

wearemoos.org

MAKING OUR OWN SPACE FIELD GUIDE FOR YOUTH ENGAGEMENT

KENT STATE
UNIVERSITY

Cleveland Urban
Design Collaborative



Saint
Luke's
Foundation

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HELLO, WE ARE MOOS

Making Our Own Space (MOOS) is a design/build program for middle and high school students.

MOOS students envision and implement projects that make parks, public spaces, and neighborhoods better, safer, and more welcoming for everyone.





ABOVE D'vonte preps framing for the Buckeye-Shaker treehouse.

Neighborhoods need public spaces that are open and inviting to all. But often there are invisible (but deeply felt) boundaries that keep residents from venturing outside of their comfort zones to fully experience the communities in which they live. MOOS aims to create shared spaces that foster greater social interaction between residents of all ages and backgrounds.

Every building, every street, and every place was designed by someone. But it's not always clear how design decisions get made or who gets to make them.

Sometimes neighborhoods have public spaces that no one uses. Perhaps they were designed without much input from the intended users. MOOS encourages activities and investments in public spaces that enhance the community for current residents while also attracting new people and investments.



YOUTH + PUBLIC SPACE

Teens are experts at navigating urban space and often have a deep and nuanced understanding of on-the-ground conditions in the neighborhoods where they live.



Teenagers are sometimes perceived as troublesome for simply inhabiting parks and public areas. They are often actively excluded from public spaces, their presence discouraged by design and by occupancy rules. But young people are eager to shape the environment around them and to create, use, and imaginatively reuse public spaces and vacant places. They have fresh ideas and important insights that deserve to be heard.

Including young voices in community design efforts leads to better, more inclusive places and creates new platforms for civic engagement. Getting a diverse cross section of young people interested in architecture, planning, and urban design is critically important to the future of cities.

BELOW Myles recording for a Making Our Own Stories podcast.



ACCESS TO TOOLS

This guide has four sections offering methods, tips, and strategies for your toolbox:

- The Basics
- Engagement
- Design/Build Workshops
- Resources





ABOVE Jaleel, Robeiro, and Darvell sanding the Glenville Pride bench.

RIGHT Ny'Riah cutting boards to size for the Hut Hut shade structure.



This guide doesn't focus on step-by-step instructions for workshops or structures. Instead, it shares the MOOS framework so it can be adapted in lots of different ways for lots of different contexts.

The exercises in this guide are a starting point for channeling the creative energy of young people into neighborhood improvements. It's a framework you can depart from, rather than a comprehensive guide to youth design/build programs.

MOOS uses a flexible process and an assemblage of strategies that are deployed in varying ways based on the site, the project goals, and the youth involved.

THE BASICS

Workshops are flexible in duration, location, and size, but there are a few things we keep consistent.



BELOW Neighborhood kids testing launch angles off a MOOS installation at a community event.



1

MOOS students receive a stipend for their creative work and neighborhood knowledge.

2

Youth are the primary decision makers in determining what should be built and what form it takes. Facilitators provide technical support and guidance on how to work through challenges in the design process and how to construct a successful project, but the youth determine how success is defined.

3

Projects are built in the public realm. They are on site and visible to the community. MOOS students make improvements to public spaces for anyone and everyone to enjoy.

4

Workshops are local. The focus is on recruiting young people who live in or otherwise have a strong connection to a specific neighborhood to create projects they will be able to see and use every day.

ENGAGEMENT

The more dynamic the activity, the better. Hands-on projects encourage students to be curious about the environment around them and make things in direct response to that curiosity.



These small, quick spatial exercises don't require the investment (or incur the liability) of a full design-build workshop. They create opportunities for youth to start making things, and to engage with familiar places in new, inquisitive ways.

Quick build exercises are also useful as a recruiting tool for more substantial construction projects, or for further engagement related to a planning effort. When other young people see something out of the ordinary happening, they get curious and often ask to join.



ABOVE The Shaker Heights crew experimenting with temporary installations in Hildana Park.

THIS IS A PLACE FOR...

Pair a walking tour of a site or a portion of the neighborhood with one or more of the short written prompts below. Prompts can be specific to a place or a project, but here are some general conversation starters to get everyone thinking about what makes a place feel good and what places feel good to you. The next spread has a couple versions you can photocopy to try it out for yourself.

