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Parking Matters: Lot C7 & C10 Celebration

Everyone at the Revitalization Celebration for Lot C7 and C10 noted that parking garages generally don't get much fanfare. There's usually more trumpeting for an upgraded historic academic building, or shiny new lab space, or a cool, green upgrade to an existing building. But just because parking garages are considered mundane, doesn't mean they aren't important. In this case, the parking structures add 647 spaces, used daily by over 1,000 people, in the heart of campus—that's 60 percent of the parking capacity there.

Lot C7 and C10 were both closed for structural repairs in 2016, notably masonry work, which caused permit holders to be reassigned. But further diagnostic work confirmed that renewing the garages would require extensive restoration and necessitate a more long-term, comprehensive approach. Across-the-board upgrades were needed to elevate the two garages to almost-new status. In remarks at the celebration, Mohamed Sultan, director of Capital Programs at F&S, thanked everyone who had worked on the project, adding that the revitalized structures were "a tremendous achievement that strengthens existing campus infrastructure, modernizes the transportation network, and will help facilitate future project development in the core of campus for years to come."

Sultan was followed by Chancellor Jones, who gave an affable speech about the two garages, explaining that "nothing is more strategically important than parking" for a campus because it is something that touches people daily. He also mentioned that many of the ADA upgrades incorporated into the two garages were actually a result of research conducted here at the University of Illinois under the auspices of Ted Nugent, who championed disability rights and accessibility through the program he founded that would eventually be known as Disability Resources and Educational Services (DRES). ADA enhancements for this project include elevator improvements, wider parking spaces and the use of curb cuts.

Stacey DeLorenzo, transportation systems manager, concurred, stating "no one's donated tens of millions of dollars specifically for parking, but it will always be a necessity." She listed many types of work done for the project, from masonry, plumbing, and drainage to every type of engineering, including environmental and sustainability. She added it was "a decade-long effort" by a lot of people (e.g., Capital Programs at F&S, Walker Parking Consultants, Grunloh Construction, and many others) to create "holistically really up-to-date parking structures." Jamie Singson, director of the Parking Department,

also provided a partial list of the improvements completed as part of the project:

- Structural integrity improvements, including a new supplemental beam system
- Elevator upgrades and additions, including a new tower and elevator for C10, which did not previously have one
- New EV charging stations
- Stair repairs
- New emergency fire alarms and cameras
- Wi-Fi upgrades, which will support new parking apps
- Waterproofing, including seal coating throughout
- Painting surfaces

The hope is that the restored C7 and C10 will serve the parking needs of the campus community for years to come, and that when people park there, they won't actually give the garages a second thought. Returning the structures to mundane status is actually the highest compliment the people who park there could pay to the team members, contractors, consultants, and others who worked on the project. It will mean the buildings are achieving their purpose in quiet ways: providing much-needed, decent parking in the heart of campus.



A Safe Campus Is a Great Campus

Strengthening university-wide culture change requires a massive communication effort. F&S' Safety & Compliance (S&C), the Division of Research Safety (DRS), and the Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation recognize this need and have commenced a new Environmental Health and Safety (EHS) communication campaign and website. The goal: a robust safety culture across the campus. The new initiative emphasizes that "A Safe Campus Is a Great Campus."

The collaboration began several years ago, with ongoing discussions about potential safety areas that could be improved. Initial focus areas included reactive, instead of proactive, processes and a disconnect between people living and working on campus, along with the reporting of safety concerns in a timely manner to the proper group that could investigate it and evoke change if needed. The EHS Development Team was created in response to these needs in December 2021.



Director of F&S' Safety & Compliance (S&C) Jeremy Neighbors and the Director of Division of Research Safety (DRS) Stephanie Tumidajski Hess.

A year later, the team conducted an audience analysis study. The feedback from that research became the basis for the current campaign. One key component is that the "campaign is culture-driven, not compliance-based," Jeremy Neighbors, director of S&C, explained in recent remarks to the F&S leadership team. Encouraging "engagement through positive messaging, not corrective actions, or punishment," sets the tone for people to want to do better and to be active participants in spreading the word.

