

Garfield Park

Blake's life journey leads to a new place of adventure

By LAKIN BOWELL

IT WAS JULY 2012 AND Blake Bowell was holding down one of several summer college jobs as gardener at the Children's

Garden at Garfield Park. This unique concept garden was established in 2007 with funding provided by the Friends Garfield Park, Inc. Blake would provide evening watering service to the garden adjacent to the Garfield Park Conservatory enjoying the moments of serenity.

"I can remember Blake out there with his headphones on watering away and as happy as can be," said Lynda Burrello, former park manager and now Friends Board president. "Who would've known a year later what would happen to change his life."

Blake grew up in Franklin Township, but spent many hours in the park as a youth playing at the Burrello Center in basketball leagues and on the summer swim team with his younger sister, Lakin, and other friends. It was not until after his honorable medical discharge from the U.S. Naval Academy in 2011 that Blake would call the Garfield Park neighborhood his home.

During that time living near the park, he spent hours walking his dog and volunteering in the park. In July 2013 his journey changed for eternity. On a family vacation in northern Indiana, Blake experienced multiple near-death seizures and then days later sadly discovered a large cancerous brain tumor as the cause.

Surgeries, radiation, chemotherapy and a courageous four-year battle led to Blake's passing in June 2017 from a rare form of glioblastoma.

The Bowell family has been a nearly 50-year presence in the Garfield Park community. Dave and Dale Bowell brought the family to Napoleon Street, just south of the park, in 1971 and raised their two children there. They have committed, with the exception of a few years out of state, their

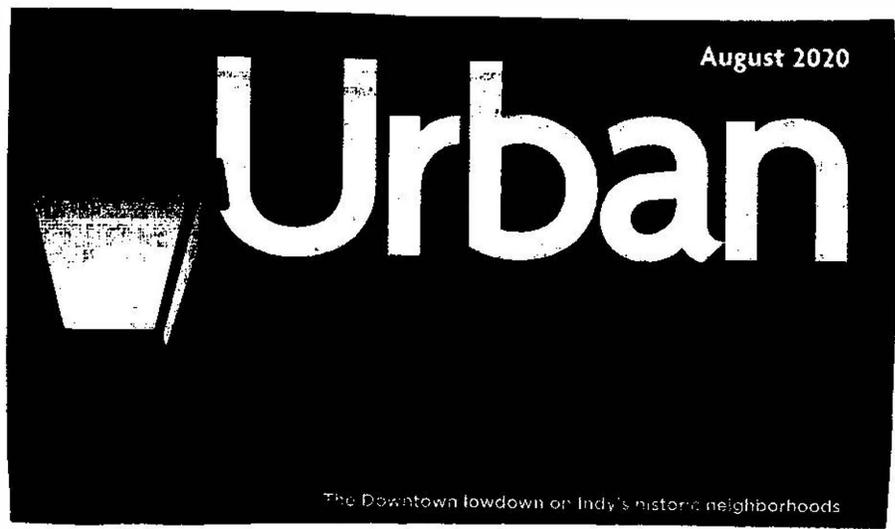
lives to the positive growth of the community. Blake's father, Mark, a Manual High School graduate, has spent the past 20 years leading the Friends of Garfield Park. His aunt Debbie Lieberman, a University of Indianapolis graduate and now leader in her community, has invested countless volunteer hours in the park as well. Further, Blake's mom, LeDania Carmichael, has been a supporter and longtime volunteer in the park.

Garfield Park has truly been a family affair.

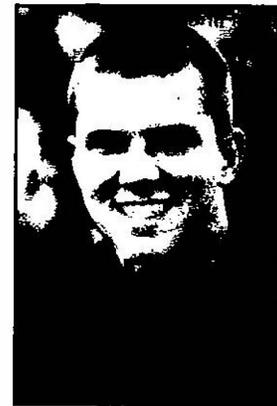
As a way to commemorate Blake's journey and also improve the existing children's garden, Garfield Park Manager Fritz Nerding suggested that the Friends of Garfield Park consider raising funds for a new and updated area. "Blake worked for me and was a positive person every time I needed his help," Nerding said. "It was a great thing for us to raise support for this new award-winning feature in Garfield Park and to honor his life by creating a place for children and families to explore."

Blake's Garden was dedicated in July 2019 and features an outdoor learning pavilion, gazebo, growing gardens, sensory gardens, a wildflower garden, chicken farm and *Divine Light*, a metal fabricated sculpture honoring Blake's life and journey.

The garden development team included Mader Design of Beech Grove, providing concept and landscape layout design; Hagerman Construction, providing added design and building services; and Kenzi Funk, designer and creator of *Divine Light*. Further, countless hours were given by Park Conservatory staff members for plantings and needed initial care. In total, nearly \$200,000 has been invested into the ►



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◀ Blake Bowell's memory lives on as Blake's Garden in Garfield Park.

► project in cash and in-kind donations received and raised by the Friends.

Blake's Garden has been recognized with three prestigious awards - the People's Choice Award and Outstanding Landscape Architecture Design Award from the Indy Chamber's 2019 Monumental Affairs Awards, and the 2019 Indiana Parks and Recreation award for Outstanding Landscape Design.

From a life well-lived but sadly cut short has come a new and fresh place of continual growth. Garfield Park is fortunate to have many wonderful amenities and Blake's Garden is a wonderful addition.

Lakin Bowell, the author of this essay, is Blake Bowell's sister. To learn more about Garfield Park and Blake's Garden, visit garfieldgardensconservatory.org. Visit blakestrong.org to learn more on Blake's legacy.