The Guardians: Reshaping History Project and Exhibition

Interview with Pauline Charles, 2021

Pauline Charles (00:00):
Hello, my name is Pauline Charles, and I'm a bill community leader and Darley Park.

Speaker 2 (00:06):
Great. And, Ms. Pauline, can you talk about what your role is like in the community and how you see yourself? How other people see you?

Pauline Charles (00:17):
Well, I truly hope positive. I've been in the community for over 40 years now, so I see now ups and downs, and right now we seem to be on a really up slope even with COVID. So I'm very proud of that. My job or my commitment to the communities actually, outreach, try to bring in sources that are needed or give out any kind of inflammation, that's required. If you well know if you know, Darley Park where actually, pretty tight community, some people call it a desert because we don't have a supermarket in banks and things here. So we have to go out for, for those kinds of things. But, I truly hope in my lifetime, I'll get to see, those things here along with being a community leader. I'm actually the president of Darley Park and I've been for just about 12 years now.

Speaker 2 (01:16):
And, talk about some of the things you've accomplished. And . . .

Pauline Charles (01:21):
During that time, if I look back and think back maybe 15 years ago, when we first saw holding community meetings, we were dealing with, quite a bit of crime in the neighborhood. Actually, we actually had to go to outside churches, not in a neighborhood to even hold a community meeting. So we weren't in a very good place. We had a lot of gang activity going on. We've changed so much over the years now, we're in a lot better place. So I guess pretty much I just started this four, not so much as a job or a title, but just a passion and love for my community and the people in it. I've always had a soft spot for the children. I watched my children grow up here in the community. I love my seniors. Many years ago, I started going to the court house with young kids in the neighborhood because it was a time where basically they parents weren't in a very good place. So I would go just pretty much so they could look out and see the Hey is somebody that cares and love you. So, that's pretty much was the start of my outreach in the community. And it's just grown from there. We've been able to get some beautiful murals artwork done in the neighborhood. We have a 21st century pork, playground. We have the first recreation center that's been built in 25 years. So we've gotten a lot accomplished. So we're, we're in a good place right now know . . .

Speaker 2 (03:16):
How have you accomplished all that, but, have you done so . . .

Pauline Charles (03:20):
Actually, I would say, time to hit the streets. So, I've been able to, be able to go out and really meet with some great organizations that have, helped us along the way. It actually started with Bill who, introduced me with so many different, avenues and programs and help open doors to so many things that I, would've never known about. so some so thankful to them and I've met some of the greatest and nice people actually. So it allowed me to meet with other, community leaders and, they passion and desire, so of things. So they're neighborhood, so it almost like gives you strength, like makes you want to do more like, wow, we can do this or we need this. And so it's just been a great experience. I love it.

Speaker 2 (04:13):
And can you describe a little bit about the process of like how you got in the rec center built, you know, how did, how did that go? Like how did you know what to do and how to do it?

Pauline Charles (04:27):
Well, at that time, we had a very great council lady council, Mary Pat Clark. She was always been such a go getter for our community and surrounding communities, or the city itself as a whole. So, when she came to the community of Darley Park, South Clifton surrounding communities, and let us know what, you know, hey, this is what, we want to take place and do. So, it took a lot of going downtown to city hall and, speaking to the mayor and, basically finding funds, grants, any kind of money that was there was around or in the city. we had a great council lady that I made these things helped take place, and it was such an honor. And I just love her as a person, have so much respect for, for her. And so she was just such a go getter. And, then she came one day to the community and says, I want to name this recreation center after Rita Church. And I was actually lucky enough as a kid, knowing the Church family, they lived right around the corner from us. So, it was actually an honor because she was also such a, a great woman and had such outreach around the city. So it's, everything has been such a pleasure to work with such a great people and different organizations.

Speaker 2 (06:08):
Since the rec center being built and the park being redeveloped. how have you S like what, what has changed in the neighborhood or how have you seen people affected by those things?

Pauline Charles (06:22):
Okay, well, the recreation center, if we speak on that, you can go well before COVID of course, you could always go there and see it feel with children from the community and outside of the community. They started basketball tournament's we would go there for game night. They had a, a program, after school for the children. Great, great summer camp that it's packed each year. So it's a lot. So, it was just so nice to see, the recreation center running the way it should be. And speaking at a recreation center, I actually, one of the gentlemen said, I guess he would hold a position as supervisor of some sort. There happens to be, a member of our church. David McNear, I've referred to him all the time as elder McNear at a level of respect through the church.

