

# NORTH OMAHA FIRST

A Hyper-local Community Experience

Powered by **FiberFirst**



*Ken Fox, co-founder of  
Black Police Officers Association*

**Serving North Omaha**

Holidays in North Omaha | Big Mama's Legacy | Local Deals Inside

# North Omaha Business Spotlight

FiberFirst is proud to support small- and medium-sized local businesses with free ad space in *North Omaha First*.

Want to promote your business in our next edition?  
Scan the QR code to submit your application!



CARRY OUT CATERING CURBSIDE

**Big Mama's**  
KITCHEN + CATERING

Mention FiberFirst for 11% off your order. \*

**Tuesday - Saturday:  
11:00 AM - 7:00 PM**

**Sunday & Monday:  
CLOSED**

\*Not valid with any other offer or discounts. Other restrictions apply.  
Coupon expires 12/31/2024.

**BIGMAMASKITCHEN.COM (402) 455-6262**

## COMING SOON...A NEW LOCATION!



Fresh, vibrant, and vital foods, juices and smoothies are coming your way! Healthy Caribbean Ital-inspired goodness!

Opening Fall 2024

Follow us for updates on  
Instagram/Facebook  
@ItalVital!  
[www.italvitaliving.com](http://www.italvitaliving.com)

*\*Mention this ad for 10% off a smoothie!\**

**OPENING SOON:  
7639 Cass Street  
HOURS:**

**Tues-Sat 7am to 7pm**

**CURRENT LOCATION:  
2323 N 24th St  
HOURS:**

**Tues-Sat 1pm - 6pm**

**RIGHT MIND CREATIVE CO**

Recording  
Mixing  
Mastering  
Guitar  
Lessons  
Multi Media  
Content

**RIGHTMINDCREATIVE.CO (531) 600-9616**

**Mon-Sun: 11am-8pm**

**5402 NW Radial Hwy  
Omaha, NE  
(402) 397-5765**

**Hartland  
Bar-B-Que**

**"Where you can Taste the Smoke"**

**EST 2007**

Mention this add to receive a  
**FREE drink**





## Letter from the Editor

### *Celebrations First! 'Tis the Season for Food, Music, and More*

The end-of-year holidays are upon us. The air has been full of spices since mid-September, and it will continue to smell like baked goods and peppermint cocoa through the end of December, at least.

One place that relishes feeding the North Omaha community, and Omaha in general, often is scented of brown sugar, cinnamon, and other spices from its signature sweet potato pie. Big Mama's Kitchen has been a North Omaha staple for more than 15 years, and owner Gladys Harrison tells the story in this issue of how her mama, Patricia Barron, started this beloved eatery. The article also includes a great recipe from the Barron family kitchen, so readers can bake a piece of Big Mama's right in their own homes. Those who want to reduce, or skip, their time in the kitchen for a holiday gathering can also use Big Mama's Kitchen for all their catering needs.

North 24th Street is a happening place—and the area is one of several in Omaha that becomes extra-special during the holiday season. It will sparkle with lights along the main portion of the corridor from Burdette to Ohio streets from after Thanksgiving to New Year's Day. On December 7, the Empowerment Network and Omaha Economic Development Corp. will join with several community sponsors to present Christmas in the Village. This year is the 14th annual edition of this spectacular event, which features fun for children—such as beloved costumed characters and face painting. It also features a live nativity scene and entertainment, such as dance performances and live music.

Creating music is not only fun, it's good for the brain—specifically the right side of the brain, which helps with creative acts such as improvisation and writing music. That's the reason for the name behind Right Mind Creative Co. This company focuses on music creation from all aspects—production, recording, engineering; even photography and cover art for albums. *North Omaha First* spoke with owner Ryan Vandergrind about how their company works, and why it's working in Omaha.

There are many in our community in need—of clothing, food, and more. Some may be able to afford food, but don't have the luxury of providing a youngster's longed-for Christmas gift. Another article in this issue focuses on how four nonprofits in North Omaha are providing relief for those less fortunate during this festive season.

While unwrapping a gift is always fun, tearing into the paper on a new tablet or cell phone comes with the need for education about how to stay safe from cyber-crimes and aware that social media is rife with scams. SmartGen Society has a mission of making sure all people, especially students, are aware of the dangers of the digital world. Their story is impressive, and can be found in this edition of *North Omaha First*.

We at Omaha Publications, and our partners at FiberFirst, hope you enjoy this edition of *North Omaha First*, and wish you a happy holiday season.

