

A neighborhood vista from the roof  
of The Plant, 1400 W. 46<sup>th</sup> Street.

# Welcome to the Neighborhood:

# Back of the Yards

By Meredith A. Morris, Senior Communications Specialist

There is a lot of buzz in Back of the Yards, the residential and industrial neighborhood within Chicago's New City community. Formerly the hub of Chicago's extensive stockyards and meatpacking industry, Back of the Yards is emerging anew as a center of innovative green and sustainable business practices.

Testa Produce, for example, at 4555 S. Racine Ave., is home to the first free-standing wind turbine in the city of Chicago. The company's 91,300 square-foot facility, in the Chicago Industrial Stockyards Corridor of Back of the Yards, is located on an old brownfield site restored into an entirely green, sustainable facility.

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Formerly Peer Food Products,  
this 1925 industrial building now houses The Plant.



# WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

## BACK OF THE YARDS



Inventory is predominately single-family



A small business tucked into residential streets



The Plant's rooftop garden watering system

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Back of the Yards is roughly outlined by S. Western Ave, W. Garfield Blvd., railroad tracks and W. Pershing Rd. Another exciting neighborhood development that's in the news is The Plant, a vertical farm and food business incubator at 1400 W. 46<sup>th</sup> St.

The Plant is a not-for-profit enterprise created to promote sustainable economic development through education and research. As such, it houses several small, independent food production businesses that hope to make a profit, leasing space to be part of The Plant's energetic, communal approach to doing well by doing good.

"The Plant is all about taking what we have, not what we wish we had," said founder and executive director John Edel, who spearheaded purchasing The Plant's facility in 2010, a former meat processing plant built in 1925, for \$500,000.

"Chicago was a leader in food innovation but we've lost that. We're trying to bring it back" Edel said.

The former meat processing plant, known as Peer Food Products, closed in 2007 and lapsed into disrepair. Today, rubble-filled rooms are interspersed with thriving small food companies as the site's complete renovation is still under-way. The Plant has three goals, intended to help revitalize food production and economic development in the city:

- Develop a renewable energy system that makes use of organic food-production waste;
- Establish sustainable indoor farming technologies for raising plants and fish (tilapia);
- Serve as a food business incubator, assisting small business that currently include, among others, Peerless Bread and Jam, Bridgeport's Pleasant House Bakery and Arize Kombucha (a fermented tea drink).

Yet to be built-out are shared kitchen space, for use by community-based food businesses that need access to approved industrial cooking facilities, an education center and a catering/events space.

The building itself, though still partially pretty rough, provides the perfect setting for food production companies because of its quality thick bricks and use of other materials that also served meat processing.

"We can reuse as much as possible and not put waste into the system," said Shelby Phillips, program manager.

The Plant has two sets of fish and plant farming facilities, one for research and education use, and the other owned by Greens and Gills, a for-profit company in conversation with some high-profile Chicago restaurants to provide locally and sustainably raised vegetables and fish.

A rooftop garden at The Plant will eventually be used to show homeowners how to convert their rooftops into productive space, Phillips said. The Plant's goal it to raise 2,500 pounds of food a year from its roof. Conveying water to the roof and protecting plants against the drying effects of sun and wind are the farmers' biggest challenges, which they are seeking innovative ways to address. The roof also supports honey-producing beehives.

"One of the main missions of The Plant is to get information out there," Phillips said.

In addition to activity at The Plant and Testa Produce, the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council administered four

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*FastSTATS 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter 2013 (8061)*

<b>Attached Single Family</b>	<b>Detached Single Family</b>
Units: 3	Units: 13
Median Price: \$8,500	Median Price: \$20,000

*Check out neighborhood stats for all 77 Chicagoland neighborhoods and select suburbs at [www.ChicagoREALTOR.com](http://www.ChicagoREALTOR.com).*

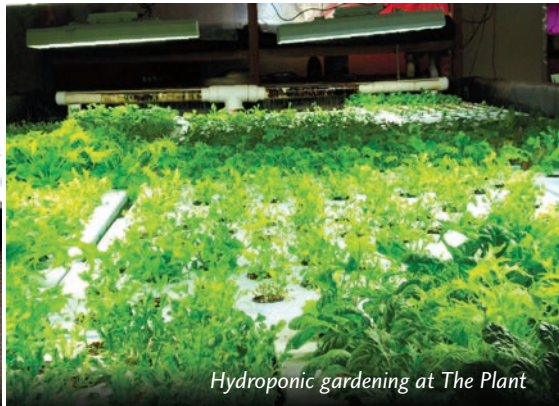
*FastSTATS consists of average sales price, median sales price, market time, units sold and percent change for Chicago and the suburbs.*

# WELCOME TO THE NEIGHBORHOOD

## BACK OF THE YARDS



Typical Back of the Yards housing



Hydroponic gardening at The Plant



An industrial bread oven inside The Plant

SSAs — Special Service Areas — in 2012 to bolster industrial, commercial and residential services and programs, according to the council. The council also supports Ballet Folklorico, founded about two decades ago by the late Maria Elena Benitez. Today, the dance troupe performs and offers an after-school activity for youth and adults, ranging in age from 4 to people in their 50s.

Community special events through the year include Fiesta Back of the Yards, health fairs, workshops, holiday turkey and toy giveaways, and more.

In terms of real estate, Back of the Yards is primarily a family neighborhood, said Nilda Olvera, a REALTOR® with Home Sales Realty who has served the community for 17 years. Built around the city's former stockyards to take advantage of several nearby railroad yards, housing tends to be older and predominantly includes single-family homes.

"People who are buying in Back of the Yards are buying because of the price of homes here," Olvera said. "They're very affordable."

Typically, inventory includes two-story single-family homes, bungalows and raised ranches. Homes tend to have yards. Olvera recalled one client in particular who bought a home with hopes of playing with his granddaughter in the yard.

Overall, Back of the Yards has trended in a positive direction since she started working it, Olvera said. Historically the location of some of the city's greatest social conflicts, the neighborhood faltered after the stockyards closed and the meatpacking facilities ceased operation in the early 1960s.

The recent influx of food industry is a good sign. Olvera also speaks favorably about a Back of the Yards Wal-Mart that opened in January.

"Many people feel the Wal-Mart will help their property values and help stabilize the neighborhood," she said.

Among her clients, Olvera said first-time home-buying families are common, as are clients looking to buy, as opposed to rent, in an area they can afford.

"People who have never been able to afford a home are moving in, and they're fixing up the homes when they get there," she said.

Olvera is impressed by local services for struggling families.

An example is the Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council, formed in the wake of the Great Depression, in 1939, as a collaboration of local schools, churches and social clubs working for neighborhood change through advocacy and program development.

"The Back of the Yards Neighborhood Council has long been a force in community organizing in the city of Chicago and has provided leadership in areas ranging from school lunch programs to economic development," said C.A.R. Senior Director of Government Affairs and Public Policy Brian Bernardoni.

The council was integral to rehabbing much of the neighborhood's housing stock in the 1950s and '60s, Bernardoni said, and has influenced a range of other social issues.

Citing a food pantry, Olvera adds: "This is an area where they are assisting low-income families and the people in the neighborhood feel great about it. It's a good neighborhood."

Back of the Yards amenities include Davis Square Park, 4430 S. Marshfield Ave., and Sherman Park, 1301 W. 52<sup>nd</sup> St. Commuters enjoy access to CTA bus lines and many major roads and highways. **CR**

*Photos by Meredith Morris of the Chicago Association of REALTORS®*