



METRO SUNDAY

\$40M PROJECT IN WESTFIELD

Plans for office, hotel would move Westfield High School stadium site

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Westfield's "if you build it, they will come" strategy may pay off sooner than anyone expected.

A local group of investors plans a \$40 million development between the new Grand Park Sports Complex and the city's fledgling downtown. It would include medical offices, a family entertainment center and a hotel at the northeast corner of U.S. 31 and Main Street,

the site of the Westfield High School football stadium.

In exchange, the city would give Westfield Washington Schools money to build a new stadium, and the city would be able to convert a tax-exempt property at a prime city intersection into a revenue and jobs generator.

Here's how the deal shakes out:
» Westfield Community Investors would pay the school system \$4 million for the land.
» The city would give the school sys-

tem \$2.5 million for construction of the new stadium, using some of the proceeds from the \$91 million sale of the city's water and waste water utility. Mayor Andy Cook said no property tax dollars will be involved.

» The school district would build a new stadium next to its existing high school soccer field for \$6.5 million, with future upgrades planned.

» WCI would have an option to buy an additional 4.5 acres from the school district for \$2 million within the next five

years. Currently, the district has administrative offices there.

"Rarely do you have projects that appear to be a win for everybody," said school Superintendent Mark Kreen. "This is one of those unique ones where, within three to five years, everybody's a winner."

Perhaps none more so than city leaders, who can claim a return on their \$45 million Grand Park investment and years of planning for a revitalized downtown known as Grand Junction.

"I am surprised — I'm pleased that

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Erika D. Smith
Columnist

Meet with gangs? It's not a crazy idea

It started off as a crazy idea. At least it sounded crazy to the Rev. Charles Harrison.

"I got a call from one of the street outreach workers," he recounted, talking about a member of his Ten Point Coalition of faith-based crime fighters. "A group of youths — part of a gang — wanted to sit down with the mayor."

Harrison was justifiably leery. These were gang members. Young men who carry guns and have undoubtedly shot a few people in their time — or at least threatened to do so. Young men who live in some of the most dangerous neighborhoods in Indianapolis. Young men who wanted to meet with Mayor Greg Ballard without any police present in Harrison's defenseless Barnes United Methodist Church.

"I didn't know what to expect, but eventually I said, 'Let's go ahead and give this a try.'"

The half-dozen or so Eastside gang members followed orders and left their guns at home. Members of Ten Point picked them up. Ballard showed up. And they talked — for an hour and 15 minutes.

That was a week ago. This week, more gang members want to talk. They want to talk to the mayor. They want to talk to journalists. They want to talk to anyone who is willing to listen.

Why? Because things are *that* bad. They're desperate.

"They're seeing everybody die around them, knowing any moment that they could be killed or they could be forced to kill somebody," Harrison explained. "For them, being in (a gang) at 13 and being 21, almost 22, you've seen a lot of violence. You've lost a lot of friends and family members."

Increasingly, gang members say they want out. Certainly not all, but some.

They joined gangs as kids for money. To get respect. To be celebrities in their chronically poor, mostly black, urban core neighborhoods.

That was then. Now they want to get a real job, an education, a good job, a big house, a nice car, a family. Heck, just a life that doesn't involve constantly looking over one's shoulder.

They know it won't be easy. Quitting a gang is not like quitting a job. Retaliation, in the form of a bullet, is a real possibility. But the alternative isn't great either.

Indianapolis is on track to record 150 criminal homicides this year, well above the 125 in 2013, which was the worst in seven years. There have already been about 50 murders — and the weather *just* got warm.

With the Your Life Matters initiative announced in March by Ballard, Ten Point and a host of community leaders, Harrison said some gang members see a potential path out.

"It was the fact that the mayor said he cared about their lives and wanted to help" that got them to talk, he said.

Who knows what will come of this? Maybe nothing. But I'm betting it will be something.

For too long in this city, we've had discussions about crime that barely

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ABOVE: Paul Biermann, 5, comes out of an Amtrak sleeping car on display during National Train Day celebrations at Union Station.

ALEX FARRIS PHOTOS FOR THE STAR

RIGHT: Sharon Biermann lifts her grandson, Declan Biermann, 2, onto an Amtrak train on display Saturday at Union Station in Downtown Indianapolis.



A DAY AT THE TRACK

Another track — this one through Indianapolis' Union Station — also drew a crowd Saturday for National Train Day. The event featured Amtrak equipment and a rare stop by the Indiana Bicentennial Train.

On Mother's Day, reasons for hope



Matthew Tully
Columnist

I was sitting in the Lincoln Square Pancake House on North Meridian Street on Friday morning, looking through my week's notes and trying to decide what column to write for today's paper.

It struck me how depressing it all was. I'd taken notes on the city's deteriorating roads while driving around Thursday night, and on the tales of a dozen people I'd watched plead guilty to various low-level crimes in a county courtroom Wednesday afternoon.

I'd typed notes into my iPhone one afternoon while watching a man and

woman Downtown argue angrily about child support payments in front of their adorable young daughter. I'd researched a graffiti-covered abandoned building, met with the parent of a heroin abuser, and scoured dozens of pages of crime reports.

Yep, it was all depressing. It was all a reminder of the daunting challenges this city faces. But then something struck me: This column would be running in print on Mother's Day. And as the husband and son of wonderful mothers, it's simply impossible for me to be depressed when I think about Mother's Day.

So today's column is being written in honor of all the great moms out there — and all of the wonderful aunts, mentors and others who find time in their lives for kids. It is being written with the type of optimism that

moms inspire better than anyone, and with the belief that while Indianapolis has a lot of challenges, it is nonetheless a great American community filled with many reasons to be hopeful.

I felt that hopefulness Thursday afternoon while wandering through The Children's Museum for probably the 100th time with my 3-year-old son. The museum was honored at the White House that same day, and the honor was well-deserved. Not only is it one of the nation's great museums, but its leaders and workers are deeply involved in trying to improve the hard-hit neighborhood surrounding it. The museum is a reminder of what this city can achieve when it reaches for greatness.

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