Daisy Hutzell-Rodman  
Managing Editor  
Content Studios Omaha

## Table of Contents

- 04** COMMUNITY FIRST  
Christmas in North O.
- 06** NONPROFITS FIRST  
Embracing the Spirit of Giving
- 08** PEOPLE FIRST  
Big Mama's Community Impact
- 10** ONLINE SAFETY FIRST  
Keeping Yourself Safe Online
- 12** BUSINESS FIRST  
Growing Omaha's Music Scene
- 14** ARTS FIRST  
Beaufield Berry
- 15** FUN FIRST  
Events/Activities Around North Omaha

### About the Cover

Officer Ken Fox is the driving force behind, BPOA, which hosts an Adopt-A-Family program each year. Story page 6.

#### EDITORIAL

Content Studios Omaha Managing Editor  
Daisy Hutzell-Rodman

Contributing Writers  
Christopher McLucas, Don Rashid, Brandi Long-Frank, Holly McAtee, Kara Schweis

#### SALES

Sales Coordinator  
Sandi McCormack

Branding & Digital Specialist  
Tim McCormack

Business Manager  
Kyle Fisher

#### EXECUTIVE

Executive Publisher  
Todd Lemke

#### ART

Photography  
Bill Sitzmann, Sarah Lemke

Graphic Designer  
Joey Winton

#### FIBERFIRST TEAM

Omaha Market Manager  
Jason Johnson

Omaha Technical Manager  
Derek Stork

Omaha Community Brand Manager  
Rachel Larson



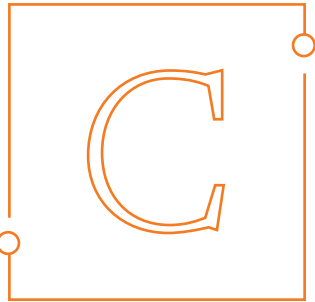
SCAN ME

We would like to hear from you! Please use this QR code to give us feedback about North Omaha First.

# CELEBRATING NORTH OMAHA

## Beloved Community Event Evokes Seasonal Spirit

Story by Christopher McLucas // Photography by Bill Sitzmann



*“Giving love and bringing joy to thousands of children is the essence of Christmas. —Geneva Lopez”*

Christmastime in the metro includes many community-wide celebrations, including one right in the heart of North Omaha. For the last 14 years, The Empowerment Network has been hosting Christmas in the Village on North 24th Street. Since its inception, many North Omaha residents and local business have come together to create this tradition, which takes place the first Saturday in December to great success. Last year, Christmas in the Village had 7,000 attendees, including locals and visitors from out-of-state, who came together to celebrate. The event is part of an ongoing re-establishment of arts, culture, entertainment, and businesses, envisioned in the North Omaha Revitalization Plan, to bring people to North Omaha—not to bask in the after-effects of its revitalization, but to be the change that they want and to participate and practice in the growth of the community.

Willie Barney, CEO of The Empowerment Network, had a vision of bringing the community together during the winter holidays. This led him to collaboration with others in North Omaha in order to rally the community behind this event.

“We wanted people to celebrate Christmas in their own backyard,” said Vicki Quaites-Ferris, vice president of development at The Empowerment Network.

Quaites-Ferris is a native daughter of North Omaha who grew up in Pleasant View Housing, now called Seventy Five North.

“Jesus is the reason for the season,” Quaites-Ferris said joyously. “That... can get lost in the hustle and bustle but when it comes down to it, it’s something to celebrate.” She noted that there are activities to suit a variety of interests at Christmas in the Village. “There’s live music in Dreamland Park, Santa gives gifts and children write letters to give to him personally, face painting, there’s a petting zoo.”

There’s also a holiday boutique, which includes around 30 vendors. One of the highlights of the event is the horse-drawn carriage rides. People also enjoy viewing the holiday lights, which add to the ambiance and extend along 24th Street from Ohio to Bernadette streets.

Geneva Lopez, administrative assistant with the Omaha Economic Development Corp., has been a part Christmas in the Village for 11 years.

“It’s a great time to celebrate the holidays and bring smiles to children and adult’s faces,” Lopez said. “It’s a delight to be a part of this ever-growing event. It’s an opportunity to give back to the community that I live and work in. Giving love and bringing joy to thousands of children is the essence of Christmas. It’s an amazing day! (People can) visit with Santa, take a carriage ride, get (their) faces painted, receive a gift bag, have a conversation with Mrs. Claus, visit life-size characters, enjoy cookies and hot chocolate, and much, much more.”

The first year The Empowerment Network partnered with Great Plains Black History Museum, Omaha Economic Development Corp., *Omaha Star*, and Union of Contemporary Art. There are now more than 50 event partners, who understand that the needs of a community are beyond one person, one organization, or business. It takes everyone to see people’s similarities in order to stop creating barriers.

