



Everyone's swinging in to the
Turf Melody Lounge 
"Heart of the Avenue"
1200 Springwood Ave. Asbury Park

*"Blow your horn
LONNIE...
Blow your horn"*

Lonnie Youngblood
sings his latest record
"Sweet Sweet Tootie"

Friday July 21
Saturday July 22
Sunday July 23

Next week
"CHOSEN FEW"



The Turf Club

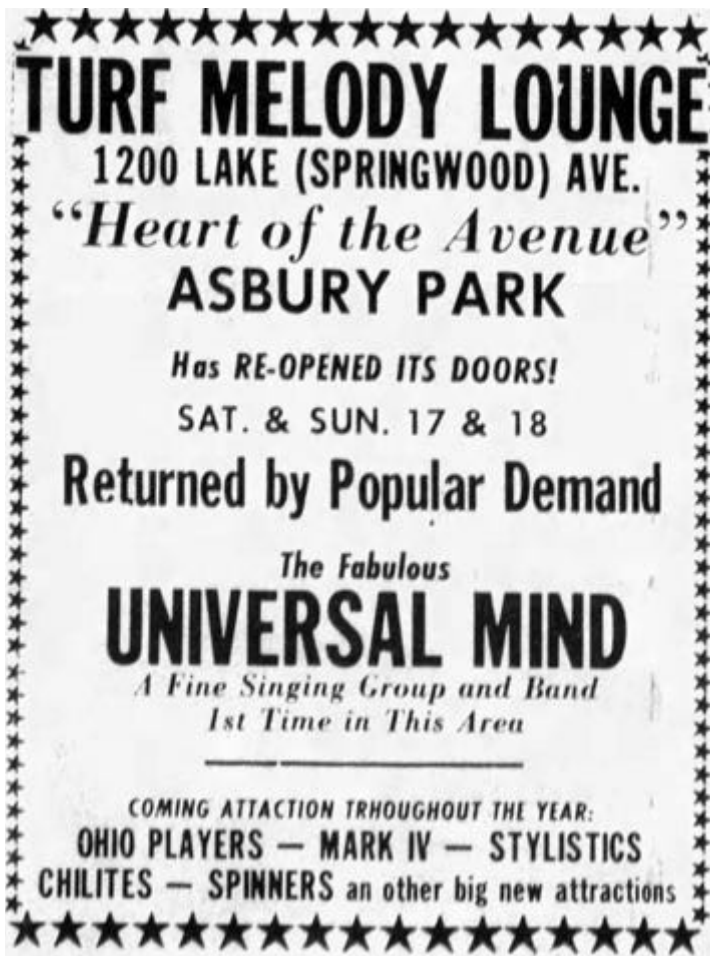
Asbury Park, New Jersey

**ASBURY PARK
AFRICAN-AMERICAN
MUSIC PROJECT, INC.**

AP-AMP PO Box 485 Asbury Park, NJ 07712



Historical Significance



Asbury Park Press, March 1973

The Turf Club is the last remaining structure that housed one of Springwood Avenue’s celebrated music spots.

In the 1960s, there were dozens of music venues on the west side of Asbury Park, all along **Springwood Avenue**. Today, only one structure remains that was once one of these venues: **The Turf Club**.

The Turf Club originally opened at 1125 Springwood Avenue in 1940 and moved to 1200 Springwood Avenue in 1956, where the building remains today. **It represents the last chance to preserve a physical piece of Springwood Avenue’s music history.** The Asbury Park African-American Music Project has been gathering stories about the Turf Club since 2017 and is working to restore the Turf Club into a community music and cultural venue.

Springwood Avenue was part of the Chitlin’ Circuit and lined with music venues and African American-owned businesses, many cited in the Green Book. Since the late 1950s, music was a mainstay of the Turf Club, offering local (e.g., **Al Griffin, Cliff Johnson, and Dee Holland**) and nationally-recognized (e.g., the **Ohio Players** and **Clarence Clemons**, who would later join Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band) jazz and R&B acts. In 1970, civil unrest and a period of disinvestment devastated Springwood Avenue.

Historic Preservationist Elizabeth Rosin notes that the Turf Club “...provides a unique physical connection to an important cultural context – **the social and entertainment heritage of the local African-American community.** Its cultural significance is enhanced by the loss of other buildings that shared its connection to the once-thriving African-American west side commercial district of Asbury Park.”

