

# CEC IN HOMEWOOD



*A mosaic created by the East End Art Team called, "A Love Letter to Homewood," displays the Andinkra symbols guiding the CEC's values.*

## MESSAGE FROM THE DIRECTOR:

Creativity. Strength in Unity. Patience. Skillfulness. Wisdom. Hope. Togetherness. As I consider the various meanings of each of the Ghanaian Andinkra symbols gracing the mosaic on the center's façade, I am reminded of the values embedded into the foundation of the Community Engagement Center in Homewood.

Guided by the CEC's Neighborhood Advisory Council, who selected these symbols to visually represent the community's desires for the space, Pitt faculty, staff and students have a symbolic call-to-action to ensure that our community engaged work is done in an effective and respectful way leading to true transformation.

Youth will be connected to educational support that will get them into college. Residents will be connected to health & wellness programs that will improve medical outcomes and quality of life. Elders will be connected to the OSHER Lifelong Learning Institute and other focused workshops because learning is truly lifelong. If you are curious about what the center has for you and your family, please stop by for a tour, grab a calendar, visit us online, follow us on Facebook, IG or Twitter, our just walk in and ask, "What is this place." We look forward to showing you the possibilities.

Sincerely,  
Daren Ellerbee  
Director, Pitt CEC in Homewood

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## HOURS & CONTACT

Mon-Thurs 9:00am - 8:00pm

Friday 9:00am - 5:00pm

Saturday 10:00am - 2:00pm

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(412) 383-0830



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**Pitt CEC**  
COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT CENTER  
**HOMEWOOD**

# COMMUNITY PRIDE: ERIC GARY

What does a STEM camp, photo archives, and a basic machining certificate have in common? A driven student named Eric Gary. In the summer of 2018, Eric learned about a paid opportunity through the Community Engagement Center (CEC) from Coach Mubarik Ismaeli. His former youth football coach had shared that the City of Pittsburgh's Learn and Earn program was placing students at the new Pitt CEC in Homewood. Eric jumped at the chance without knowing how many other opportunities it would lead to.

The Learn and Earn program offers youth ages 14-21 a chance to work for the summer at places throughout the city. Eric had the chance to work with Pitt's Archives and Special Collections to create the exhibit "Homewood Then & Now", a gallery of photos that is proudly displayed in the hallway at the CEC. The photos reflect the history of the Homewood community, an important way to acknowledge that the center is just a small piece of the bigger picture of an already asset-rich community. Capturing the history of Homewood was so rewarding, Eric committed to a second summer at the CEC.



Eric stands in front of the gallery wall he helped create.



Eric builds a STEM project with CampBioE.

CEC Director Daren Ellerbee saw the drive in Eric and wanted to connect him to more programs happening at the center. Pitt's School of Engineering had taken over the CEC to run CampBioE, a one-week camp for middle and high school students giving them hands-on interaction with bioengineering and regenerative medicine. Eric applied for the camp and was accepted, allowing him to attend CampBioE during the day and while continuing to work at the CEC. Eric was eager to continue exploring and signed up for Pitt's School of Social Work SPIN Project where he provided information on safe and risky spaces in his neighborhood. This information will be used to develop programs to increase access to safe spaces and for his participation, he received an iPhone to document those spaces along with a stipend.

By now, it's clear: Eric is a self-starter. He is exploring a certificate in Basic Machining at Pitt's Manufacturing Assistance Center located at 7800 Susquehanna Avenue. When asked about Eric Gary, Coach Mu said, "He is one of our top student-athletes. He makes us all proud and we can't wait to see what's next for him." The Pitt CEC couldn't agree more and is happy to be part of Eric's journey!

# CEC IMPACT STORY: COMMUNITY AND UNIVERSITY PARTNERSHIP

Operation Better Block's Jr. Green Corps collaborated with the Dept. of Civil and Environmental Engineering at the University of Pittsburgh's Swanson School of Engineering to test soil samples from vacant lots in Homewood. The project's goal, led by NaTisha Washington of OBB, who collaborated with Dr. David Sanchez of Pitt, was to determine the efficacy of lead remediation strategies in Homewood soils.

Ms. Washington directs Operation Better Block's Jr. Green Corps where she helps high school students develop as community leaders by exposing them to green collar jobs that impact their physical environment and providing academic activities that enrich their education. The Jr. Green Corps led the project and processed the samples in the CEC's Science Lab with assistance from the University of Pittsburgh's Mascaro Center for Sustainable Innovation's Undergraduate Research to sort and process tons of soil samples. The Jr. Green Corps, made up of youth from Homewood and Wilksburg have been using the results from the lead measurements to implement remediation strategies such as planting sunflowers, cover crops, and pollinator plants to see which plants have the greatest effect.



When asked why the work of the Jr. Green Corps is important, Jerome Jackson, Executive Director of Operation Better Block responded, "From storm water drainage to lead remediation, Operation Better Block has been at the forefront of addressing many of the challenges of Homewood for decades, including environmental issues that affect the lives of residents who desire to live in a safe community."

Prior to the availability of the Science Lab, the soil samples were analyzed at Robert Morris University's campus and sent out-of-the-community to be tested. "Now that the science lab is available for community use, we can test the samples with the Jr. Green Corps in the community they work in, and not have to wait to receive the test results to move to the next step," said Ms. Washington who added, "The opening of the CEC has become a great resource for community efforts like ours."



As a part of the program, the Jr. Green Corps were also able to visit Pitt's Engineering Lab for a brief tour of the facilities on campus in Oakland. CEC director Daren Ellerbee sees the long-term value of cultivating community-university collaborations through the CEC in Homewood, especially as it relates to addressing equity & inclusion. "There are vast racial disparities in STEM fields and it's important to plant seeds early so that area youth feel comfortable and empowered to navigate scientific environments. Providing collaborative science learning opportunities through the CEC can nurture the next generation of Science, Technology, Engineering and Medical professionals by guiding African American youth towards STEM majors when they go to college."

## FEATURE EVENTS

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### **Community Dinner and Conversation**

Wednesday, September 18

Wednesday, November 20

5:30-7:30 pm

Join us for the CEC's monthly Community Dinner for a chance to meet CEC staff, tour the space, and learn how the center can benefit you and your family!

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### **Coffee with the Director**

Tuesday, September 24

Tuesday, October 29

9:00-10:00 am

Enjoy coffee and some one-on-one time with Director Daren Ellerbee. Learn more about ways to partner and utilize the CEC!

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### **One-Year Anniversary Celebration**

Wednesday, October 16, 2019

5:30-7:30 pm

Join us to celebrate the one-year anniversary of the CEC in Homewood! Food, giveaways, fun!

All are welcome to attend.

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## HOURS & CONTACT

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\*Depending on programming

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