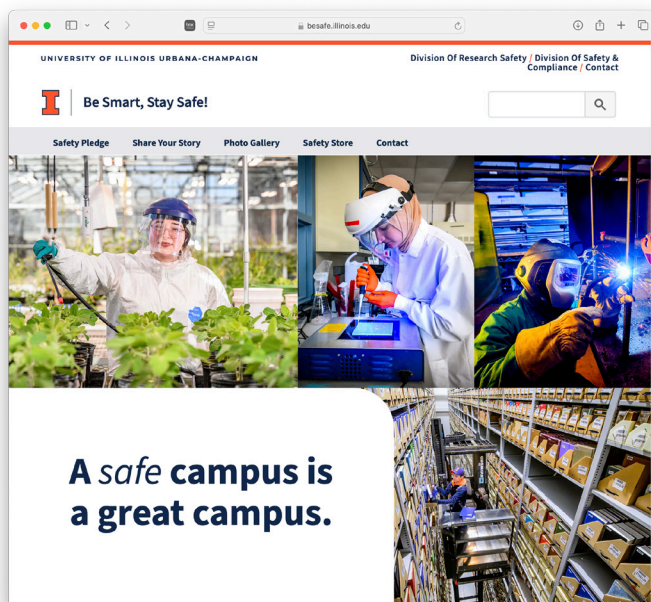
Another part of the communication campaign is having a strong, vibrant website that draws people in. To that end, the team has launched the BeSafe website (<https://besafe.illinois.edu>). "We built a micro-website that would sync along with the campaign and become a go-to quick reference spot—a guide to get to DRS and S&C at a high level," noted Steve Breitwieser, CRC's manager of communications & external relations. The site includes contact information for each division, along with a monitored contact form that can be submitted by anyone with campus safety concerns. It also features compelling images of people modeling safety protocols, invites people to take a safety pledge, and there's even a safety store to show your commitment to safety.

The hope, Breitwieser said, is that the website will "be a launching point for more organic and user-shared content in the future. That would, in turn, feed more campaign work and back-and-forth." In addition to the website, there is a digital sign and social media tie-in that will also help build awareness for the program.

With stronger communication about safety, the expectation is other goals will be more attainable:

- A campuswide proactive safety culture
- Increased reporting of safety incidents
- An uptick in people taking ownership of safety protocols in their own areas
- Improved enrollment in safety programs and trainings

Updates may come from various sources, such as website revisions, emails, newsletters, presentations, and more. These can be tailored to specific units and highlight the personal stories that are meaningful to those engaging with the campaign. As the project progresses, there will be ample opportunities for F&S to emphasize its safety culture as part of the campaign. After all, safety is everyone's business!



Mike Larson, associate director of utilities production at Abbott Power Plant, along with members of Kappa Delta Sorority, recently stopped by Crisis Nursery to formally present the donation raised by last fall's Pork Lunch Fundraiser, which is organized by Abbott and Kappa Delta as part of the Campus Charitable Fund Drive. The Abbott charity lunch, first held in 2011, has partnered with Kappa Delta since 2015 and has collected more than \$100,000 for Crisis Nursery over the years.

Upcoming Calendar Dates

March 15–23	Spring Break	April 12	Boneyard Creek Community Day
March 26	Noontime Knowledge	April 15	Tax Day
April 1	Consolidated Election	April 22	Earth Day

Love, Community, Art and the Power to Evoke Change



Photo credit: Seed Lynn

Daniel Gray-Kontar learned the power of the spoken word at age four when he attended a church service at St. Timothy Missionary Baptist Church in Cleveland, Ohio. Reverend John T. Weeden was the minister there, as well as a leader in the civil rights movement in Cleveland, in Atlanta, and in Selma, Alabama. Gray-Kontar watched in awe as Reverend Weeden took the congregation on a journey with his oratory. He remembers being so moved, even at such a young

age, that he pointed at the minister and declared he wanted to do that, too.

Gray-Kontar is the new associate director of arts & cultural programming at the Bruce D. Nesbitt African American Cultural Center (BNAACC), and he was the recent guest speaker at the Diversity & Inclusion Committee's Noontime Knowledge in honor of Black History Month. He spoke on the topic of "Imagination for an Imagined Nation: Centering young artists as catalysts for liberatory democracy." While Gray-Kontar did not become a minister, he uses many of those same skills in his work as an artist and with students and the community. Before coming to the University of Illinois, he founded Twelve Literary Arts, a nonprofit organization "dedicated to supporting and developing young writers and artists;" served as chair of the Literary Arts Department at the Cleveland School of the Arts; received many awards for his art and poetry; and is even a rapper, touring as his alter ego Replife.

