

Children from the Springfield Mommies Group hurry to Klutho Park at the southern edge of the neighborhood.



PHOTOGRAPH: CHARLES WALTON IV

THE SOUTH'S
10
BEST

COMEBACK NEIGHBORHOODS

We've scoured the South to find these neighborhoods that were once down on their luck but are now resurging with community pride. Learn from their inspiring stories.

by REX PERRY

1 SPRINGFIELD JACKSONVILLE, FL

Where Hip Meets History

The great fire of 1901, which destroyed most of downtown Jacksonville, spared the Springfield neighborhood. However, what fire didn't do, poor zoning and suburban flight almost accomplished in this historic area north of downtown. But today you can see potential. Prairie-style and gingerbread Queen Anne homes, some lovingly restored and others waiting their chance, share the streets with trees draped in Spanish moss. Springfield's stunning architecture is tempered with a gritty side, but

where some see blight, locals see opportunity. "We have flavor," says resident Tony Allegretti, who writes a blog called The Urban Core. "We still have problems and the economy hasn't helped, but great projects are beginning every day. We enjoy an urban quality of life with local arts, culture, and neighbors we know by name."

Families, empty nesters, executives, and creative hipsters come looking to plug in to the energy of the community. "New homes that blend seamlessly with historic ones are bringing in buyers who lack renovation skills," says Mack Bissette, CEO of SRG Homes & Neighborhoods. "We've had passionate renovators here in the past, but this latest wave is lining up with a new generation of buyers." *sparcouncil.org*

Our Picks

We chose 10 places where revival isn't just about fixing up old houses. It's about working together to rebuild traditions and save the soul of a place.

1. **Springfield**—Jacksonville, Florida
2. **North Chattanooga**—Chattanooga, Tennessee
3. **Wilmore/South End**—Charlotte, North Carolina
4. **Crescent Hill**—Louisville, Kentucky
5. **Patterson Park**—Baltimore, Maryland
6. **Historic Fairmount**—Fort Worth, Texas
7. **Phelps Grove**—Springfield, Missouri
8. **Viola**—Greenville, South Carolina
9. **East Nashville**—Nashville, Tennessee
10. **Holy Cross**—New Orleans, Louisiana



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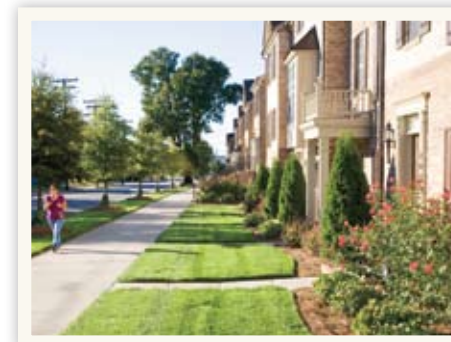
Reopening the 2,370-foot Walnut Street pedestrian bridge sparked an awareness of the potential of the NorthShore.

3 WILMORE/SOUTH END
CHARLOTTE, NC
Take the Light Rail Home

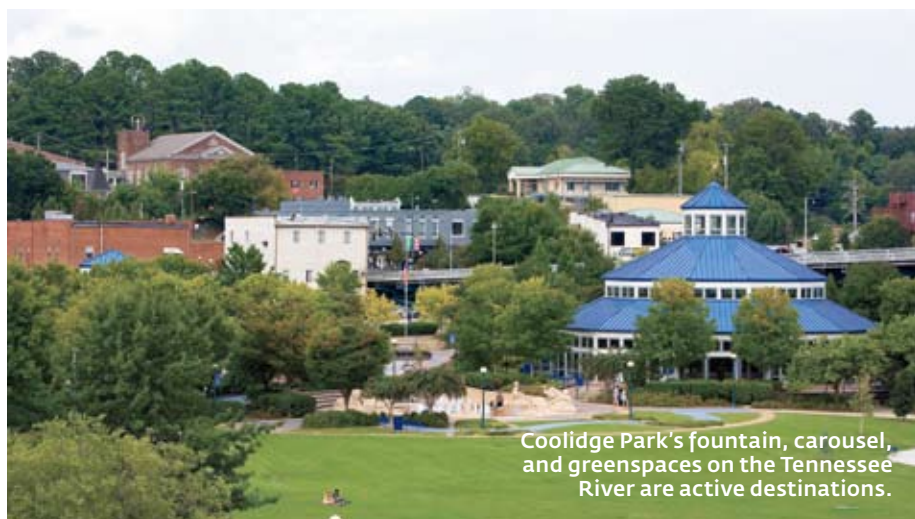
The Wilmore neighborhood followed a familiar path of growth, decline, and rebirth. From the early 1900s, working-class families lived in small Craftsman bungalows and worked at the nearby mills. The area flourished until mill closings and isolation due to highway construction almost finished it off in the sixties. Then in the eighties, the adjoining Dilworth neighborhood began to take off. In the nineties, as Dilworth became more expensive, people looking for affordable places began to reclaim neglected houses and shuttered warehouses in Wilmore and the South End. "I got in a 1931 bungalow for \$50,000," says 12-year resident Kirk Callahan. "It was fun watching brake lights as people slowed to watch me work." When Charlotte added train service to the area in 2007, the neighborhood turnaround found new energy. "For these up-and-coming areas, the new rail service has been like throwing kerosene on a fire," says local real estate broker Terry McDonald. neighborhoodlink.com/Wilmore/home



