

# Muncie Inform

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## Bringin' the heat



Photo by Jacob Musselman

Lathay Pegues, owner of JohnTom's Barbecue, holds a bottle of his favorite barbecue sauce.

By Ian Tannenbaum  
for Inform Muncie

As a child, when Muncie native Lathay Pegues was barbecuing with his grandfather in his Whitely neighborhood, he never would have dreamed his love for barbecue would bloom into a nationally distributed brand, JohnTom's Barbecue.

What started as an experiment when he was in college to recreate his grandfather's secret barbecue sauce recipe has grown into a successful business for Pegues and his business partners Rodney Robinson and Terrell Cooper.

In the beginning, Pegues and his partners were making batches of 288 bottles of various sauces that he sold out of the back of his car. When his business started to take off in 2014, Pegues immediately realized he needed to scale up the production and signed on with a co-packer in Chicago, who produces 400-gallon batches of his sauces. In January 2021, JohnTom's Barbecue signed with US. Foods, its first national distributor, and has over 100 retail distributors.

Pegues's passion for barbecue was imparted on him by his grandfather and the company's namesake, John Tom Branson.

See **HEAT** on page 2.

## Muncie's Black Chamber sees rapid growth

By Sam Keevil  
for Inform Muncie

In less than a year after its creation, The Muncie-Delaware County Black Chamber of Commerce has more than 60 members and is growing fast.

"It's all about community," said Jason Walker, president of the chamber and owner of First Choice Electric. "We are trying to better our community and promote financial wealth within our community."

The chamber officially launched in July of 2020, in the midst of COVID-19, but officials say they've already seen a difference in the representation of Black-owned businesses in Muncie.

The goal of the chamber is to be a professional development resource for Black and minority-owned businesses in Delaware County.

The chamber regularly provides a wide range of professional workshops for business owners to attend. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, the chamber has hosted its workshops over Zoom. When permitted to meet face-to-face, the chamber will meet at Ivy Tech Community College in downtown Muncie, Walker said.

"The workshops are for anybody in the community. Anybody who wants to join our chamber can participate in these workshops," said Walker.

The chamber has been a useful resource for minority owned businesses in Muncie, like Mama Bond's Soul Food Kitchen, which opened in November of 2020.

"We were all able to go there and represent her, and help her do a ribbon cutting," said George Foley, the public relations representative of the chamber and owner of Tailored Technology.

## HEAT: Muncie native lands national contract with sauce

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"He and all his family, parents, siblings, they all moved from Mississippi, up north, just looking for a better life outside the Jim Crow South. They landed in Muncie. And my grandpa brought with him this passion for barbecue," Pegues said.

His grandfather created a secret barbecue sauce that was loved by all who had the honor of tasting it.

Though Pegues tried for years to recreate the recipe, he never quite cracked the code. "Of course, that didn't get it. But what that turned into was this five-year trial and error. I just kind of veered off from trying to duplicate his sauce. And just stuck with what I was onto." After inviting coworkers, family, and friends to barbecues, the consensus was Pegues should try to sell it.

JohnTom's Barbecue had a slow start when it was created in 2006 but in 2014, Pegues left his job at the Star Press, where he was a journalist to devote himself full-time to the entrepreneurial enterprise.



*My grandpa brought with him this passion for barbecue.*

*Lathay Pegues*

It was in Muncie, where he received the support of his and his wife's families, as well as the support of Muncie's mayor and some local organizations.

"Innovation Connector is a gem to this area," said Pegues. Innovation Connector is a business incubator that exists to help entrepreneurs succeed by offering resources and support. He also talked about the Indiana Small Business Development Center (ISBDC), which he accessed through Innovation Connector. The ISBDC provides entrepreneurs expert guidance and a comprehensive network of resources in order to increase their chances of success.

Pegues, who graduated from Indiana University in 2000, says not to underestimate the importance of networking and maintaining relationships, both business and personal. Today, Pegues is an officer in new Muncie-Delaware County Black Chamber of Commerce.

"I think the most important thing and I think the most beneficial thing that we have is the relationships, the relationships that we have built, the relationships that we have cultivated, the relationships that we have maintained," he said.

Another piece of advice, from Pegues, is to be brave.