Outlining the tenets of his life and his work, Gray-Kontar noted his unwavering commitment to his core beliefs:

- The importance of youth voices
- The power of safe spaces
- The transformative nature of education for lifelong learners
- The impacts of tradition and innovation
- Love as the universal guiding force of all action

From the basis of these central ideals, he explained that "liberatory democracy seeks to empower marginalized communities, redistribute power, and create conditions for all people to thrive." It is a way of reimagining traditional democratic systems in a manner that can work for all, regardless of gender, race, class, and other social constructs.

One example of the power of liberatory democracy in practice, Gray-Kontar said, came from BNAACC's own history. On February 15, 1969, a group of Black students at the U. of I. demanded change. This action was an extension of the Project 500 protests that had begun on campus the previous fall over inequitable treatment. Among their asks was a Black cultural center—a safe space for Black students to gather and a place that could offer the opportunity to educate others. Four days later, the UC Senate Council recommended supporting the creation of such a center, and the Afro-American Cultural Program opened in the fall of 1969. The program eventually was renamed for its former director, Bruce Nesbitt, and after utilizing space built for other purposes, in 2018–19, a new custom building for the cultural center was erected with F&S support. It has a conference room, music/dance space, an area for social gatherings, and more.

While centering the ideals of liberatory democracy in action on the Urbana campus, Gray-Kontar then turned to the role of artists in this practice. Artists, he said, "leverage creativity and play a central role in shaping democracy" by using "beauty, provocation, and imagination to disrupt oppression and nurture collective agency." Here Gray-Kontar brought up the much-used phrase, "It is what it is." This phrase, he contended, lacks agency for the person uttering it—it's more of resigned acceptance of something that (seemingly) cannot be changed. But Gray-Kontar suggested artists never accept that, and people can change that perception by simply changing one word: "It is as it is" or "It is not what it is." The latter two ways of stating it gives agency that allows for the possibility of change. Nothing is immutable.

Gray-Kontar argued for the importance of arts integration to help us understand the world around us—and how we can use that knowledge to affect positive change. But this takes time. First, **arts exposure** is needed for students of all ages and at all levels, and this needs to become routine because one play, one poetry reading, one trip to the art museum may move someone in the moment, but it may not be lasting. This leads to the second point: **arts engagement**. Once someone is actively interested in the arts, they begin to take in meanings and insights, to investigate histories, and to even begin participating in the activities, meaning-making, and experiential learning themselves. Finally, over time, these people may exhibit **arts excellence**, or mastery, and these practicing artists can, in turn, offer leadership and experiences for new students just beginning their arts journey. And the cycle repeats.

As an example, Gray-Kontar described an event Cleveland students put on that explored self-love and collective love. Many of the students had been raised only by their moms. One Valentine's Day, they invited neighborhood moms, cooked for them, made them gift baskets, and performed for them—all to remind the moms what love is and that they were loved. One young 19-year-old poet and dancer, Keith Benford Jr., opened the video, *Midtown Mixtape*, they had created for the moms with a poem and dance. Gray-Kontar played the audio of the poem, which says, in part

*Love is friendship.
Persistence.
Hate resistant.
It's equidistant to the space between us and God...
Love looks for a home...
To love yourself is to love someone else
The essence of love is both.
Love is a lifestyle.
Love is this poem deconstructed.
Love is reconstruction.
Love is a priority.*

Merging art with a really important moment for the community, Gray-Kontar said, allowed what could have been a painful moment for people to become a reminder about "what it is and how to love themselves." He also noted that his talk was "just the beginning of a conversation about the way in which the arts can become part of our everyday lived experiences" and the importance of being willing to be in conversation and community with others because through this community we can "make meaning together."

This Noontime Knowledge was recorded with Daniel Gray-Kontar's permission. If you would like to view the presentation, it is available at <https://fs.illinois.edu/diversity-and-inclusion/>.