Pauline Charles (07:24):
And, we had just really before COVID once again, I don't want to keep mentioning that. but bright before that came up, we had came up with, a great idea of so many great things that was going to take place in a recreation center. We were starting game nights and, more things for the seniors. They do have a senior program, but it was just aware of, interacting the elderly in the seniors, the seniors, and
the youth together. So we were looking forward to that. So hopefully that'll still take place once we get back.

Speaker 2 (08:03):
And my favorite scenes is, there was a dance class going on.

Pauline Charles (08:07):

Speaker 2 (08:13):
All right. And tell me a little bit about, kind of looking forward. Some things you would still like to work on or have happened in the neighborhood.

Pauline Charles (08:22):
Okay. Because I mentioned a recreation center. I apologize. I would feel so bad if I didn't mention, Darley Park, that park, I love our park a whole lot. It's very important to me. I can remember back to the time when I wasn't working while I was working downtown at the gas Metro company, and I would be on a bus stop. And I would, I remember when they were actually houses there and it seemed like I don't know where the city came in, tore down a whole block of houses. And then I watched it become a dumping ground in an empty space for so many years. So it has just been such an honor to be a part of the team to make their pot, you know, be what it is. So actually, if I look at Darley Park, it has been it's, it's just so nice.

Pauline Charles (09:18):
It's nice to actually to be able to come from out of your home, from off your porch and walk into a welcome place is just such a great atmosphere to actually be able to sit and look and see your community and be able to speak to your neighbors. I love it. And now we have the playground there. And actually that came at a time where the kids hadn't been able to actually really get out and enjoy it. We have a new swing set coming within six weeks. We had the swing sets on yet. We actually, we had one time as you well know, we just had swings there, removed the swings to put in a 21st century playground, not aware how important those swings were to the community. So the kids and, surprisingly, so many of the adults had made quite a stinker about it.

Pauline Charles (10:12):
So we were able to get the swings back in the neighborhood. So it's excited to see that take place. I'm just, we'll be happy when the weather break and hopefully even with COVID, praying that everyone still be safe, but just to be able to come out, we had talked last year about being able to, even hold, some community meetings outside. We had them in a recreation center, but was thinking we have this lovely park here. Let's have him out that way. Hopefully it would have bring out more of the young people to join in and give their opinions because their opinions are so important to this neighborhood. So

Speaker 2 (10:55):
Can you describe a little more about what the park looks like and some really great things that have happened in the park since it's been built?
Pauline Charles (11:05):
Well, to describe the park, as I said, it's, just looking at the park, from where it started off, we had a
great organization come in, Six Branch, and when they first came in and he put in, we actually had a
project up there and building, flower boxes and things like that. And we thought it was truly the greatest
thing and it really was. And now it's got nothing now that we've gone 21st century. It's a lot more, I
should say, I guess, modern. And it's, just, one of the things that was very important to me with the park
was that I wanted it to be a very, colorful place. I wanted bright light colors, and that's his actual, he go,
you go up there and you get to sit on a nice tilt bench, the night light, blue benches, and, flowers.

Pauline Charles (12:02):
When they, to simply that colorful, we they've colorful flowers. it's a place where, actually you can go
and set and we're looking, you know, to have more events such as I'm looking so forward to jazz night to
bring out some of the adults. A lot of the kids I've really enjoyed, the park, but it's, it's, it's, it's a very
safe environment and we hadn't had that in a long time in the neighborhood. So, I can't begin to say
how thankful and happy I am to just do when I walk up the street or if I'm riding past, just to see my
neighbors and seeing, if we have talked to so many people that just ride by and say, wow, you guys are
really doing some great things up there and Darley Park. So it's just good to hear. It's just good to hear
nice stories, good things happening in your community. It makes, it just gives you such a good feeling.
I'm, I'm just, I'm very proud of my community. Very proud.

