



## **Ron Gallo – Comments**

### **Community Foundation of Louisville Press Conference – June 15, 2022**

I am Ron Gallo, President & CEO of the Community Foundation of Louisville. I welcome you to this historic neighborhood for what we believe to be a historic announcement. In the mid-1800s this place was a refuge for immigrants aspiring to obtain their dreams in a society that saw their ancestral home as a defect against society. This area was home to German, Catholic, and Presbyterian immigrants. One of the early Jewish synagogues in Louisville was established about two blocks from this location. These people were the first to work in the factories that belled grey smoke from the numerous smokestacks powered by coal and low wage laborers. The smoke was so prominent that the area became known as Smoketown. By the late 1800's many of the original inhabitants of Smoketown owned land in the area.

After emancipation in 1865, many newly freed Black people found refuge in Smoketown. They rented homes from people familiar with the challenges of succeeding in America. They found opportunities to work in Smoketown factories. Some worshipped in Catholic and Presbyterian houses of worship. The newly emancipated built a community alongside those who already called Smoketown home. Soon the emancipated people and their descendants became the largest population in Smoketown; but the majority of their homes, places of employment, worship centers and social spaces remained under the ownership of others. Eventually, the original land owners chose to use their wealth as owners to realize their dreams beyond Smoketown. The predominantly Black population of Smoketown remained, primarily as renters, full of aspirations, courage, faith and perseverance to achieve under the strain of poverty; however, they were absent of the benefit of land ownership as a tool to break the cycle of poverty.

Today we stand on property that served as a gateway to wealth and opportunity for many families. This was one of the homes of the Louisville Slugger factory. In 1842 J. Frederick Hillerich started a wood turning business that John "Bud" Hillerich, his son, helped transform into a family legacy that not only impacted a sport but helped shape American culture. Their labor force shared in the fruits of their vision. One of those was Mr. Louis Hyde who built a family with Mrs. Ruby Hyde, his widow who is here today.



They were among the Smoketown residents who benefited from employment at what came to be known as Hillerich & Bradsby.

When Hillerich & Bradsby decided to move their factory beyond Smoketown the family owned business intentionally chose not to sale the land. They realized in the proper hands the land could seed the dreams of future Smoketown residents. The land could become the asset that helped improve the quality of life in Smoketown. The family held the vacant lot for decades waiting for that opportunity. In 2015, the Hillerich's chose to partner with the Community Foundation of Louisville to achieve their vision of using the land as a benefit to Smoketown. The family gave the land to the Foundation with the explicit instructions for it to be used as the family intended while listening to the voices of current and historic Smoketown residents.

Today, we announce that this land has been divided into two separate parcels and given to separate nonprofit entities to realize their years long efforts of improving the quality of life in Smoketown. These two organizations are now the owners of their respective parcels with complete autonomy to use the land to complete their initiatives. The about 1-acre parcel bounded by Jackson St is currently owned by the Louisville Association for Cooperative Economics, LACE, to develop the Louisville Cooperative Grocery. The nearly 1-acre bounded by Preston St is owned by REBOUND, Inc to facilitate the creation of a Community Land Trust. Once the CLT is formally established with a resident led Board and IRS nonprofit status, REBOUND will transfer ownership to the CLT.

The Hillerich family and our foundation believe this decision accurately fulfills the family's intent while beginning to repair harm to a neighborhood that has lacked access to and control of land to support their quality of life. We intentionally chose to make this announcement during the week leading up to the Juneteenth Federal Holiday. By transferring ownership and decision making to the current and historic residents of Smoketown, we are demonstrating our commitment to reckon with and repair the harm of structural racism. I now bring back Ramona Dillum, VP of Equity and Impact, to describe how we arrived at this decision.