F&S' Big Breakfast by the Numbers

How much food does it take to feed approximately 300 team members at the Big Breakfast and 35 at the Big Breakfast for Dinner? A lot! Among the items served were:

60 pounds each of eggs and hash browns,
45 pounds of sausage gravy, **40** pounds of
bananas, **24** pounds of yogurt, **15** pounds
each of pancake mix (made into pancakes, of
course!), **15** pounds of strawberries, **9** pounds of
blueberries, **512** pork sausages, **288** biscuits,
160 turkey sausages, **10** gallons of orange juice



This amount of food doesn't prepare or serve itself, so much appreciation is due to the committee members, the volunteers, the leadership team, Movers, BSWs, and Electrician Shop 03 who made the magic (and deliciousness) happen:

Events Committee

Katie Balch
Paul Jensen
Quentin Lusby

Joe Meeker
Leslie Miller
Rose Paul

Colleen Ruhter
Brad Trankina
Doni Walker, chair

Volunteers/Leadership

Jeff Angiel
Steve Bainbridge
Mark Barcus
Kody Egolf
Malikah Gordon

Stephanie Landess
Greg Moen
Josh Murphy
Jeremy Neighbors
Jim Sims

Macie Sinn
Eric Smith
Pete Varney
Morgan White
Doug Winkler

Many thanks to all who helped and all who came out to enjoy the food at this eggcellent annual event that is a bright beginning (or ending) to the F&S day. More pictures can be seen in the glass case in the West Hallway in PPSB. Hope to see you there next year!

Spotlight on Safety: *Tornado Safety and You*

Illinois Broke Tornado Record in 2024

Last year Illinois smashed its previous record for number of tornadoes in a calendar year with 142, which was 18 more than the previous recorded high in 2006. Additionally, the state had five tornado days with 10 or more tornadoes, including July 15, which had an astounding 48 tornadoes confirmed! Clearly, Illinois weather can be wild, so it remains more important than ever to be vigilant and take action when conditions are ripe for a severe weather event.

Know the Wind Terms for Severe Weather

The National Weather Service (NWS; Lincoln, Illinois, is the local one for Central Illinois) will issue warnings for severe thunderstorms, with an added designation for potentially damaging winds: considerable for 70 mph winds and golf-ball-sized hail and destructive for 80 mph winds and baseball-sized hail. Remember that winds do not have to rotate to be destructive at those speeds, so you may hear those terms in reference to straight-line winds, downbursts, or derechos, as well as for tornadoes. If a very strong or violent tornado is confirmed, one where severe threat to life and catastrophic damage is expected, the NWS will announce a tornado emergency. Visit www.weather.gov/Lincoln for more information.

How Can You Protect Yourself?

Steps you can follow to stay safer during severe weather include the following:

- Monitor a news source for the latest weather information; be ready to take shelter if needed.
 - » Listen for warnings on the radio or via the tornado sirens, which go off during a warning.
 - » If possible, have a designated NOAA Weather Radio that will alert for tornado warnings, or download the app.

- If you are advised to take shelter and you are inside a sturdy building
 - » Stay away from windows and glass doors. Go to the basement or to an interior room on the lowest floor; this might be a closet or central hallway, or bathroom.
 - » Protect your head.
- If you are outside and cannot make it to a sturdy building, find a low spot, such as a ditch, where you can lie flat.
 - » Use your arms and hands to protect your head.
 - » Do not stay in your car! A strong wind can toss that around.
- After the tornado warning expires, be careful of debris and stay away from downed power lines.

What Should You Do at Work?

Take note of storm refuge areas and go there is advised to shelter. Review the Building Emergency Action Plans (BEAPs) for the campus buildings you work in most often. These show the storm refuge areas and offer information about what to do in an emergency, including meeting points, a discussion of emergency notifications systems, a list of floor coordinators, emergency contacts, maps of the building, and more. You can access the BEAPs for F&S locations in the Emergency Information section in ERIN at <https://erin.fs.illinois.edu/quick-links/emergency-information>. BEAPs for other campus buildings are located on the University of Illinois Police Department's website: <https://go.fs.illinois.edu/UIPDBEAP>.

How Else Can You Prepare?

Plan ahead! The State of Illinois has a severe weather preparedness document at <https://go.fs.illinois.edu/Preparedness>. It covers other weather events, emergency supply kits, and more.