“Things have been happening before I came on board. We want to build upon that,” Quaites-Ferris said. “You don’t see those people in the trenches doing the work putting this together...We want you to come down to 24th Street and experience what we have to offer.”

The 2024 event will take place from noon to 5 p.m. Dec. 7. Quaites-Ferris invited everyone to come and experience this annual event.

“When you lock arms with others you will become a more connected community,” Quaites-Ferris said. “I want people outside our state to see Omaha neighborhoods collaborating and celebrating. When they see us do it, they know they can do it as well.” 🌍



Vicki Quaites-Ferris, vice president of development at The Empowerment Network





Photo Courtesy of the Black Police Officers Association



Photo Courtesy of the Black Police Officers Association



Photo Courtesy of  
No More Empty Pots



Photo Courtesy of Project Home



Photo Courtesy of No More Empty Pots

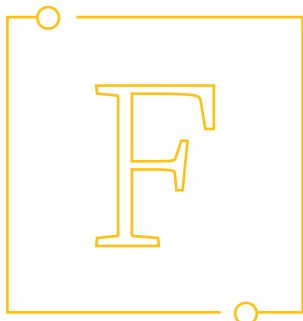




# SERVING NORTH OMAHA FIRST

## Local Nonprofits Provide Holiday Cheer

Story by Don Rashid // Photography by Bill Sitzmann



our local nonprofits will stay close to their North Omaha roots while impacting the broader metro community this holiday season. Each organization partners with families, children, and individuals. Building up the strength and vibrancy of this geographic area is their collective mission. Each of these nonprofits is proud of their ability, as servant leaders, to help provide basic needs and partner with the North Omaha community.

### Black Police Officers Association

Ken Fox, Omaha Police Department Support Services captain, co-founded the Black Police Officers Association in 2013 upon seeing a need to be a bigger presence in the community. Fox said, “The purpose of our organization is to support our community and be that gap that specifically bridges the Omaha Police Department and North Omaha.”

Their 250 members sponsor an Adopt-A-Family program in which OPD officers deliver clothing, gifts, and a full meal to 15 families at Christmastime, with another 15 families receiving Thanksgiving meals. They will also be a part of Christmas in the Village.

### No More Empty Pots

This organization hosts an annual holiday open house—this year on Dec. 13—blending their fresh food with culture through a partnership with Omaha Performing Arts. During Thanksgiving, they provide a community-prepared meal.

President and CEO Talia McGill said No More Empty Pots is an “organization dedicated to ensuring people thrive, working through food and food systems.” Commercial kitchens and programs provide equipment, plus access to an expanded food science lab, and an upbeat environment for practicing basic culinary skills. Budding entrepreneurs learn business development and marketing skills. A greenhouse allows natural light in to grow potted and vertical hydroponic plants, herbs, and vegetables. McGill’s team helps neighborhood and community members work through long-term financial problems and believe in a different way of life.

### Project Hope

Those in need in the community have been able to receive aid through Project Hope for over 35 years. They are a good resource for those looking for warm clothing.

During the winter, Executive Director Veda Keebler works with staff and 40 volunteers to organize winter coat drives. Keebler said, “Most of our clients are women with children in their households, including the elderly raising their grandchildren. A higher percentage of residents are from North Omaha.”

These coats are especially needed for youngsters, who often outgrow coats annually. November is the month in which coats need to be worn almost daily—in Omaha, average high temperatures range from nearly 60 degrees at the beginning of the month to around 40 degrees by the end of the month.

Along with coats, Project Hope can help others with hygiene products and food.

### Kiwanis Club of Florence

The Kiwanis Club members are dedicated to improving children’s lives, including believing that people deserve to have presents under the tree at Christmastime. They participate in Toys for Tots, a project for which the group enjoys serving. Larry Ziska, group treasurer, and a past president and district governor said, “It is always heartwarming to work with young folks and see their eyes light up. Kiwanis gives us, as an organization, an opportunity to help kids be better citizens and learn what it means to be of service to the community.”

Along with helping provide toys for youngsters, Kiwanis also helps senior citizens receive smaller, stocking-stuffer-type gifts. The club adopts Florence Elementary through an Adopt-A-School program, providing holiday gifts for teachers. 🌟

For more information or to get involved, scan the QR codes below

Black Police Officers Association



No More Empty Pots



Project Hope



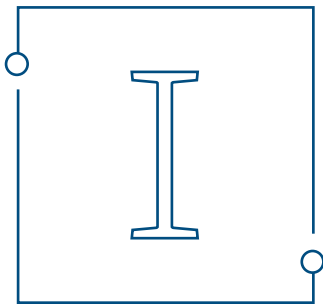
Kiwanis Club of Florence



# A LEGACY OF LOVE

## Big Mama's Daughter Continues Positive Impact on North Omaha

Story by Brandi Long-Frank // Photography by Sarah Lemke



In the heart of North Omaha, the legacy of community member Patricia “Big Mama” Barron continues to thrive through her family-owned restaurant, Big Mama’s Kitchen. Known for its soulful comfort food and warm community spirit, Big Mama’s Kitchen has become an iconic establishment in the city; but for her daughter, Gladys Harrison, the restaurant is much more than a place to eat; it is a testament to her mother’s passion for cooking and serving others.

