

Sunrise on the SouthSide (3): A Clean and Safe Environment

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(Latest in a series of posts about Lehigh University and the Southside)

Sunrise on the Southside

Chapter 1: *A Clean and Safe Environment*

After a short break, Gadfly would now like to continue the slow walk through Lehigh University's high quality production "Sunrise on the Southside," focusing today on chapter 1, "[A Clean and Safe Environment](#)."

This project came to Gadfly's attention just as we have been spending a lot of time on the Southside, a focus especially stimulated by the moving letter from the [South Bethlehem Historical Society](#) and the formation of [Bethlehem Residents for Responsible Development](#).

The SouthSide Ambassadors — those people in the yellow uniforms cleaning streets and sidewalks!

Who are they? Where did they come from? Why are they there? What do they do?

Since the program was created in 2014 in partnership with Lehigh and the Bethlehem Economic Development Corp. (BEDCO), the Ambassadors have expanded their footprint on the South Side with support from the Community Action Development Corp. of Bethlehem.

- “In a lot of people’s minds, it’s not clear who [the Ambassadors] work for, whether they work for the City of Bethlehem or whether they work for Lehigh University. And to me, that is a successful way to view it. They are out there to make the South Side better.” (Lehigh president John Simon)
- Seven days a week in the South Side’s core commercial district, the Ambassadors are on the job from 7 a.m. until 11:30 p.m. Morning details focus on sweeping the sidewalks in an 18-block radius, pulling weeds from tree beds, picking up leaves, sprucing up. Later in the day, the Ambassadors focus on safety issues. The Ambassadors also provide plenty of hospitality—helping visitors with parking meters, directions and restaurant locations.
- “Listen, it was pretty rough down here. It was dirty. Street lights were out. Curb lines were just covered with garbage, out almost 16, 18 inches from the curb. That doesn’t seem like a big deal when you’re in it every day, but when it’s gone, what a difference it made. Things have changed considerably. ” (Ambassadors Operations Manager Hector Lopez)
- “Now we are starting to see a change in [people’s negative perceptions of the South Side] just because the sidewalks are clean.” (Lehigh assistant vice president for community and regional affairs Adrienne McNeil)
- McNeil works with Lehigh’s Office of First-Year Experience on Faux Friday, when first-years eat at South Side restaurants as part of the effort to get them to check out the core business district. Last fall, she says, about 1,100 students participated.

- Then, on the first Friday in October, McNeil leads one of Lehigh's 5X10 (five programs over 10 weeks) series. Participating students meet her at Farrington Square, then they walk together to the Color Me Mine pottery place on Third Street, where they can make plates, bowls and mugs imprinted with the Lehigh logo. "Part of that is just showing them that Third and Fourth streets are close," she says. "It's a fun thing for them."

Gadfly invites comments on this powerful Lehigh public relations document as we go.