Speaker 2 (13:03):
Yeah. The fact that you helped build this space and create this space has brought new life and joy and
pride to the neighborhood. And it really is the face of the, you know, it's the thing people see now when
they come. and then I heard, Mr. Muhammad who lives in the house where we did the other mural at
one point say he saw someone who was carrying a gun, like turn around, not enter the park and go back
and put the gun away. And then there's,

Pauline Charles (13:37):
It's amazing to see that I've actually had known of several, it even far as like even trash, it's not a trashy
park. We have plenty of cans around it, but I mean, they don't throw trash in the park. It's been times
where, just as you spoke of the neighbor Muhammad, I've actually heard of several stories in cases
where it's been known, okay, Hey, whatever your trouble is or whatever your beef is a problem, it can't
go on in this playground or in this. You've got to take it somewhere else. And that says a lot when I hear
some of these young kids that come back and share and tell me things that not tell me things, but
shared with me and are like, Hey, we make, you know, this doesn't happen in the park. And we make
sure they really care and love that park. And I'm very thankful for that.

Speaker 2 (14:36):
Right. And it shows what happens when, you get, when you, someone like you would get, the city and
the state to invest in this community, the way it shouldn't be invested in, well moving on from the park,
what else do you want to see happen in the neighborhood or in Darley Park in the coming years? What's
your vision for?

Pauline Charles (15:01):
Well, it would be housing. we still have quite a problem of, boarded up houses in the community. We
are a part of, John Hopkins work where you live. however, so far that has, made a difference to, the
community, because we haven't got that, I guess to the part where we have been able to get, outside organizations that want to, commit to, investing and that's what we need right now. Some investors to help us with our properties in the community. I've actually paid my, I should say my husband has actually had family members that had come back and visit and always say, “wow, I remember this block used to be so filled with, pretty flowers and, all the houses.” And I always think about like at, even at Christmas time, it was a time when, well, mind you I've been here over 40 years.

Pauline Charles (16:05):
So back then you had more neighbors and people would put out Christmas lights and things like that, but we, you can't go seven houses, five houses in any direction and Darley Park and not come across, a vacant property. So that's a great concern. And this is a beautiful old area. And it, I mean, we're so close to everything. It's, it's, it's worth investing. We truly are worth investing in. So that's something I would love to see, take place, to just see, we don't want the right track. We definitely are that I would love to see, investors come and help us with, the homes and the neighborhood. It's one of the big things I would love to see, take place.

Speaker 2 (16:57):
I love the layout of the newer [inaudible]. A loop know, feels like it really feels like a tight-knit little community.

Pauline Charles (17:04):
True. I describe us that way all the time. We are very tight knit community and we actually all look at each other based truly as family. It's like, I'm always say, describe us a lot of times, you know, it's one big family and, you know, we have a few dysfunctional cousins, you know, and, you know, wherever they may even be considered to be one of them, but it's, but, and we even look out for them. So, it's just been, it's been a great experience spent here and it's been wonderful. bringing my children up here in this community and not my children. I played a part with nieces or many, a host of nieces and nephews. So it's been, it's been wonderful.

Speaker 2 (17:51):
I kind of asked you this earlier, or you talked about it, but like ho what keeps you going and how do you do this work on a consistent basis and also take care of yourself and stuff.

Pauline Charles (18:05):
Some days it's challenging, to be truthful, but it's out of an act of love. I truly, as I said, we're like one family and, I love my family. So this community, it's my family. I always say, you, I look at it this way. I spend more time with my neighbors. Then I would say, aunts and uncles and cousins that live in another state. So this is my family here. And, they love me and I love them. So, we truly do look out for one another and most important, is the level of respect that we have for one another. I've always, share this with, adults and children. the level of respect, how far it's going to take you in life. And I always say there's no age limit on respect. If I, if I disrespect the eight year old, I can, can't expect that eight year old to respect me. So it's no age limit. I respect the kids, the kids respect me and I love them and hug them daily that I can walk out this door. They come and hug and love on me. So, you know, that's what it's all about. Yeah.

Speaker 2 (19:26):
I met other leaders in this neighborhood, but if there were some other leaders that you looked up to or that, you know, I should interview if I have the time in the future, who should I talk to, or who's been a part of the work?