Barron’s love for cooking started at a young age. “As a kid, my mom had chores to do before my grandmother got home from work, like cleaning the house, scrubbing floors, and washing windows,” Harrison shared. “My mom hated cleaning, so she would make tea cakes for neighborhood kids in exchange for them doing her chores. My mom used food to bring people together, and sometimes to get people to do what she wanted.”

After graduating from Central High School in 1960, Barron had dreams of attending a historically Black college. However, when her parents denied her wish, she took an unexpected path. “She joined the United States Navy right after high school and served for four years. That’s a whole other story!” Harrison said with a laugh, hinting at her mother’s adventurous spirit.

After her time in the Navy, Barron returned to Omaha and pursued her culinary passions while working a corporate job at local phone company Northwestern Bell. “She always wanted to open a restaurant, but she put that dream aside to climb the corporate ladder,” Harrison explained. Despite her demanding job, Barron’s passion for cooking never wavered. She started a catering business out of the family’s home, which eventually grew into Big Mama’s Kitchen.

“I remember that we always cooked out of the house. We started making cakes and desserts, and eventually, that grew into cooking food,” Harrison recounted. “We ran a catering business out of our basement, where we had two kitchens. My mother was the type of person who did everything she wanted to do. She even learned how to make authentic dishes from different cultures, like Chinese wontons and (Mexican) tamales, by finding someone to teach her.”

After retiring from Northwestern Bell, Barron decided it was time to fulfill her long-held dream of opening a restaurant. At 62, she and her daughters began selling food out of their house on Saturdays, mirroring the entrepreneurial spirit of rappers selling CDs out of their cars. This grassroots effort was the humble beginning of Big Mama’s Kitchen.

With the help of the community and the Turning Point Organization, Barron eventually found a more permanent home for her restaurant at 45th and Bedford streets in Omaha. “At first, my mom wasn’t interested, but after a few more meetings and some prayer, she decided to check it out,” Harrison recalled. “We ended up making the space look like my mom’s kitchen to give people the vibe of eating in their grandma’s favorite kitchen. We opened in December 2007.”

From the beginning, Big Mama’s Kitchen was more than just a restaurant. Barron and her family wanted to create a welcoming space for the community.

“My mother wanted to create a place in North Omaha where people could come for a good meal and the community could meet,” Harrison said. “We’ve always hired people who were formerly incarcerated, believing the culinary field is a great way for someone to acquire a skill and a career. We’ve always wanted to give people a second chance.”

In 2008, Big Mama’s Kitchen was featured on the Food Network’s “Diners, Drive-Ins & Dives,” which brought national attention to the restaurant and its mission. “That exposure has brought people from all over the world to Big Mama’s Kitchen,” Harrison noted. “It showcased who my mom was and what our restaurant was about.”

Barron worked tirelessly at the restaurant until her leukemia diagnosis in 2016, which eventually led to her passing in 2018. Despite her absence, Harrison and her sisters have continued to honor their mother’s legacy by keeping Big Mama’s Kitchen alive and thriving. “Six years after her passing, Big Mama’s family continues to carry on her legacy of preparing great food and serving the community,” Harrison said.

The impact of Big Mama’s Kitchen extends far beyond its delicious meals. It stands as a symbol of resilience, community, and the power of a shared meal. “Big Mama’s has become an icon, and we’re committed to doing our part to help North Omaha thrive,” Harrison concluded.

Through their dedication to Barron’s vision, Harrison and her family have ensured that Big Mama’s Kitchen remains a beloved institution in North Omaha, embodying the spirit of togetherness and generosity that Big Mama herself cherished so dearly. 🌟





This cherished cornbread recipe comes straight from the Barron family's kitchen. Big Mama's Cornbread Mix can be purchased on their website, <https://bigmamaskitchen.com>.