①

I would like a place to...

②

I love places that make me feel...

③

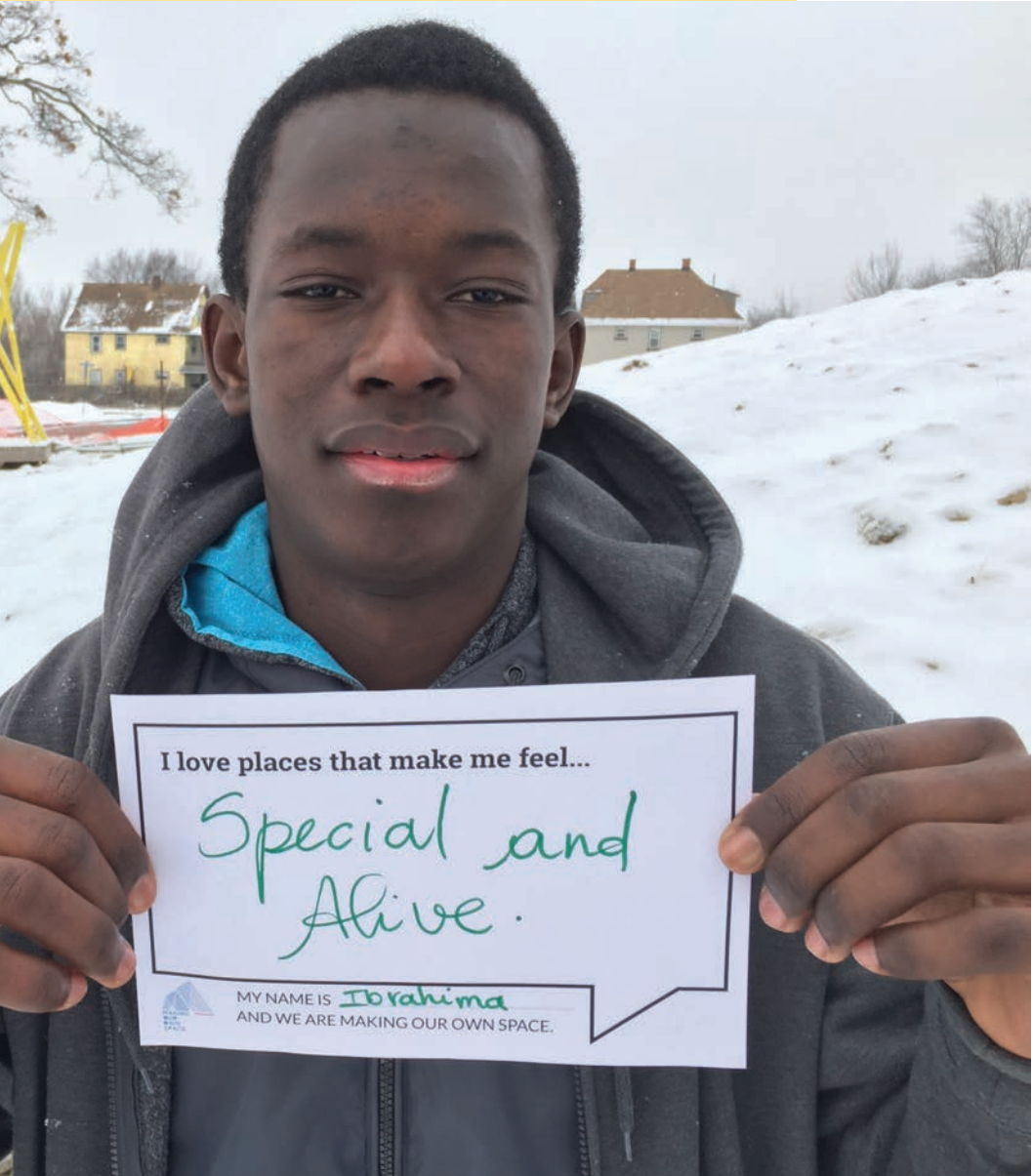
The best thing about my neighborhood is...

④

This is a great place for...

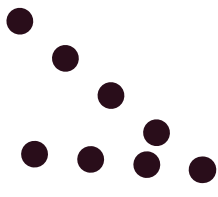


BELOW Ibrahima summing it all up.