Wilmore/South End really began to transform when Charlotte added train service in 2007.



New housing fits the historic mix of South End neighborhoods.



Coolidge Park's fountain, carousel, and greenspaces on the Tennessee River are active destinations.

2 NORTH CHATTANOOGA
CHATTANOOGA, TN
Cross the Bridge To Downtown

"Not long ago most people couldn't find North Chattanooga," says Mike Thompson, who grew up in the neighborhood. "They ignored this side of the river and this neighborhood was falling apart." The first surge of renovations in North Chattanooga coincided with the transformation of the downtown riverfront from an industrial port into a destination. In 1993, the reopening of the Walnut Street Bridge as a walkway to the NorthShore provided the catalyst for even more people to rediscover the neighborhood. Case in point: Mike and his wife, Karen, rescued an 1890s Victorian-style house just before the first wave of neighborhood improvements. As they've restored their home, fellow renovators have snatched up ornate Victorian houses and small bungalows around them. "I've seen North Chattanooga reborn," says Mike. "It has great architecture and new parks, and I've counted 25 restaurants within a 20-minute walk." northshorechattanooga.com



ABOVE: Bungalows built during Chattanooga's industrial past maintain their charm today. RIGHT: Mike and Karen Thompson, with son Grayson, are restoring one of the first homes built in North Chattanooga.



PHOTOGRAPHS: LAUREYW. GLENN



Blue Dog Bakery & Café owners and Crescent Hill residents Bob Hancock and Kit Garrett built their Frankfort Avenue business with hard work and fresh bread.

PHOTOGRAPHS: VAN CHAPLIN (WILMORE/SOUTH END), ART MERIPOL (CRESCENT HILL)

4 CRESCENT HILL
LOUISVILLE, KY
Walk to New Local Shops

Crescent Hill residents love to talk about their neighborhood near downtown Louisville. They'll tell you about the well-kept cottages, beautiful churches, and involved citizens who saved the local library and improved Kennedy Park. They'll also talk about the turnaround of the Frankfort Avenue business corridor. "Fifteen years ago you didn't have to look for cars before crossing Frankfort," says councilwoman Tina Ward-Pugh. "Now it's the heart of Crescent Hill." Neighbors walk to locally owned restaurants and shops, which they happily share with visitors. "We're at the right place and time for this swing toward a love of great neighborhoods," says Don Burch, owner of Quest Outdoors. crescenthill.us