#### Ingredients

- 1 cup flour
- 1 cup cornmeal
- 1/2 teaspoon salt
- 1 tablespoon and 1 teaspoon baking powder
- 1/2 cup sugar
- 2 eggs
- 1 cup milk
- 1/2 cup canola oil

1. Preheat oven to 425°
2. Add dry ingredients to mixing bowl
3. Add eggs and milk
4. Pour the canola oil into an 8-inch, cast-iron skillet or baking pan to grease the
5. Pour oil from skillet into mixing bowl with other ingredients
6. Blend ingredients until smooth
7. Pour batter into baking pan or skillet
8. Bake for 20-25 minutes

#### Directions

Yields 8-12 pieces

Gladys Harrison, president of Big Mama's Kitchen







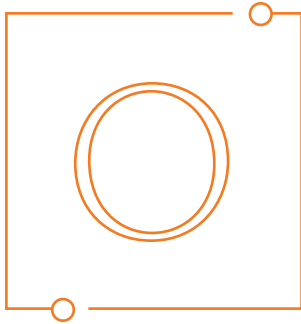
Lisa Johnson, director of marketing and development at Smart Gen Society



# USING TECHNOLOGY WISELY

## Smart Gen Society

Story by Daisy Hutzell-Rodman // Photography by Bill Sitzmann



Online and digital safety is a major concern for most parents, with good reason. The National Institute of Health reported in 2022 that 53% of children in the United States have a smartphone by age 11, with 59% of those youngsters receiving the phone due, in part, to asking for one. Those children mostly already knew how to use a phone: the NIH also found that, while over 93% of parents think that their toddlers should not use phones, 73.34% of those parents allowed it.

Add to this the fact that social media changes faster than many parents can keep up with it—Threads is the new competitor for X, which is the new Twitter; Lemon8 is not TikTok but it is a video and photo-sharing social media project owned by TikTok's parent company. So how are parents to know what to allow their children to use, and how are children to know what sites are a danger to them?

One company in Omaha is making a huge effort to help. Smart Gen Society has created a research-based preventative education program that helps students and parents counteract the negative impact of technologies and teach safety management.

The organization began in 2016 as Smart Girl Society, but, in 2019, they changed their name to become fully gender inclusive. By 2020, the organization was serving more than 45,000 people and had become an official FBI partner, and today, they have programming in more than 16 states.

It's a resource that is especially valuable in vulnerable populations.

"Probably my biggest worry for kids in those populations is one of the biggest things we see, which is financial extortion and grooming tactics that are being used," said Lisa Johnson, director of marketing and development.

She said that vulnerable populations, such as those who are food insecure or cannot afford new clothing, are more willing to click on a scammy text or email in order to obtain extra cash they sometimes desperately need.

"Because of that financial situation, they are going to be more likely to fall into financial scams," Johnson said. "The parental supervision isn't there. Sometimes there's a language barrier. Sometimes the schools have given the kid a tablet, and these kids will be preyed upon by a school-issued device."

SGS serves predominately children, youth, and their families, in partnership with participating public and private schools. The idea is to provide a system of support around today's youth through workshops and seminars, classroom curriculum, and digital resources. The organization is dedicated to helping all people make sure their children are safe online.

Johnson said Smart Gen advocates for mentoring over monitoring.

"Some people read every single text their kids send," Johnson said. "Following kids on social media is good, but don't comment on every single post."

That's because posting every time a kid puts something online can seem like a parent is smothering a child, and can actually make kids shut down online, or engage far less frequently.

And when posting on social media, keep things positive. Liking dark comedy or mean statements online leads to dark comedy or mean statements coming up in one's algorithms more and more frequently. Following things that bring joy will tell the programs to send more of those things that bring joy—and soon a person will have a feed full of pumpkin-spice latte pictures instead of vampires.

Johnson also said that technology safety extends to video games. One of the prime ways that the organization helps is by staying engaged and up-to-date so that community members can stay current. They provide presentations targeted to a variety of professionals (law enforcement officials, businesspeople, educators, and physicians) as well as students, parents, and caregivers.

Another leg of this system is their digital wellness program, which provides one-on-one support for people dealing with digital media crises, such as cyber-bullying or other conflicts. Their services range from intervention consulting such as a brand audit or family/caregiver digital planning to conflict resolution such as court-appointed restorative justice mediation, and can also help figure out where a digital crisis occurred.

"We really think that education is the way to help, and we're here to help," Johnson said.

### For parents or caregivers:

- 1) Be an open and approachable adult.
- 2) Know a child's passwords and unlock code.
- 3) Be careful of "oversharenting." Parents are sharing too much information about their kids online.

### For students:

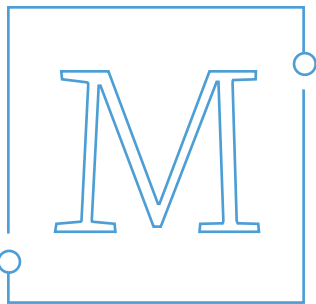
- 1) Be your own first line of defense. Learn to think: Is this someone I know, is this safe?
- 2) Anything you share might come back to you. If you aren't sure, ask an adult if this is appropriate.
- 3) Be kind and safe. It is easy to comment rude or mean things.