Springwood Avenue

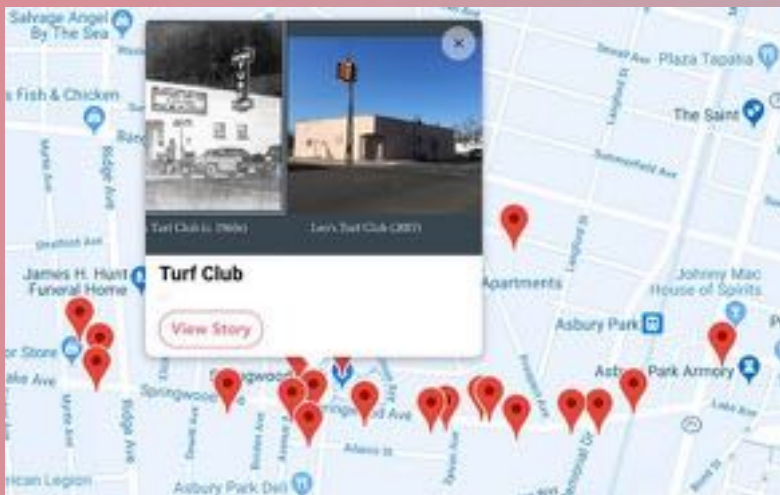
The Heart of Asbury Park's African-American Community

Springwood Avenue has been called the “Main Street” of Asbury Park’s west side community.

Springwood Avenue’s rich musical history dates back to the turn of the twentieth century. Framed within the popular genres of gospel, jazz, and rhythm and blues, **Springwood thrived as an enclave of African-American musical expression.**

Throughout the Springwood Avenue neighborhood, on any given night, listeners could hear the music of both local talent and icons such as **Billie Holiday, Ella Fitzgerald, Duke Ellington, and Count Basie** coming from one of the many clubs that dotted its strip. But these clubs were only the start of a larger musical springboard that expanded throughout the entire West Side, with musicians practicing and performing in hallways, street corners, backyards and front porches.

Although clubs like the **Orchid Lounge** and the **Turf Club** have long closed their doors, the music of Springwood and the impact of its cultural narrative still permeate the music scene. Through a collection of oral histories, photographs, and sound recordings, visitors can continue to enjoy the rich history and the contributions of the African-American community as they created **a unique musical space within Asbury Park.**



Red dots on this map indicate the location of businesses (many African-American owned) and music venues that once stood on Springwood Avenue. Of the dozen music venues, the Turf Club is the only remaining structure.

“The places in cities where Black people led their lives in the 20th century are too often the same locations at risk due to the forces of urban renewal, gentrification, and displacement.

Revitalizing these cultural landscapes, such as the Turf Club, through community-led arts and cultural programming, is a proven strategy used to make heritage relevant and connected to future generations.”

— Kofi Boone
NC State University,
Professor of Landscape Architecture;
Landscape Architecture Foundation President

History of the Turf Club

From 1940 to today



Photo: Joseph A. Carter, Sr. (1917-1980)
© Asbury Park: A West Side Story Collection

*Looking east on Springwood Avenue in the 1960s.
The Turf Club is on the right side of the street.*

The Turf Club originally opened at **1125 Springwood Avenue** by Robert and Carroll Brown, most likely in **1940**. Later that year, ownership was transferred to John Moore, who continued to operate the Turf Club until 1947. In 1948, after a lengthy series of hearings, ownership of The Turf Club was transferred to Leo Karp and Sol Konvitz, who continued to operate the club at 1125 Springwood Avenue until 1955. There is no evidence of music being performed at the Turf between 1940-1955.

In December 1955, **Leo Karp** published his construction plans for the new Turf Club building, which would be located across the street at 1200 Springwood Avenue. He planned to tear down the dilapidated Victory Hotel which was on the site at that time. In April 1956, Karp reported that construction had begun on the site, and that he plans a "a modern, one-story fireproof brick building on the site, which has a 62-foot frontage on Springwood Avenue, and 50 feet on Atkins Avenue."

On **June 30, 1956**, the new "**Leo's Turf Club**" at **1200 Springwood Avenue** opened, where the building remains today. Music became a mainstay of the Turf Club beginning in 1959 and particularly the 1960s, offering local and national jazz, blues, and R&B acts. Many local musicians have performed there, including **Al Griffin and the Gents of Jazz, Cliff Johnson and the Squires of Rhythm, Dorian Parreott and the Cubops, and keyboardist Dee Holland**. Nationally-recognized performers such as saxophonist **Clarence Clemons** (who would later join Bruce Springsteen and the E Street Band), jazz saxophonist **Illinois Jacquet** (known for his work with Lionel Hampton), organist **Jimmy McGriff**, and countless others performed at the Turf Club during this era.



