debris-filled alleys made it impossible to safely pass through them, and a lack of street lights meant a consuming darkness once the sun set. This created conditions that fostered illegal dumping and crime.

The desire to restore this land to beauty became the driving force behind the founding of Demographic Inspirations–Detroit in 2014 and embarking on what he describes as an “educational journey” that would introduce Matten to the wonderful community of Hope Village.

Ron, who retired from the United States Air Force and the State of Michigan as a Correction Officer in 2012, has devoted his retirement to sitting behind the controls of heavy machinery. Moving

dirt, shoveling, plowing, raking, and tending to the eight blocks that make up his project are all part of the beginning of the revitalization of the Dexter–Linwood Cordon.



Ron Matten working on the project site.

Along the way, Matten has worked alongside volunteers, teaching each step of the process to eager volunteers and welcoming ideas from community members.



Volunteers operating equipment on site.

The project is, above all, for the community. The space is free, open, and accessible. No permission is required.

Already, the space includes shade-giving trees, outdoor games, wildlife, and a native wildflower meadow

known as *Gay's Way*, a signature project that has become a community gathering place.



Native Butterfly Meadow "Gay's Way"

The butterfly meadow was named in honor of a senior neighbor whose former home once stood on the same lot. Mrs. Gay, who passed away before the completion of the butterfly meadow, regarded the space as an "eyesore". To honor her memory and the wish she had to see this space beautiful once again, Ron dedicated the Native Butterfly Meadow to the Gay family, grounding the project in memory as well as renewal.



The native butterfly meadow in bloom.

Future plans for this space include a community vegetable garden, a half-court basketball court, an exercise pad, a gazebo with a firepit, and potentially several accessible tiny homes for low-income veterans.

After more than a decade of learning and adaptation, Ron has come to believe that community collaboration is

one of the most undervalued tools in neighborhood revitalization.

"It hasn't been a very easy road," said Ron. "I have been doing a lot of work strategizing how to move forward."

Ron Matten, who frequently reaches out to other Detroit organizations for advice on how to overcome revitalization hurdles, has learned that every community organization often faces many of the same hurdles. Ron calls this project an "educational journey" as he is learning every day how to continue striving forward and how to better accomplish the nonprofit's goal.

Taking to heart the words of a former leader—"Nobody's going to send the troops to save our neighborhood. We have to start it on our own. We are the troops."—Ron chose not to wait for others to act, but to begin pursuing the vision himself.

However, what Ron soon learned was that he was never on his own. Receiving as many as 150 volunteers at a time from the community to assist in the workload has taught him the true value of community collaboration.

This space that Ron is creating is for the community, and it is the community that can make this space come alive.



Volunteer groups assisting Matten on-site.

Ron envisions a future where the Dexter-Linwood Cordon becomes a place for graduations, birthday parties, family barbecues, and everyday connections. He hopes local schools will one day use this space as an outdoor classroom and that veterans will find peace here too.



Rendering of Proposed Organic Bowl, a part of the site with an accessible bridge and picturesque scenery.

Although the journey is long and new obstacles continue to arise, it is the vision of restoring vibrancy and beauty to this space that pushes Ron forward. His ultimate hope is that one day bikers, runners, and others traveling along the Joe Louis Greenway will discover this hidden corner of Detroit, helping reconnect residents from across the city through shared space, movement, and community.