

November x, 2002

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Dear xxxxxxxxxxxxxx:

The University of Chicago attracts students and faculty from around the world, and the knowledge and ideas generated here affect people's lives across all nations. The University is also an institution deeply rooted in its local community—the neighborhood of Hyde Park-South Kenwood. It is also the place I call home. It's where my wife, Chris Jacobs, a family physician, and I are raising two children—Robert, 13, and Hannah, 11. On bright sunny days, you might see our family at the Point or, in any weather, coaching, playing, or watching soccer on the Midway. Chris and I firmly believe that Hyde Park has been an extraordinary place to live and raise our children. I'm not speaking lightly when I say that our community possesses a unique history and a stunningly bright future. As someone whose personal and professional life is spent living and working for the community, I would like to tell you how the University's relationship to the community has changed and how it will continue to develop.

The post World War II era was difficult for the city of Chicago. Between 1950 and 1990, the city's population declined by more than 800,000 residents—the largest 40-year decline by a city in U.S. history. The south and west sides of the city bore the brunt of this decline. The population of the Woodlawn neighborhood, located just south of our main campus, declined from 81,279 in 1960 to 27,473 in 1990, a drop of 66 percent. In response to these changes, the University joined with neighborhood residents, the City, and the federal government to make Hyde Park-South Kenwood the site of the nation's first urban renewal project. This historic redevelopment agenda included increasing police protection, enforcing building codes, promoting residential stability, and encouraging residential construction.

Urban renewal was—and still is—controversial. In the 1960s, residents were displaced without the kind of help that is now common. Looking back, we see that some urban design decisions might have been made differently. But there is no doubt that the decisions of the 1960s, combined with sustained support for redevelopment by the University and others, have been remarkably successful.

Over the past decades, the University has played a major role in the renaissance of the Hyde Park-South Kenwood neighborhood. Not only are we the largest employer in the area, but more than 60 percent of our faculty, the vast majority of our students, and more than 3,000 University and Hospital staff live here. Hyde Park-South Kenwood, while maintaining great diversity, is today among Chicago's most attractive residential neighborhoods.

### **Promoting Public Education**

Hyde Park is known nationally for its network of very strong private schools. The exceptional University of Chicago Laboratory Schools, in particular, attracts many families to the area. For an urban neighborhood, Hyde Park also offers a dizzying array of children's activities—from arts programs and ballet to soccer and baseball leagues. But strong neighborhoods cannot exist in Hyde Park-South Kenwood, or elsewhere in the mid-South Side, without quality public education. And so the University's current community involvement begins with strengthening public schools and increasing safety, and actively includes faculty, staff, and student participation.

Although the University has many programs designed to enhance public education, three are especially noteworthy. First is the North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School (NK/OCS) described in the August 2002 issue of *The University of Chicago Magazine*. Chicago is one of the few research universities in the nation sponsoring a charter school. An outgrowth of the University's Center for School Improvement, NK/OCS both provides an excellent education to Chicago public school children and serves as a unique professional development center for public school teachers. Now in its fifth year, the Charter School serves nearly 400 children and is a major force for redevelopment in the North Kenwood/Oakland community. More than 60 percent of its students come from families with incomes below the poverty level, and the school has shattered the myth that students from disadvantaged backgrounds cannot achieve high educational results.

Second is the Office of Special Programs-College Prep (OSP). OSP was one of the very first Upward Bound programs in the nation. Upward Bound is a college preparatory program designed especially for students who are the first in their families to attend college. For more than 30 years, OSP has provided year-round tutoring and academic support for some 200 middle and high school students annually from throughout Chicago's South Side. Because of this program, generations of children on the South Side have entered and successfully completed college.

Third is the Neighborhood Schools Program (NSP). Begun in 1976, NSP links University of Chicago students with area schools. Each year more than 300 U of C students spend up to 15 to 20 hours each week in the classrooms of 37 schools in Hyde Park-South Kenwood, North

Kenwood/Oakland, and Woodlawn working as teachers' assistants. Most of the schools where NSP students are placed serve predominantly underprivileged children. Our students tutor, encourage, and nurture those children who need extra help and challenge those who can take on a bit more. As one student said: "When I took this job, I thought I was only going to teach kids how to read. A little over a month into the job, and I realize that it's never been just about reading. My position in that classroom, depending on the child, is as a tutor, a teacher, a mentor, and a friend." Some students, he continues, "benefit from me just being there. Others count on me to build their confidence and better enable them to read. And still others just like having another adult in the classroom to regulate the 'troublemakers.' Regardless, I'm continually learning how to better help them, and they are helping me more than they know. Teaching is an experience I will never forget."

