

A Brief History of Silver Spring Neighborhood Center

In 1957 a committee from the Housing Authority of the City of Milwaukee led by Reinhart Gutmann asked the boards of Milwaukee Christian Center and Neighborhood House to develop a “settlement house” style neighborhood center to serve and meet the needs of the residents of Westlawn Housing Development and the surrounding area. Incorporated the next year, Silver Spring Neighborhood Center started as a 3,000 square foot building with an adjoining playground. The Center immediately became a member of the Community Fund (now United Way) and after the 1959 Campaign, they became a modest beneficiary.

According to Gutmann, “There was an air of optimism when the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center was founded. People's consciousnesses were being stirred to achieve equality of law and equality of opportunity for all. We believed that using our social work skills would help people solve their problems and achieve independence.”

An ordained Episcopal Priest and the founder and executive director of Neighborhood House, Gutmann initially took on the role as Chairman of the Executive Committee for Silver Spring Neighborhood Center. Resigning in 1960, he left Milwaukee to work for the church in Washington, D.C., turning the reigns over to Charles Wilson as the first Executive Director.

In 1960, the SSNC staff of two (the Executive Director and a Group Leader) sent out a questionnaire to neighborhood residents regarding their needs and desires for Center programming and services. Soon after, they began youth programming with a day camp, and in 1964, after an addition to the original facility, SSNC started a licensed day care, becoming one of the oldest licensed day care programs in the city.

The 60s were a particularly violent decade for the Center. Concealed weapons were a common part of the SSNC landscape, and the shooting death of a young girl outside the Center rocked staff and participants. However, despite these setbacks, resolve was tightened and programs continued to grow and develop according to the neighborhood needs.

In 1971 SSNC partnered with Milwaukee Area Technical College to offer adult education classes. This partnership remains today.

It soon became clear that another addition (the third) was needed at the Center. The gym, which had been converted from a meeting room, was one of the most heavily used areas of the Center was lacking in both capacity and facility. Planning for a new gym began in early 1979, and construction was underway by August 1980. The old gym was eventually converted for use by the day care and counselors.

Reinhard Gutmann returned to Silver Spring Neighborhood Center to help celebrate their 25th Anniversary. With a staff of 35, the Center had certainly grown since he fought for it in committee.

In 1986 the Turning Point Learning Center (now the Silver Spring Academy) opened its doors to tutor pupils who were in danger of failing in their regular school. As Milwaukee Public Schools continued to crowd and area students more left behind, Turning Point's need and popularity grew, requiring a waiting list. After an additional Center expansion and renovation in 1989, Turning Point became a full-fledged alternative middle school.

However, before this renovation, in 1987, the University of Wisconsin – Milwaukee Silver Spring Community Nursing Center began its pilot program. Funded by a three-year, renewable federal grant, the Nursing Center focused on the whole person, particularly concerning wellness and preventative medicine. Staffed by only one part-time nurse and three graduate students, visitors to the clinic increased daily. During afternoon of the pilot program, 61 people stopped by to see the nurse.

With over 500 visitors to the Center each day in 1987, the Center continued to be recognized as the “place to be” in the community.

With more space and programs than ever, Silver Spring Neighborhood Center was finally able to purchase their first computer in 1991 – a gift from a local Rotary Club.

The Center began its partnership with Browning Elementary School in 1998 with the introduction of Safe & Sound funding for after-school programming at a nearby bowling alley. In 1999 Milwaukee Public Schools invited SSNC and the Housing Authority into a three-way partnership, which would result in the most recent renovation and expansion of Center facilities and the new construction of a Browning Elementary School attachment. In 2003, this major project was completed, and Silver Spring Neighborhood Center now occupies over 11 times the space of the original building.

In 2001, the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center began its Spartan Sports Program. Both the track and basketball programs eventually became Amateur Athletic Union (AAU) programs. Both programs are run by volunteer coaches with more than 75 years of experience. More than 98% of our student-athletes graduate high school. Collectively, they have earned more than \$3.5 million in scholarships. In 2007, the basketball program had its first graduating class, and all 33 have gone to college; 29 of the 33 graduates have attended college on scholarships. Past Alum include both NBA and overseas players. SPARTAN PRIDE.

In 2004 SSNC and Browning received the prestigious MANDI (Milwaukee Awards for Neighborhood Development Innovation) Award recognizing a non-profit/public project, which best enhances and promotes neighborhood development.

By 2010 the center was running full steam with the 10 Centers of Excellence Programs that included, and Early Childhood Development Center, Afterschool, Teen, Adult Employment and Education Programs, Youth Sports, Family Nights, UW-Milwaukee/Silver Spring Community Nursing Center, Community Connections and an Emergency Services Food Pantry. Offering holistic programs under one roof.

Once again, in 2017 the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center was awarded the prestigious MANDI Award, this time we received The BMO Harris Cornerstone Award recognizing an organization for their commitment and effectiveness over time. We were also one of three winners in the **Wells Fargo People’s Choice Award**, an online social media campaign that selected public picks for three winners across all award categories.

2017 continued to be a busy year for the Silver Spring Neighborhood Center and Browning Elementary School. We were recipients of a beautiful Multi-Sport Complex gifted to us by the Milwaukee Bucks and Johnson Controls.

With more than half-a-century of providing community service and programs. The Silver Spring

Neighborhood Center will continue to provide the most comprehensive array of education, health, and social services to residents on Milwaukee's Northwest side. We will continue with our community partnerships and collaborations to meet the needs of those we serve while fulfilling our mission.