A bartender at the Turf Club, c. 1970s.

On January 14, 1970, the club was renamed "**Wakie's Show Place,**" and ownership was transferred to **Waylon Goldston**, a local African-American businessman. Wakie's grand opening was **April 2, 1970** and featured Irene Reid, a vocalist who performed with Count Basie. In the uprising of July 1970, many west side businesses were burned and never reopened. But, Wakie's Show Place survived and continued to book musical acts. There were many performances advertised in the local newspaper at Wakie's between 1970-1972, including **JT Bowen and The Chosen Few**.

In **1972**, the bar was purchased by Frederick Thorne and was once again renamed, this time to "**Turf Melody Lounge,**" branded as "**the Heart of the Avenue.**" Two years later, the Turf traded hands again; **Bill Reed** was the owner from 1974-1988. Musical acts, such as the local group Toogie and the Gang, continued to perform at the Turf throughout the 1970s.

By 1979, the Turf Melody Lounge was no longer the "brilliant night spot" it once was. Since then, the club has changed owners and names several times, becoming "**Mae's Melody Lounge**" in 1988 (owned by Ella Mae Jackson, who had previously worked at the Turf Club under Bill Reed). In 1990, it was purchased by Kusumaker and Veena Kuchaculla, who renamed it "**Sports Turf Club.**"

The Turf shut its doors around 2000 and has remained vacant since.

Timeline

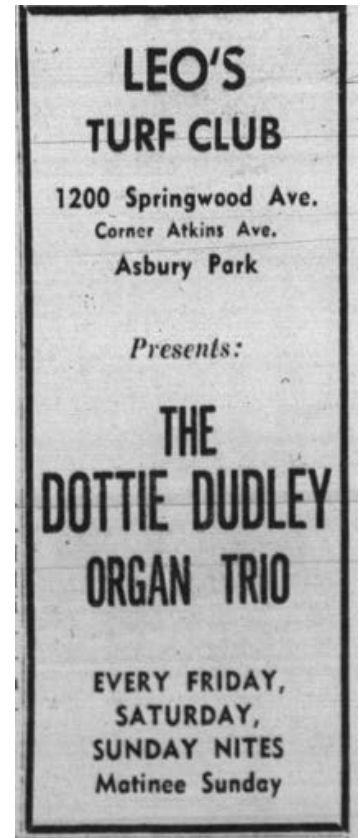
1940 — The Turf Club opens at 1125 Springwood Avenue, owned by Robert and Carrol Brown.

1947 — Leo Karp and Sol Konvitz take ownership of the Turf Club.

1956 — The Turf Club, owned by Karp, moves to its current location at 1200 Springwood Avenue.

1959 — Musical performances are advertised at the Turf Club.

1960s — This decade was the “golden era” of the Turf Club, with many local and national acts performing there.



1959



1966



1968

January 1970 — Waylon Goldston becomes the owner of the Turf Club and renames it “Wakie’s Showplace.” Music continues to be performed there.

July 1970 — Wakie’s, along with many other businesses on Springwood Avenue, is burned in the Asbury Park uprising, but the structure remains standing.

1972 — The Turf Club was purchased by Frederick Thorne and renamed the “Turf Melody Lounge.”



1970



1972

1974 — The Turf Melody Lounge was purchased by Bill Reed. Music was still performed there throughout the 1970s.

1988 — Ella Mae Jackson takes over ownership of the Turf Club, renaming it "Mae's Melody Lounge."

1990 — Kusumaker and Veena Kuchaculla purchase the club, renaming it "Sports Turf Club."

c. late 1990s — A fire damages parts of the building. The Turf closes its doors.

2002 — The building enters foreclosure.

2004 — The building was purchased by Tamar Ayyash, who plans to convert it into a laundromat. The roof was removed for repairs.

2012 — The building was purchased by Vince Gifford.



Photo courtesy Greg Bouie

c. 1970s



2020 — The Asbury Park African-American Music Project partners with community members and organizations to revitalize the structure. The interior was cleaned out and murals were painted on the exterior.

2021 — The Asbury Park African-American Music Project (AP-AMP) hosts "Tuesdays at the Turf," the first musical events in the building in decades.



Photo: Conni Freestone

January 3, 2022 — The Asbury Park African-American Music Project (AP-AMP) purchases the Turf Club.

Memories of the Turf Club

Local community members and musicians remember...