# GROWING A COMMUNITY FOR MUSIC IN OMAHA

Right Mind Creative Co.

Story by Holly McAtee // Photography by Bill Sitzmann



Music is spiritual. It sinks into one's soul and creates memories. A great song can take a person back to a sacred time.

Nestled on the back side of a building complex on north 90th Street is a hidden gem called Right Mind Creative Co. On the door is the image of the right side of the brain with the business name beside it. As soon as someone steps inside the doors, they are greeted with bold, modern décor and all the latest sound studio equipment.

The business name, Right Mind Creative Co., was developed because the right side of the brain is the creative side. The studio is a hive of creativity where people feed off each other's activity.

"We consider ourselves a creative space in general, and not just a recording studio," said Ryan "Roo" Vandergriend, owner and engineer of Right Mind Creative. Vandergriend specializes in turning an idea into a finalized record. Rob "Louphoria" Guardiola sets the vibe for inspiration with expert production. Cooper Jewett turns each client's session into a shared experience with their following. The three work together to create a unique sound for their clients.

Vandergriend has been a lover of music all his life. He first found a love for music when he was 5 and began playing the piano at home. Eventually, he began to write music. "Music has always spoken to me on an emotional level," Vandergriend said. "I feel like it's a really special way to help people connect to their feelings. It's one of the best ways to express yourself and your identity as a creator."

Vandergriend is soft-spoken, but when he talks about his love of music and helping others create their unique sound he erupts into bursts of energy. He loves being a part of the whole process with creating music for his clients.

Right Mind Creative works with all types of artists to help them develop their unique sound. They have developed music for Keeda Dezhon, Allie Jade, Hunnidband Lindo, and Jordanna Maria, among others.

Those working with Right Mind Creative receive personal attention. The engineers care about the song and the artist. "Artistic development is one of the things that we really focus on," Vandergriend said.

Right Mind does the whole process for their clients—from music lessons, to recording the tracks, to developing the brand with album covers, and even promoting the artists on Instagram and TikTok.

Those who work with Right Mind should be prepared to get out of their comfort zone. According to Vandergriend, "it's a hard space to be (in). Being able to take

yourself out of that box and find peace in the discomfort is when your natural state of creativity will flow."

"I always try to reassure artists that 'discovering' yourself and your sound is a never-ending journey—and to enjoy the journey over the destination. Sometimes it takes being uncomfortable to bring out something new about yourself that you never knew that you loved. Often, I'll get to their level and be vulnerable myself, either showing them my most vulnerable music, or speaking about a vulnerable life experience myself with some humor added to bring light to the moment," Vandergriend added.

It's the dedication to helping develop talent that makes Right Mind a great choice for local musicians.

Vandergriend's vision for the future with Right Mind Creative is to grow a community for music in Omaha. He envisions a collaborative community of artists from different genres.

"We are all young and hungry for the potential on the table. We look forward to growing people and our process as well," Vandergriend said with a beaming smile. "Look for new independent artists coming out of Omaha. There's a lot going here. A lot of hard work has been happening in this city." 🌍



*We are all young and hungry for the potential on the table. We look forward to growing people and our process as well. —Ryan "Roo" Vandergriend*



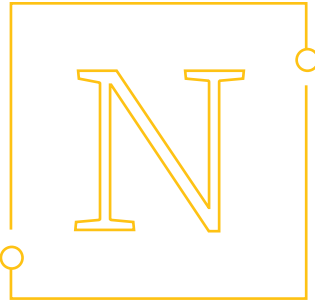
Ryan "Roo" Vandergrind, owner and engineer of Right Mind Creative



# FAMILY AND COMMUNITY

## Beaufield Berry's Legacy of Storytelling

Story by Kara Schweiss // Photography by Bill Sitzmann



Now that Beaufield Berry's three children are 4, 7, and 10, the playwright, novelist, and arts educator—who also serves as marketing manager for Benson Theatre—said she loves being able to share her work with her offspring and play a part in fostering the next generation of creators.

"My kids are so sweet. They're so interested in what I do, and I only recently realized that," she said. "I want to bring them in even more. I want to really create with them."

It's a family legacy of sorts. Berry has been around dynamic personalities her whole life.

"My mother (Pamela Jo Berry) has been running the North Omaha Summer Arts Program now for over a decade," she said. "My grandmother, Janis Berry, ran the (near) North Omaha YMCA, which isn't there anymore, but she ran it for a number of years in the '80s and '90s."