Pauline Charles (19:44):
Well, of course, you know, our Ms. Francis, Ms. Francis has been, a community leader, along beside me, and she's 95 years old. And that just say something, when you have someone that age still has such a passion and love for our community. And, and I'm not sure who gave her that name, but it really stuck with her, the mayor of 25th street. And, oh, council lady, Mary pat gave her that name, the mayor of 25th street. She knows the everything that goes on and she, you know, she gets out there and schools don't, you know, they're not doing something right. But, her biggest thing too, is, she's seen and mind you she's raised her children in a neighborhood and she's been around there probably 70 years. So of course she seems quite some changes. So, but it's just, that's the one that I've just, respect so much in the community.

Pauline Charles (20:50):
then I also, I couldn't say this without going, speaking about my spiritual friend, my sister, Aletha, Carter, she holds the position of, around here that everyone knows, that a book is good for a meal. Always. She's an excellent cook. So she looks out for all the neighbors and cooking, but she's the one that, when you need prayer and we all do, she's always been the one that people reach out to for prayer. she's an excellent singer, so she's actually pretty much any funeral that's on the east side. You can know you're going to see her because she's there singing and what have you, but she's asked, I couldn't say because she's, she's also been around here over 60 years. And, so she sees the, this is just someone that I just have such a level of respect for, and have, and just really care and have looked out for the community. You know, we have a few seniors that I don't get out at all and she prepares meals for them and, you know, and they, they know that they're going to eat that day and they're going to eat some good collard greens; they're not eating canned food or a processed food. She really looks out for, you know, we have a few people, of course, that just traveled through she's, she's just that one that looks out for, for us here in the neighborhood.

Speaker 2 (22:27):
Is there anything else you feel like you want to share about the neighborhood or yourself or the work you've done that we haven't touched on?

Pauline Charles (22:39):
Well, as you said, you're seeing someone, and this is just basically a concern, I guess this would be said, okay, did I speak on the concern? we have a young man that as you say, you see grilling up the street and the park. And I remember it it's shown me in from, pretty much, a dark side of his life. And now he's on the light side. So I basically, and I've seen him up there and he grills, he goes to Sam club and he comes back and he brings and, food and water and, hot dogs and hamburgers, oodles of noodles, coffee, and tea. so he has like a little business going on there. And, his city recently came by and told him, he had you shut it down. He had one, one permit, but he said, well, you can't do this here.

Pauline Charles (23:35):
And, he was so destroyed by and people everywhere, not even just here in Darley Park, I'm referring to even the other side of Hoff, Roatan community have asked, actually said, what's going on with me,
them, you know, close him down. This gentleman has actually, and when he went up, when I stopped and he was, and he was sharing with me and he says to me, he says, no one ever walks away from this spot hungry. He says, you, well, no, we have a lot of people that have different problems and homeless people and whatever that passes by and wherever they walk up here, I’ve made it clear that no one walks away hungry. So, he looks out for them early in the morning with a cup of coffee, or, and I thought this was such a great, part of outreach for the community.

Pauline Charles (24:35):
And this is a young man who years ago, maybe wasn't the most positive young man. Right. But he made such a change in his life that it’s just great to see. And another thing he took on a project of doing itself was that the young kids that are just in a neighborhood, he was like, I don't, I don't want them on a corner. I don't want them to go the route I went. So he asked him out there and he had them sell a water and sodas. And, he gives him a couple of dollars at the end of the day, since then, we've been able to keep out parks clean. He doesn't allow just the hangout or staying around at best. So we don't, but if they would act, we actually have officers that sit up there and, you know, they're there.

Pauline Charles (25:20):
And they're like, this is something good for Darley Park. So that's a little concern. I'm hoping that he, and he just started it, just started his own little business with, caulk, Kings and Queens is that's what these, this, what these kids are around here. You know, we gotta build them up to be Kings and Queens. And so that's the name of his business. And so he recently got closed down. So, I'm hoping that would be, parks to people. Steve Preston. We'd been up there several times at a point in the park and they'd talk to him and just watch how many people that they actually, you know, people stopped even in the car, stopped by water, blow the horn. And he was like, it's a great thing. So, I'm really a little disturbed by, by that.

Pauline Charles (26:11):
So certain people know people in certain circles, of course, you know? And so this is a young man that used to be, you know, out on the corner that, yeah, so he's seen as a leader, right? So, he, he, so he may have someone that has, recently came home, from prison or something that that's, they don't want to go back and they just hear them come out and share these stories with the young men like, Hey, maybe catching them now, at 15 and 16 or 14, you know, you don't want to go this route.