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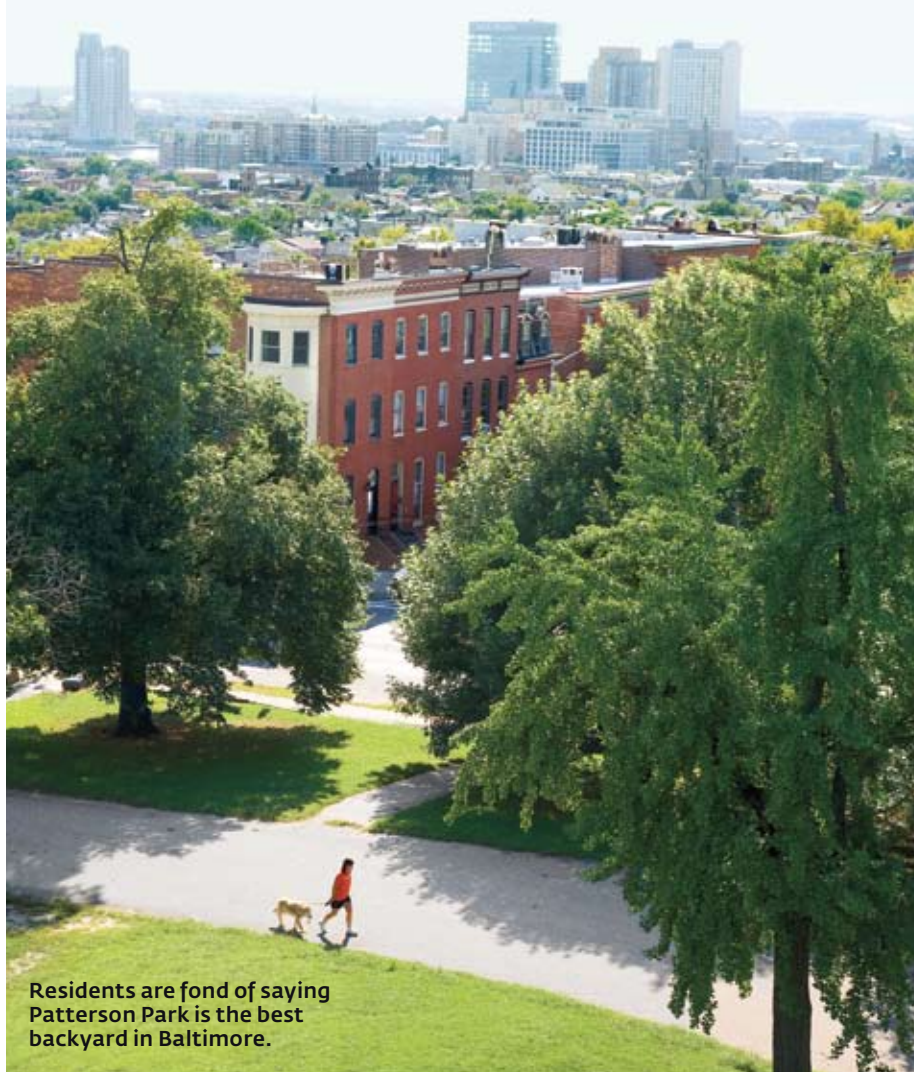
Patterson Park is a neighborhood of row houses and front stoops.

5 PATTERTON PARK
BALTIMORE, MD
Plug In to Grassroots Efforts

"In the nineties, you didn't stop your car near Patterson Park because of the drug dealers and prostitutes," says Michael Harmel, who owns Three, a restaurant across the street from the park. Many of the brick and stone row houses bordering the park were boarded up, burned out, or rented on the cheap. Beginning in the late nineties, grassroots efforts began to turn the park and the adjacent neighborhood from an eyesore into an oasis.

Future restoration of the community rests on the struggle between the housing downturn and energized homeowners rallying behind the community. "You've heard of sweat equity? We have fret equity," says neighborhood association vice president Kimi Aghevli. "You move in and think, 'What have I done?' Then your neighbors reach out and bring you into the social circle, lifting this neighborhood house by house."

A diverse population lives in affordable row houses within walking distance of the Inner Harbor. Every Wednesday, people gather at a street corner for Citizens on Patrol, during which they visit with friends and stroll the sidewalks looking for problem areas. Festivals fill the park's summer schedule, and people now enjoy walking the tree-lined paths. pattersonparkneighbors.org



Residents are fond of saying Patterson Park is the best backyard in Baltimore.



Citizens on Patrol walks encourage neighborly connections.

PHOTOGRAPHS: REX PERRY

6 HISTORIC FAIRMOUNT
FORT WORTH, TX
Join Neighbors on The Porch

When urban-core neighborhoods began to decline after World War I, money and energy drained from Fairmount. Things began to look up in the late seventies. Graceful bungalows and American Foursquares attracted renovators to this neighborhood of about 1,400 homes south of downtown. "Fairmount was still a little scary in 2002 when I bought my house, but the porch just reached out and grabbed me," says homeowner Patti Randle. Later, good schools and safe streets attracted parents looking for close-knit neighborhoods. With the help of Fort Worth South Inc., restaurants, shops, and a police substation returned.

"A lot of families come to look at the old homes, but it's the closeness of the neighbors that sells them," says neighborhood association president Robert Wedding. "Families move here for the sense of place and belonging," adds Fran McCarthy, who relocated to Fairmount seven years ago. "Who knew suburban flight would be a round trip?" historicfairmount.com



A family-friendly attitude pervades Fairmount.



LEFT: The Old Home Supply House is a perfect fit for Fairmount. It has a little of the old, a little of the new, and a whole lot of character.



Quaint picket fences give Phelps Grove the feel of a small town.