Other early memories include a grandfather's colorful narratives.

"We grew up hearing these stories of Daddy in that tornado of '75. My grandfather was a storyteller. He was so full of life, and definitely an exaggerator. But I love that in people," Berry said.

She immortalized the tornado tale and other family stories in her Black American family drama "In the Upper Room." Collective family experiences have been creative influences, Berry said, including some difficult content. For instance, her great-grandparents first landed in Omaha in the 1950s through military service, only to experience being marginalized.



Beaufield Berry, local playwright

"My family was from Georgia, deep South Georgia. They'd experienced a lot in terms of racism and segregation, but coming north and experiencing it here as well was really a culture shock," she said. "Being raised in the same home as my great-grandfather exposed me to a lot of those stories from before I was born."

Several of Berry's works besides "In the Upper Room" address the Black diaspora, such as "Buffalo Women: A Black Cowgirl Musical Dramedy," set in 1865 on the American frontier. The recurring theme of race is also informed by Berry's own experiences.

"Growing up biracial, both in North Omaha and then (when) I went to school out west, it was challenging both places for different reasons," she said. "I really had to figure out who I am and how I'm going to walk, and it's remained a chal-

lenge throughout my life, but also a privilege that can't be denied...it's really just a balancing act, and it goes back to that self-integrity of being true to myself and knowing who I am, so that other people's perceptions of me would not be able to shake my identity of myself."

Her works acknowledge the sometimes-gritty history of the community, yet Berry deeply desires to see North Omaha flourish both economically and creatively.

She said, "I feel like North Omaha's own residents have taken that part of the city back and really poured love and art back into it, which is really beautiful." 🌍





# Fun First: ACTIVITIES / EVENTS AROUND NORTH OMAHA

## 2024 TURKEY TROT 5K

Nov. 28 at Charles Schwab Field  
1200 Mike Fahey St.

One of Omaha's favorite Thanksgiving traditions is back! Runners, walkers, and those wanting to help out a good cause will love the Omaha Turkey Trot presented by All Community Events. The event starts at 9 a.m., so runners can get out of the kitchen and leave others to cook the feast. Participants receive their choice of a long-sleeve T-shirt or fleece pullover, and LaMar's Donuts are available for a post-run snack. Proceeds benefit Make-A-Wish Foundation of Nebraska.

— [nebraskaruns.com/omahaturkeytrot5K](http://nebraskaruns.com/omahaturkeytrot5K)

## CHRISTMAS STORE 2024

Dec. 14 at Abide Omaha, 3223 N. 45th St.

Every year, Abide Omaha's Christmas Store provides thousands of new gifts to the children of North Omaha. Community members come to pick out gifts for children 0-10 years old. This year, they plan to have 2,000 gifts available for 1,000 children. The gifts are purchased and donated by helpers throughout the metro. Each gift, whether it's a toy, clothing, shoes, or something else, is brand new. The store also has treats such as cookies, and wrapping. Whether you go to shop, volunteer to assist, serve, or help park, Christmas and the North Omaha community are alive and joyous with Abide Omaha's Christmas Store.

## BFF OMAHA: FIRST FRIDAY IN THE BENSON CREATIVE DISTRICT

Jan. 3 at 2729 N. 62nd St.

Each Benson First Friday event is unique, engaging, and walkable. First Friday is BFF Omaha's longest running and most popular program. Past First Fridays have included artist markets, synesthesia, pop-up dog parks, youth education, and annual events such as Pride and The New American Arts Festival. Their artist markets have included over 100 vendors and on-street live performances as well as art from local artists from the metro. The First Friday educational programming engages kids from toddlers to teenagers. These events are a must-visit with the whole family available on the first Friday of the month throughout the entire year.

— [bffomaha.org](http://bffomaha.org)



Photos Contributed

## NOVEMBER

### VIETNAM VETERANS CEREMONY

Nov. 11  
Memorial Park  
6005 Underwood Ave.  
402.444.5900  
— [nebraskavietnamveterans.com](http://nebraskavietnamveterans.com)

### TONY ROMITI

Nov. 16  
The Waiting Room Lounge  
6212 Maple St.  
402.884.5353  
— [waitingroomlounge.com](http://waitingroomlounge.com)

### A CHRISTMAS CAROL

Nov. 22-Dec. 22  
Omaha Community Playhouse  
6054 Maple St.  
402.553.0800  
— [omahaplayhouse.com](http://omahaplayhouse.com)

### BREAKFAST WITH SANTA

Nov. 23  
Florentine City Hall  
2864 State St.  
402.871.8791  
— [florentineplayers.com](http://florentineplayers.com)