"I was fearful to leave the Star Press. That's probably the scariest thing I've ever done in my life. But once I did it, and once I got used to not working a traditional job and doing this, once I got acclimated and, and got used to it, I said, I probably should have left there a long time ago."



Pegues says being in his hometown and cultivating relationships was key to his success.

"I always say this too, I don't think I could have done this if I hadn't moved back home, if I hadn't moved back to Muncie, because I knew I would need the support of the city."

**JohnTom's**  
BARBECUE

# Rose Park grows its own

## Neighborhood steps up in food desert



Photos by Haley Wade

Above left: Rachel Foster, one of the gardening specialists at Ross Community Center, with plant seedlings. Right: A lettuce bed at Rose Park.

**By Haley Wade**  
for *Inform Muncie*

**R**ose Park is the Ross Community Center's newest outdoor project and it is designed to be a space of "tranquility and education" while also providing room to grow – literally.

Jacquelyn Hanoman, executive director, says vegetation beds will not only serve a purpose of beauty, but also a more vital role — a food source.

The Ross Community Center has played a major part in the neighborhood by serving as a safe space for the community while also supporting families through its food marketplace every Friday. Rose Park will add to that.

Rachel Foster, one of the gardening specialists, is one of the key forces behind this park. Her knowledge of plants has helped with the educational and beauty aspects of the park. There will be four new beds, including native species, pollinator beds, and vegetables.

"There's so much potential in that space — not only to evolve physically, but to be a tool and a resource, and

I look forward to every aspect of making that a reality," Foster said.

Most of these vegetables will be used for the food market every Friday at 4 p.m., but the spot also will serve as a community garden for the neighborhood. People who are miles away from a produce store now have one right out their front door.

According to the U.S. Census, about 31% of Muncie lives in poverty, which impacts accessibility to food throughout neighborhoods. The nearest grocery store from the Thomas/Avondale neighborhood is two miles away, and this distance fluctuates throughout the neighborhood.

The garden also will be used as an educational space for children. An after-school program for ages ranging from kindergarten to fifth grade will include hands-on learning with the vegetation beds.

"I really want to use the garden as a catalyst for their interest in education and to teach them how important it is to care for the environment," Foster said. "Really, the possibilities with this space are endless."

**“Really, the possibilities with this space are endless.”**  
*Rachel Foster*

# Branching out

## New coffee shop opens in old bank

By Taylor Sheridan  
for Inform Muncie

**R**osebud Coffee House opened its doors to the Thomas Park/Avondale neighborhood in early December 2020.

Owner Tiara Hicks wanted to covert an old bank branch building to create a safe and welcoming environment for the community to hang out and work.

"It was all about breaking down barriers," Hicks said. "I wanted to be a part of the comfort and the feel. I wanted you to come in and not be intimidated."

There are two meeting spaces you can use in the coffee house. One is inside the old bank vault of the café.

Free WIFI also is available to customers.

Rosebud was named after Hicks' grandfather and the rose theme followed after that.

"Rosebud was my grandfather's nickname and my grandpa passed away six or seven years ago, and he was the one who really instilled hospitality and an open door, always inviting someone in," she said.



Tiara Hicks



Tiara Hicks' grandfather inspired the name 'Rosebud' and the sense of community she wanted to create.

### Rosebud Coffee House

1805 S. Hoyt Ave., Muncie

#### HOURS:

Tuesday through Friday: 6 a.m. to 5 p.m.

Saturday: 8 a.m. to Noon

*The menu includes a unique blend of coffee and organic teas, pastries, cookies, and breakfast treats.*

A chalkboard sign shows the shop's seasonal flavors. Owner Tiara Hicks made sure all drinks had names that were easy to pronounce.

Photos by  
Taylor Sheridan  
for Inform Muncie



The suggestions box sits on a table in the coffee house. "It was all about repurposing and reusing, so everything in here had another life and another story and that was really important to me coming into this concept not only from a budget perspective, but this is just kind of my style," Hicks said.

# Open Door ushers in new clinic

## Target opening of late 2021 at former Lincoln School site

By **Grace Medrano**  
for *Inform Muncie*

I was feeling sick and needed to see a physician. I am only in Muncie because I'm a student at Ball State University, and I had no idea where to start. I don't have a car, so my options were limited.