7 PHELPS GROVE
SPRINGFIELD, MO
Learn in a College Town

"We called this the student ghetto," says Andy Faucett, co-owner of Bambino's, a cafe in Phelps Grove near Missouri State University. Couches on rooftops, weekend parties, and student rental houses made the area near the university seem more frat house than family-friendly. Those in the community for the long haul fought against blight—not with conflict, but with a neighborhood plan that lifted the pride of student renters and homeowners alike. "Everyone is beginning to take responsibility for the neighborhood," says homeowner and neighborhood association president Terry Rowland. "It's about quality of life. After 27 years, we're back to knowing it's all about the people and the porches." phelpsneighborhood.org



Craftsman bungalows define Phelps Grove.



An old corner grocery store finds new life as a neighborhood restaurant.

PHOTOGRAPHS: REX PERRY (FAIRMOUNT), CHARLES WALTON IV (PHELPS GROVE)

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8 VIOLA
GREENVILLE, SC
Start Fresh Near
The City

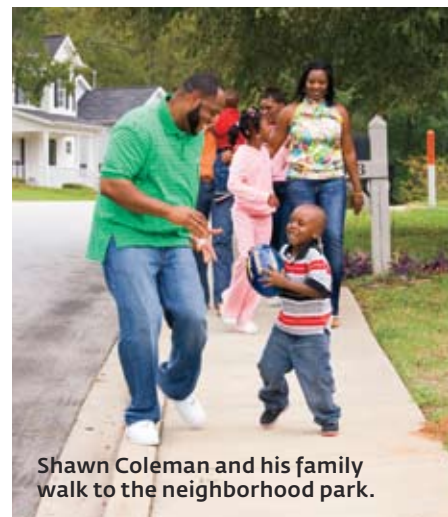
Parker Street was at a low point in downtown Greenville. "Heavy rains would flood through the shacks at the bottom of the street," says lifelong resident Shawn Coleman. Crime also filled the area. But a little over a decade ago, the Viola neighborhood was reborn, thanks to the efforts of the city, First Baptist Greenville, the Urban League of the Upstate, various community partners, and the residents themselves. Tidy homes with front porches replaced clapboard homes in decay. Better drainage and new streets, sidewalks, parks, and attitudes transformed the neighborhood. "When I got out of the military, my goal was to become a homeowner," Shawn says. "I never thought I'd be able to in my old neighborhood." In 2002, Shawn and his wife, Sandra, bought one of the more than 90 new homes in the neighborhood and inherited a second house, which they've kept as an investment. He isn't the only former resident to learn the benefits of ownership. "Former renters are learning to be homeowners. Viola has turned a lot of broken dreams into new dreams," says neighborhood association president Vincent Green. greenvillesc.gov



New houses and new roads alone didn't transform Viola. Education and connections to the greater community enabled long-term change.



Greenville's downtown turnaround spilled over into the Viola neighborhood.



Shawn Coleman and his family walk to the neighborhood park.

PHOTOGRAPHS: VAN CHAPLIN



Kate and Mike Loyco (center) admire the newborn son of neighbors Josh and Stefanie Ellis.

9 EAST NASHVILLE
NASHVILLE, TN
Shorten Your
Morning Commute

Urban areas on the rebound are just for urban pioneers, right? Don't tell that to people moving into East Nashville. "We have fewer pioneers and more families moving permanently into the area," says Josh Ellis, who lives in a remodeled 1905 Victorian with his wife, Stefanie, and their newborn son. After 10-plus years of a slow and steady rise, the neighborhood has managed to keep its eclectic, artsy vibe while welcoming a diverse mix of newcomers. "Of all the great things happening here, when I see young moms pushing strollers down the sidewalks, I know this place is back," says local shop owner Debbie Goodwyn. eastnashville.org

PHOTOGRAPHS: REX PERRY (EAST NASHVILLE), CHARLES WALTON IV (HOLY CROSS)

10 HOLY CROSS
NEW ORLEANS, LA
Restore a
Historic Home

Natural disasters bring out the best and worst in people and the places where they live. The destruction wrought by Hurricane Katrina on Holy Cross laid bare countless civic and social problems. More than four years after the flooding, the restoration of Holy Cross is also uncovering the resilience of people determined to save their neighborhood. Volunteers from the neighborhood and beyond, the Preservation Resource Center, and countless other organizations are saving Holy Cross by rebuilding the historic homes and allowing residents to return to this sliver of high ground within the Lower Ninth Ward. "People are



pouring their hearts into Holy Cross for a love of this place and their neighbors," says resident Pam Dashiell. "And we're not rebuilding blindly. The Ninth Ward has become an epicenter of preservation and sustainability." helpholycross.org *



SHARE THE CLOSE-KNIT SOUTHERN PLACE THAT YOU CALL HOME:
southernliving.com/neighbors



The character of Holy Cross is tied to the shotgun houses and the people who call them home. Both are returning to the neighborhood.