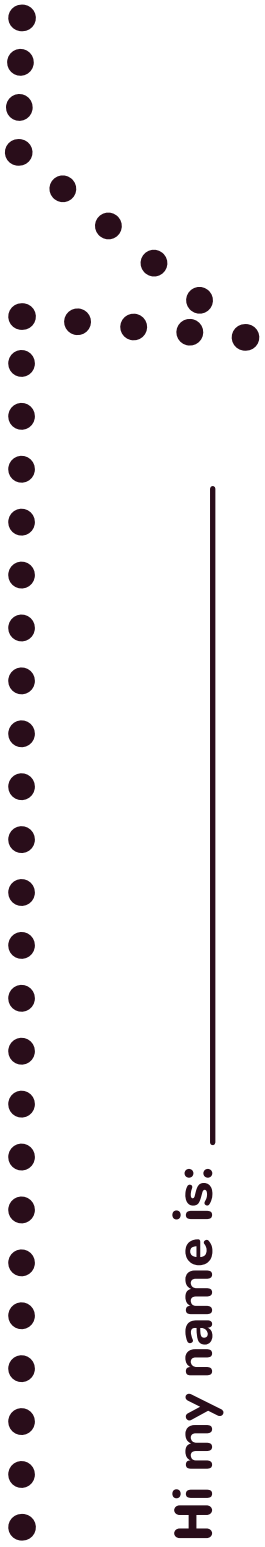
**THIS IS A GREAT
PLACE FOR...**

Hi my name is: _____





I LOVE PLACES THAT
MAKE ME FEEL...



Hi my name is: _____

QUICK BUILDS



1

Build the tallest possible thing





Make something that will hold one person's weight



Mock-up a suggestion in response to one of the previous written prompts (i.e. This is a place for...sitting? ...watching a football game? ...climbing?)

Quick builds don't require any tools—the lumber used is thin enough to snap with hands and feet, and joints can be made with zip ties or duct tape. It's a great way to learn basics of structure (#1 lesson: triangles are very strong), practice collaborating in a group, learn how to iterate (the first strategy rarely works), and prototype ideas for larger builds.

Material List:

- Thin lumber (1x2, 1x4)
- Colorful duct tape
- Zip ties
- Scissors

GRAPHIC IDENTITY

①

Buckeye-Shaker crew working on visual identity and wayfinding for Britt Oval.



Ask participants to design a flag or graphic identity for a neighborhood, a city, a park, or any other community space. Discussing what colors, patterns, and symbols represent using examples of flags, logos, or other visual identities gives students the space to discover how much power and meaning they can achieve with seemingly simple design choices. While creating their own graphic identity for a place, students learn to represent aspects of a place's culture and convey big ideas through clear, impactful designs.

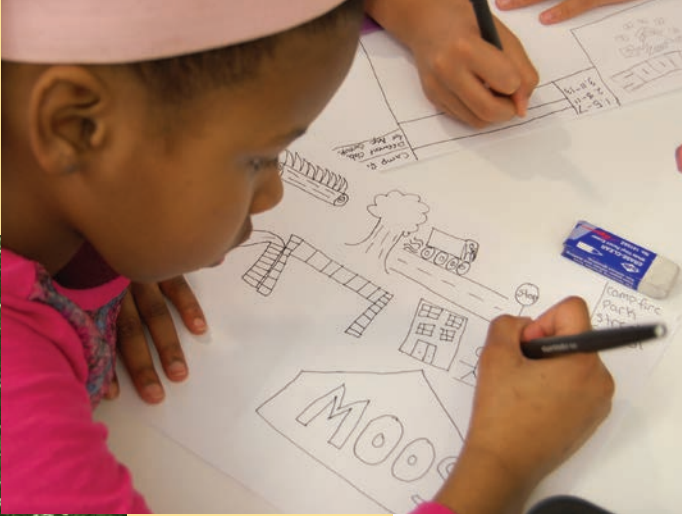
Material List:

- Thin lumber (1x2, 1x4) for flag poles and/or signage
- Colorful duct tape
- Solid color fabrics
- Fabric glue
- Scissors
- Examples of flags for discussion



2

Brainstorming ideas for the MOOS logo.