I spent hours calling places, searching for a practice that would take my insurance. I knew there would not be many who take Medicaid and if they did, it would have been weeks before I could be seen.

Finally, I found Open Door Health Services. I had an appointment within five days of my initial call.

Open Door is a not-for-profit, federally qualified health center, that offers primary, urgent and preventative health care services, as well as some social support programs. Open Door takes patients regardless of ability to pay.

Mostly, uninsured people come from low-income neighborhoods like families in the Thomas Park/Avondale neighborhood. About one in three in this neighborhood

live at or below federal poverty guidelines, according to the Thomas Park/Avondale Neighborhood Action Plan. This number is higher than both state and national levels.

Open Door expects its clinic at 1200 W. Memorial Drive, site of the old Lincoln Elementary School, to be open in late 2021. It will be the fifth Open

Door location in Delaware County, said Open Door Chief Executive Officer Bryan Ayars.

"We did quite a bit of surveys and residents rated access to health care as a high importance of quality of life and also ranked it low for having it where they live



Photo by Grace Medrano

Open Door Chief Executive Officer Bryan Ayars with Jena Ashby, a leader in Muncie's 8Twelve Coalition, and director of impact and programs for Greater Muncie Indiana Habitat for Humanity, at the site of the former Lincoln School, which will become an Open Door clinic in 2021.

now," said Jena Ashby, a leader in Muncie's 8Twelve Coalition, and director of impact and programs for Greater Muncie Indiana Habitat for Humanity. "That is when we realized the problem."

Habitat purchased the building when it came up for sale in 2019, said Ashby. Open Door purchased the land and building from Habitat.

"We decided to come to this area because south of the tracks no one is providing health care services and it is the area that needs it the most," Ayars said.

Poverty and low-income status are associated with a variety of adverse health outcomes, including shorter life expectancy, higher rates of infant mortality, and higher death rates for the 14 leading causes of death, according to the American Academy of Family Physicians.

A health clinic in the neighborhood, within walking distance for so many, gives important access to residents and assures better health care for families who might otherwise not get it.

"I'm very excited about the opening because I know that this area has been a major concern about addressing the systemic health issues holistically," said Mike Martin, neighborhood resident and owner of Muncie Common Market, 900 W. Eighth St. "I feel like this is a major piece of getting the growth and abundance back to a long neglected area."

*' We decided to come to this area because south of the tracks no one is providing health care services and it is the area that needs it the most. '*

*Bryan Ayars*

# Muncie pastor welcomes all

## Andre Mitchell's Whitely church wants people to feel LOVE

By Arianna Sergio  
for Inform Muncie

**D**eliverance Temple, nestled in the heart of the Whitely neighborhood is the cornerstone of the community and at the helm is Pastor Andre Mitchell, a youthful, charismatic, dressed-to-the-nines, passionate preacher.

The church was passed on by his father as a gift for his 35th birthday.

Mitchell has filled the church with the technology of the 21st century that includes big screens, projectors and computers. He's connecting with community at every turn including Apple podcasts, Instagram followers, Twitter and a YouTube Channel. During the pandemic, the church provided COVID-19 testing and food giveaways.

"I told my staff I wanted to build a state-of-the-art ministry in the hood, so to speak," said Mitchell, who also works third shift at General Motors in Marion. Mitchell says all the technology was done "strategically and on-

purpose. I think I'm most proud that we're on the path to creating that type of space, that when people from the community come in, they feel proud of it," Mitchell said.

Mitchell got a taste of church life as the youth pastor at Deliverance Temple until January 2011. By the following summer, Bishop Henry Wallace, turned the church over to his son. Mitchell still

seeks his advice on major decisions.

**One of the most challenging parts about being a pastor is that you're human.**

*Andre Mitchell*

"One of the most challenging parts about being a pastor is that you're human," Mitchell said. "People see your title and they assume that means perfection. You have to kind of lower people's expectations, but then you also have to try to live up to everything you're preaching, which is always a juggling act."



Photo provided by Andre Mitchell.

Andre Mitchell is pastor of Deliverance Temple in the heart of the Whitely neighborhood. The church's motto is LOVE: Living Our Vision Everyday.

At Deliverance Temple, freshly painted purple and yellow walls, are paired with purple carpets and chairs to compliment the area, reflecting Mitchell's flair for the detail.