### **Strengthening the Community**

Complementing our work in the public schools is our goal of creating a safe community. Since the 1950s, the University of Chicago has operated a fully licensed police department within the boundaries of Hyde Park-South Kenwood. Working with the Chicago Police and community groups, we have made great strides toward achieving public safety goals. From 1975 to 2000, robberies in the University area (from 47<sup>th</sup> to 61<sup>st</sup> Streets and from Cottage Grove Avenue to Lake Michigan) have dropped by 56 percent, sexual assaults by 92 percent, burglaries by 76 percent, and homicides from 11 per year to zero. Last year, to help in the revitalization of the Woodlawn community, we extended our police protection to include the Woodlawn neighborhood.

The University also sponsors important programs and innovations in health care, local real estate development, and recreation. The University of Chicago Hospitals, the largest provider of Medicaid care among non-public hospitals in Illinois, serves as the major source of the community's health care, and is one of the premier hospitals in the nation. We are currently constructing the new Comer Children's Hospital, which will provide world-class care to seriously ill children both in our local community and beyond.

Recently, the University has emerged as an important partner in neighborhood improvements throughout the mid-South Side. From 22<sup>nd</sup> Street on the north, 67<sup>th</sup> Street on the south, the Dan Ryan on the west and Lake Michigan on the east, this area is marked by some of the most exciting community development initiatives in the country. Among other changes, many of the Chicago Housing Authority high-rises have been demolished and will be replaced with new mixed-income housing.

In partnership with the Chicago Park District, we have revitalized the Midway Plaisance, planting new gardens, improving playing fields, and adding a permanent ice rink. Next will be a great children's garden. We have purchased the Hyde Park Movie Theater and adjacent retail building. It is our great hope that this site flourishes into a major commercial and entertainment venue supplying more Hyde Park cultural opportunities. On campus, a bowling alley, tavern, and restaurant just opened in the University's new parking facility at 55<sup>th</sup> Street and Ellis Avenue.

## Creating New Knowledge

Of course, the University's most fundamental contributions to urban revitalization—both locally and nationally—derive from creating new knowledge and educating the next generation of leaders. Through landmark scholarship and research by our faculty and students, we will continue to develop new strategies for sustaining mixed-income communities, improving social service delivery, bettering race relations, reducing crime, and improving urban schools. The success of the North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School, to note just one example, would not be possible without the groundbreaking research of Tony Bryk, Marshall Field IV Professor of Sociology and the College. With the generous support of the McCormick Tribune Foundation, the University has launched a national academic program that will train community development professionals and create innovative ideas in order to solve tough urban problems.

Finally, over the last several years the University Community Service Center, a full-time administrative department, has formed strong partnerships with a variety of local organizations to provide meaningful volunteer opportunities and internships for nearly 1,800 students, helping them develop into civic-minded leaders. These dynamic programs range from Green Awareness in Action, which encourages people to care for the environment, to Kids Can, which teaches youths to empower themselves. Over the next few years we will expand these efforts and foster a culture of community service that extends across the entire campus.

In achieving our aspirations, the University cannot rely solely on our own resources. Our community initiatives all involve partnerships with government agencies, community groups, and other non-profit organizations. One of our most important partnerships is with you, our friends and supporters. We hope that our current capital campaign, *The Chicago Initiative*, will enable us to expand our innovative collaborations in research, education, and community redevelopment. Projects such as the North Kenwood/Oakland Charter School and the Neighborhood Schools Program make this University a place, as Robert Maynard Hutchins wrote in 1949, “that can, perhaps on a microscopic scale, produce within itself conditions that may indicate a path the world may follow.”

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Henry S. Webber". The signature is written in black ink on a white background.

Henry S. Webber  
Vice President for Community and Government Affairs