3

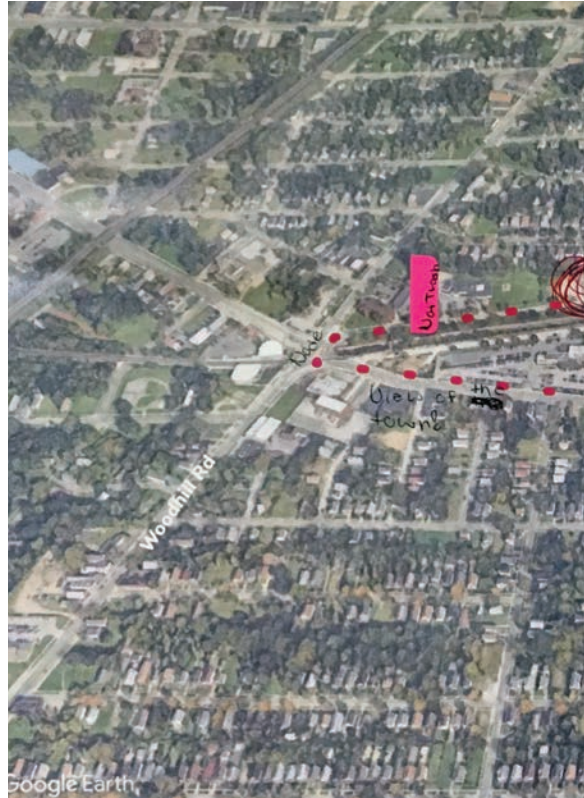
Darvell used symbols for love, equality, and loyalty in his flag design.



COMMUNITY WALKS

Talking while sitting can be tough—especially for young people—but talking while walking keeps energy and ideas flowing. Touring a neighborhood and identifying likes, dislikes, weird spots, hazardous places, and hidden gems gives students a chance to share their deep and specific knowledge of hyper-local on-the-ground conditions.

After locating these spots, they start to look at familiar places with fresh eyes, analyzing why they respond to them the way they do and thinking about how design plays a role in those experiences. Sometimes the group latches onto a site they have big ideas for. This can provide the inspiration to start a build workshop!