"Our motto is LOVE, which means 'Living Our Vision Everyday.' We try to create an atmosphere that, even though it's a religious space, feels less religious. We want people to feel love. We don't want people to feel judged. We want them not to be afraid. We want people to always feel loved. We try to keep it light-hearted. Even though it's a church, we try not to be super churchy," Mitchell said.

Deliverance Temple welcomes everyone and for Mitchell, that's a source of pride.

"We're not an exclusive space and we're not an intimidating space. You should just feel like you're loved. You should feel comfortable," he said.

# Study: Coming out at work is risky business

By Sophie Thompson  
for Inform Muncie

**F**or LGBTQ+ community, coming out at work is scary, and some say laws should be changed to protect those are at risk.

Almost half of persons who identify as queer are closeted at work, according to a 2018 study by the Human Rights Campaign Foundation.

Even now, three years after the survey, finding safe space at the office remains challenging for LGBTQ+. But one local couple is doing what they can to provide an inclusive environment for employees and customers.

"I'm so proud of her in owning this business, Queer Chocolatier, and so I had to talk about it. It's my life. It's who I am," said Cheri Madewell about her wife, and owner of Queer Chocolatier, Morgan Roddy. For the Muncie couple, their identity became central to the entrepreneurial venture. Madewell and Roddy spoke to Inform Muncie earlier this year. Listen to their podcast at [informmuncie/podcasts](http://informmuncie/podcasts).

For most who identify in the LGBTQ+ community, work and their sexual identities are wholly separate. Some believe it is risky to be transparent. "I was actually outed to my coworkers without my knowledge, so that was fairly harassing and it kind of made for a hostile workplace," Roddy said.

Laura Janney, founder of MuncieOUTreach, says Indiana's status as an at-will state has had a negative impact on members of the LGBTQ+ community, especially transgender people. "We had someone who came out at work and they were fired the next day," Janney



Photo provided by Morgan Roddy.

Cheri Madewell (left) and her wife, Morgan Roddy, owner of the Queer Chocolatier. The business is moving to a new downtown Muncie location, 201 S. Walnut St., and will open in the fall of 2021.

said. "If they aren't fired, many in the community still struggle after coming out due to coworkers refusing to use correct pronouns or preferred names."

Indiana is among 21 states and all five territories that have no laws in place prohibiting discrimination based on sexual orientation or gender identity.

According to an April 2021 Williams Institute study, approximately 12 percent of respondents think that the LGBTQ+ community are treated poorly in the workplace. Yet more than 35 percent of respondents either were unsure or opposed federal non-discrimination protections for members of the LGBTQ+ community.

"In the beginning, I wasn't treated with as much respect as a cis, white man would be treated with," according to one person who wished to remain anonymous. "I felt like I

had to measure up to their standards and tone down my queerness and 'transness,'" they said. "I was very scared to express those qualities of myself."

In their eyes, trying to get a feel for the workplace culture is one of the most important parts of job-hunting while being queer. "I would hate to see someone take a job knowing that it would not be a place where they could be comfortably out and accepted. You have to take care of yourself and stay true to yourself."

Madewell and Roddy say this representation matters. At Queer Chocolatier, they started with the right nametags.

"I just realized that folks in the service industry often are misgendered, and I thought that [name tags with an employees' pronouns] would be a normalizing way for folks to feel comfortable using their pronouns."

Listen to the Cheri Madewell/Morgan Roddy conversation:  
[informmuncie/podcasts](http://informmuncie/podcasts)



Inform Muncie, a proof-of-concept newsletter and news website, was launched in a Ball State University immersive seminar as part of the Virginia B. Ball Center for Creative Inquiry in Spring 2021. Students, under the direction BSU faculty members Juli Metzger and Melinda Messineo examined emerging news deserts and created a new publication targeting the under-recognized and untold stories of Muncie.

Students walked through neighborhoods of Muncie, collaborated with a nine-member Audience Advisory Board, and went through implicit bias training before embarking on storytelling development.

You can see more at [informmuncie.com](http://informmuncie.com)



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Inform Muncie is a news outlet committed to collaborative storytelling. Its focus on inclusion means delivering an experience that gives voice to the untold, under-recognized, and unheard. Involve. Investigate. Inspire.