



UMB News

Face to Face: Live Near Your Work

January 28, 2022 | By [Alex Likowski](#)

"The ache for home lives in all of us," poet, author, and civil rights leader Maya Angelou wrote. "The safe place where we can go as we are and not be questioned." There is something unquestionably fundamental about having a home, and something even more emotionally charged about owning one. What could be a more central component of the American Dream than owning a home? Feeling a deep sense of accomplishment. Laying the keystone of our financial foundation. Achieving a real feeling of belonging, of membership in a community.

That's why it was so exciting to announce late last year that the University of Maryland, Baltimore (UMB) Live Near Your Work program reached an impressive milestone. One million dollars have been given out to help 63 university employees buy homes in seven nearby West Baltimore neighborhoods in less than just four years.

The program is open to many employees at UMB, with a few conditions, the most important of which is the requirement to live in the home at least five years after settlement. Other financial requirements include being credit-worthy and being able to put at least \$1,000 down.

One recent homebuyer, University of Maryland School of Social Work facilities manager **Justin Hanna**, used what he called the "absolute blessing" of the program to purchase a 3-level townhome in the Pigtown neighborhood.

"I was under the impression," he said, "that I needed to save X amount of money, and I was like, 'There's no way. I won't be able to do that anytime soon.'" But with the help of a \$16,000 Live Near Your Work grant and another \$2,500 from the city, Hanna was able to pull it off.

"I'm literally a 10-minute walk from work. I don't need a car, and it's just incredibly convenient to be able to wake up in the morning knowing that I'm not going to get stuck in traffic. My neighbors are awesome, too. People are super friendly, and everything I need is right here just across the street," he said.

Hanna and his 62 colleagues have taken the first step in what the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) calls the "largest generator of wealth for families, exceeding even a household's income or their level of educational attainment."

A HUD report shows homeownership in low-income neighborhoods is about 10 percent /less expensive than renting. More importantly, the gap in homeownership between white households and African American households is larger today than before the Fair Housing Act was passed in 1968 (27% in 1960 vs. 29% today).

A Brookings Institution report last year notes that "Lower Black homeownership and the racial wealth gap are byproducts of systemic racism," and, "The loss of wealth in Black communities hastens a downward socioeconomic spiral."

The study also points out the need to go beyond treating what it calls the symptoms, such as education disparities, alone. White college graduates attain seven times more wealth than African American college graduates. Perhaps the most important facet of the solution, the study argues, is bolstering home ownership.

But of course, it isn't just the home buyer who reaps all the benefits. Communities are enriched and enlivened by newcomers. Some of the homes purchased in the Live Near Your Work program were vacant, providing no real estate taxes to the city and potentially creating nuisances in their neighborhoods. New neighbors are often more energized, engaged, and invested in the community's quality of life, and they provide added support to local businesses and schools.

Joining UMB President **Bruce E. Jarrell, MD, FACS**, on the January 27, 2022, edition of Virtual Face to Face with President Bruce Jarrell were two key drivers of the Live Near Your Work program, UMB Senior Vice President and Chief Business and Finance Officer **Dawn M. Rhodes, DBA, MBA**; Benefits Manager and Live Near Your Work Program Coordinator **Emily Winkler, MS**; and Office of Emergency Management Continuity of Operations Program Manager **Hayley Markman, MPA**, who purchased a home through the program.

Watch the entire discussion, including questions and answers with the audience, by accessing the link above.

SHARE THIS ARTICLE



The University of Maryland, Baltimore is the founding campus of the University System of Maryland.
620 W. Lexington St., Baltimore, MD 21201 | 410-706-3100
© 2021 University of Maryland, Baltimore. All rights reserved.