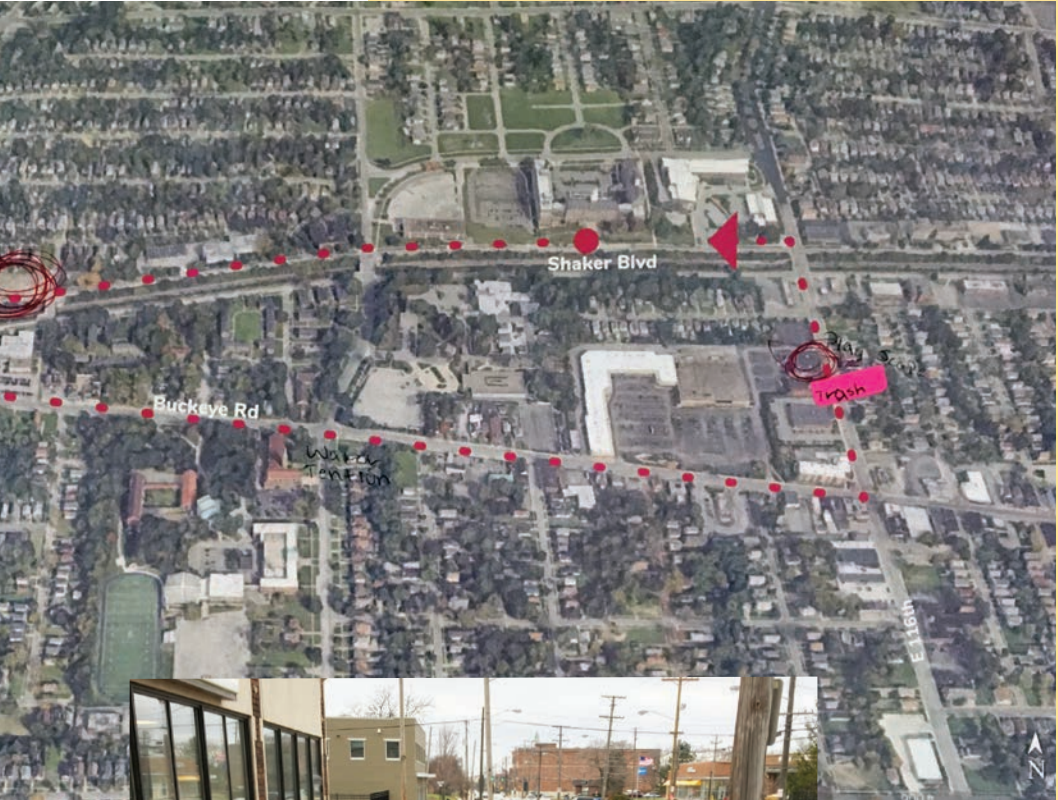


Material List:

- Neighborhood map (printed from Google maps)
- Small sticker labels of a few different colors
- Markers + pens of a few different colors
- Clipboards

UPPER Map of commercial corridors in the Buckeye-Shaker neighborhood by D'Angelus.

LOWER Discussing ideas for streetscape improvements along Chagrin Boulevard.



DESIGN/BUILD WORKSHOPS

There's a big difference between talking about ideas and seeing them happen, and an even bigger difference between asking for change and making it.



Design/build workshops are at the heart of MOOS. Everything in the **Engagement** section can serve as important skill-building warm-ups. Larger design/build projects can generate more excitement and empower young people to make tangible changes in their neighborhoods.

BELOW E.J., Jaleel, and Ben working on the Lakeview Road bus shelter.



ESTABLISH GOALS



ABOVE Workshop in La Villa Hispana.
RIGHT Glenville Pride Bench installed at the Glenville Recreation Center.

Clear goals help keep the group moving forward. A clear idea of who the group is building for and an overarching mission are useful when design decisions get tough. We build together for lots of different reasons, but our most successful workshops respond to one of the following three prompts.

1

In support of a larger planning effort?

↳ Workshops in **La Villa Hispana** on Cleveland's west side focus on amenities for La Placita (pop-up neighborhood events) that are building momentum for a future community hub and business incubator in the neighborhood. Young people have a critical voice in how the functional and aesthetic choices for public space reflect the community's wants and needs. Students get real-time feedback on their ideas from neighbors at the events.

2

Focused on a specific site? (i.e. vacant lot, playground, streetscape, commercial corridor...)

↳ A pilot build in partnership with the City of Cleveland's **Glenville Recreation Center** investigated needs for public space improvements and better connections across the site shared by the recreation center, Glenville High School, and a large park. All facilities are well-used, but feel tucked away with low visibility.





3

Prototyping ideas to inform future more permanent improvements?



Students in the Moreland neighborhood of Shaker Heights spent several years building, testing, and advocating for permanent improvements in **Hildana Park**, a green space that lacked definition and investment from the city as a park space. The students' prototype (above) was designed in response to the Shaker African American Mothers Support group's advocacy for welcoming fencing along the edge of the park, which borders a busy road.

START WITH AN ACTION

Encourage the group to make something they couldn't buy in a catalog or find in any other place. Starting with the end result—we need a table, or a bench—fixes an image (and maybe not the same one) in everyone's mind of what that particular thing looks like. Choose one or more of the following jumping off points to help your group develop projects that are customized, colorful, and unexpected.

1

Start with an action, like climbing, playing dominoes, or sitting, that the space does not yet accommodate.



The **Domino Table** was inspired by a popular pastime in the Puerto Rican community.



2

Start with an emotion, like comfortable, welcoming, or safe, and test out design strategies for making projects + places that feel that way

↳ The **Lorain Lounger** was built for comfort. A lot of effort was put into testing different angles, lengths, heights, and profiles for the piece to accommodate a type of sitting that is often highly discouraged in public space: long-term lounging.

3

Focus on a particular feature of the site and respond specifically to it

↳ Some of the Glenville students were both frustrated by the drabness of the existing bollards and intrigued by their repetition all the way down the street. So they asked 'what else can these bollards do?' and the **Bollard Hacks** were born. Ideas included turning them into playscape elements, gardens, and seating.





LEFT Tim, Ny'Riah, and Adrianna painting the Donut Planter prototype that rings an existing bollard.

BELOW A'lona and Jaleel demonstrating proper use of the Friend-Zone Bench, designed so you can sit with a friend who you want to keep at least one bollard width away from yourself.