### HOLIDAY LIGHTS FESTIVAL BEGINS

Nov. 25 at 6 p.m.  
24th and Lake Streets  
402.345-5401  
— [holidaylightsfestival.org](http://holidaylightsfestival.org)

### A GREAT PLAINS BUSINESS COMPADRE

Nov. 29 & 30  
Florentine City Hall  
2864 State St.  
402.871.8791  
— [florentineplayers.com](http://florentineplayers.com)

## DECEMBER

### HOLIDAY OPEN HOUSE

Dec. 3  
P4K  
1004 Farnam St., Suite 200  
402.930.3082  
— [p4k.org](http://p4k.org)

### THE HOLIDAY ROOM

Dec. 5  
The Benson Theatre  
6054 Maple St.  
402.991.4333  
— [bensonthatre.org](http://bensonthatre.org)

### UNIONMADE: AN ARTIST MARKET

Dec. 7  
The Union for Contemporary Art  
2423 N 24th St.  
402.933.3161  
— [u-ca.org](http://u-ca.org)

### HOLIDAY BOUTIQUE

Dec. 7  
2401 Lake St.  
402.502.5153  
— [empoweromaha.org](http://empoweromaha.org)

### CHRISTMAS IN THE VILLAGE

Dec. 7  
The Village  
24th & Lake streets  
402.502.5153  
— [empoweromaha.org](http://empoweromaha.org)

### HOLIDAY MARKET

Dec. 15  
The Waiting Room Lounge  
6212 Maple St.  
402.884.5353  
— [waitingroomlounge.com](http://waitingroomlounge.com)

### HOLIDAYS SHAKEN, NOT STIRRED

Dec. 15 & 19  
St. Paul United Methodist Church  
5410 Corby St.  
402.556.2433  
— [mastersingersomaha.com](http://mastersingersomaha.com)

### NEVERMIND UNPLUGGED

Dec. 27  
The Waiting Room Lounge  
6212 Maple St.  
402.884.5353  
— [waitingroomlounge.com](http://waitingroomlounge.com)

## JANUARY

### VISCERIOUS

Jan. 3  
The Waiting Room Lounge  
6212 Maple St.  
402.884.5353  
— [waitingroomlounge.com](http://waitingroomlounge.com)

JAZZ SESSIONS AT NOMA  
Jan. 3, 10, & 17  
North Omaha Music and Arts  
2510 N. 24th St.  
531.867.4280  
— [northomahamusic.org](http://northomahamusic.org)

### FROZEN

Jan. 4 & 5  
FilmStreams Dundee  
4952 Dodge St.  
402.933.0259  
— [filmstreams.org](http://filmstreams.org)

### OUTLANDER AWARDS DINNER

Jan. 22  
CHI HEALTH CENTER OMAHA  
455 N. 10th St.  
402.341.1500  
— [chihealthcenteromaha.org](http://chihealthcenteromaha.org)

Add FiberFirst TV Streaming starting at \$45/mo and Digital Phone for \$19.99/mo! See website for details.

# Hey, North Omaha!



New customers who sign up for  
**1 Gig or faster** internet with FiberFirst  
become eligible to receive a  
**\$100 Amazon.com Gift Card\***

**2 Gig**  
(2000Mb/2000Mb)

**\$115/mo.**

with Auto Pay and E-billing‡  
Free installation

**MOST POPULAR**

**1 Gig**  
(1000Mb/1000Mb)

**\$75/mo.**

with Auto Pay and E-billing‡  
Free installation

**500 Mb**

**\$65/mo.**

with Auto Pay and E-billing‡  
\$99 installation fee

**300 Mb**

**\$30/mo.**

with Auto Pay and E-billing‡  
\$99 installation fee

- ✓ Unlimited data, NO contracts, NO caps
- ✓ All-in pricing with NO hidden fees
- ✓ 100% fiber to your door (no copper cables)
- ✓ Includes Wi-Fi 6 router
- ✓ Symmetrical speeds; Uploads as fast as downloads
- ✓ 24/7 tech support with local field technicians

‡-For all plans, an additional \$10/month fee will be added for non-automatic billing and \$10/month will also be added for paper billing.



**FiberFirst.com**  
**833.FIBRGIG**  
(833.342.7444)

Scan here for  
more information  
or to get started!



\*Promo offer expires 12/15/24 - order today! Cannot be combined with additional promotions. Offer for new customers only. Restrictions apply, see [www.amazon.com/gc-legal](http://www.amazon.com/gc-legal). Visit [fiberfirst.com/save-big-on-a-gig/](http://fiberfirst.com/save-big-on-a-gig/) for details.