ROUGH DRAFTS

1

Just dive in and start making things



It's easy to get stuck discussing ideas or trying to draw out a whole plan for the project, but just get started. The best way to find answers to questions that come up (How tall should it be? How do we keep it from falling over?) is to test out strategies by making them. It may not be the most efficient process, but it keeps the students from getting stymied and creates opportunities for hands-on learning, rather than verbal instruction from adults.





2

Build full-scale



The students' design for the **Sit & See** project is a platform to stop, sit, and view Lake Erie along the Lakefront Bike Path. Since many different people live in the area and use the path, the piece will need to be a good neighbor to all. The students built a full-scale prototype that could be temporarily installed on site to gauge the community's response to the project and collect feedback from those who will use it.





3

Get input from friends, family, neighbors, and design professionals.



The **Skinny Bus Stop Shelter** was inspired by a visit from the RTA officials who work on transit waiting environments in the city. They told the students about budget and maintenance issues, among other challenges, but emphasized that one of the biggest issues can be finding space on a narrow, crowded sidewalk to squeeze in amenities. This prototype sought to provide a small amount of seating and shelter in a minimum footprint.

RIGHT Morgan, David, and Amora running an engagement table at a Hildana Park community event to collect ideas from neighbors on improvements for the park.



REVISE & REBUILD

**Celebrate compromises
when critiquing and
revising for the final build**



While building public seating, our Buckeye team couldn't agree on whether people prefer to sit alone or in groups. So a single seat was added to the side of a longer bench and the **Fido Bench** (right) was born. Similarly, the **Stoop Slide** (below) was a compromise between more active students in our Shaker Heights group wanting to make something a little more playful, and others just looking for a place to chill.



RESOURCES

The Foundation Center

www.foundationcenter.org

The Foundation Center offers a grants database, a library of grant opportunities, and regularly scheduled workshops and seminars on grant writing and funding strategies.

Youth Funding Opportunity Grants

www.youth.gov

The Grants.gov Youth Funding Opportunity Search Tool helps you find open solicitations across more than 12 federal funding departments, for about 300 programs that specifically support youth and their families.

Neighborhood Connections

www.neighborhoodgrants.org

The Cleveland Foundation's Neighborhood Connections program provides grants, ranging from \$500 to \$5,000, directly to resident-led organizations to support community efforts in Cleveland.

Hershey Foundation

www.fdnweb.org/hershey

The Hershey Foundation funds projects and initiatives in Northeast Ohio that provide growth and development opportunities for children.

Boys & Girls Clubs | Schools | Libraries | Recreation Centers | Community Development Corporations

These organizations (and others) are potential partners for design/build programs for youth.

Making Our Own Space

www.wearemoos.org | cudc@kent.edu

An on-going initiative of Kent State University's Cleveland Urban Design Collaborative. Contact us for advice and partnership opportunities.

WORKSHOP SAFETY RULES

DO

- 1** KEEP WORK AREAS CLEAN
- 2** WEAR PROPER CLOTHING (CLOSED SHOES + SECURE ANY JEWELRY, LONG HAIR, LOOSE CLOTHING)
- 3** KEEP MACHINE GUARDS IN THEIR INTENDED PLACE
- 4** WEAR EYE PROTECTION WHEN NECESSARY
- 5** WEAR DUST MASKS WHEN NECESSARY
- 6** BE SURE EVERYONE IS CLEAR BEFORE STARTING EQUIPMENT
- 7** REPORT ALL INJURIES AND OBTAIN FIRST AID
- 8** ASK QUESTIONS & LEND A HAND WHENEVER OTHERS NEED HELP

DON'T

- 1** DISTRACT PEOPLE USING ANY TOOL
- 2** USE HEADPHONES WHILE WORKING OR PHONES OUTSIDE OF BREAK TIME
- 3** EAT OR DRINK WHILE USING TOOLS
- 4** CLEAN, OIL OR ADJUST MOVING MACHINERY
- 5** DROP/THROW TOOLS OR PLAY WITH ANY MACHINERY/EQUIPMENT



THANKS!

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SHAKER HEIGHTS



THE CHAR AND CHUCK
FOWLER FAMILY FOUNDATION