"I could sit on my step and hear music from the Turf Club... what a time! ... I played at the Turf Club; I want to tell you this story. At the Turf Club, they had a bar, and so many of these bars, they had the bandstand in the middle of the bar. So people are sitting around you, and boy, you're really in the spotlight... the bandstand was raised. On the Atkins Avenue side of the Turf Club, there's a window. I was playing at the Turf Club, I was living on Atkins Avenue. I was playing, and I kept seeing this head jumping up and down at this window. I said, 'What is this?' Every time I turned, I could see someone jumping up to see, because the window's kind of high. It's still there. It was my son! He had never really seen me performing in a club. He was just a kid, and it was him. That touches me so deeply, even now."

— **Cliff Johnson** (Interview with AP-AMP, January 2018)

"My first night out of the service, and I went into the Turf Club... Our main place was the Turf. They had some great bands, good musicians came in there, from all over. That's the one thing about Asbury too: they used to bring people in from all over the world."

— **JT Bowen** (Interview with AP-AMP, May 2018)

"The Turf was my hangout."

— **Charlie Smith** (Jazz Legends of Asbury Park panel discussion, 2007)

"There was the Turf Club. They had jam sessions. That's how many musicians in Asbury Park learned how to jam."

— **Cliff Johnson** (Jazz Legends of Asbury Park panel discussion, 2007)

"I went to the Turf Club. It's called Leo's Turf Club. They had all kinds of groups that come, the bands that come. It was just a nice night club. ... Sammy Pugh! I used to go and see him at the Turf Club."

— **Rose Johnson** (Interview with AP-AMP, May 2018)

"The Turf Club was a great experience. It was loud. All the music was top quality that came through here. Charles Earland and all of those great jazz players... You could stand outside and hear just about everything that was going on. I couldn't wait for the next act to come through, even though I was playing there. ...Not on a regular basis, but maybe once a month we were in there."

— **Desi Norman** (Interview with AP-AMP, 2019)

"All of these clubs [on Springwood Avenue] were meeting places not only for musicians, for families. During holidays, people used to go from club to club. It was a place where people made a living, it was a place where people could enjoy themselves, it was a place where people could go if they needed someone to talk to. It was a place to go if you just wanted to be by yourself!"

— **Al Holmes** (Interview with AP-AMP, September 2019)



The Turf Club in the late 1960s. A group called "Charles and Dave" performs. L to R: Willie F. Wynn, JB Williams (both partially obscured), David Peace, Claude Collins, Charles Dockery (AKA McMillan), and Bob Lee, bass.



Ben Dinkins, center, at the Turf Club.

The Turf Club Today

After closing its doors around 2000, the Turf Club had several owners. It fell into foreclosure in 2002. In 2006, the building was purchased by **Tamar Ayyash**, who planned to convert the building into a laundromat. Ayyash removed the roof to begin repairs, as the building suffered a fire sometime before 2000, but the laundromat never opened. In 2012, the building was purchased by **Vince Gifford**, and it remained vacant — until recently.

In 2020, AP-AMP partnered with community members and organizations to revitalize the structure. Through collaboration with Springwood Avenue Rising, a local community partner, artist **Larry Walker** painted murals on the exterior, which includes images of local musicians, some of whom played the Turf in its heyday. The interior of the building, which had become overgrown with vegetation, was cleaned out.

In the summer of 2021, AP-AMP initiated a series of open-air concerts inside the Turf Club called “**Tuesdays at the Turf.**” These concerts featured many local musicians who had once played there, such as Al Holmes, Vel Johnson, Bill Carter, and Bob Lee. “Tuesdays at the Turf” marked the first time live music had been performed at the Turf Club in over 20 years.

Through the generosity of our community and partnership with Vince Gifford, **the Asbury Park African-American Music Project purchased the Turf Club** in January 2022.

You can help AP-AMP restore the Turf Club by donating, volunteering, and sharing your Turf Club memories.

Visit us at asburyamp.org for more information.



Photo: Conni Freestone



After the Turf Club clean-up in October 2020.

Interior of the Turf Club in 2020, prior to the clean-up.

Tuesdays at the Turf Summer 2021

Photos by Conni Freestone



Credits

Special thank you to all the individuals who have shared their stories
and all the musicians who share their time and talent with us.

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Asbury Park African-American Music Project Team

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ASBURY PARK AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC PROJECT



Illustration by Charles Trott



The Turf Club, c. 1960s

Photo: Joseph A. Carter, Sr. (1917-1980)

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asburyamp.org

The Asbury Park African-American Music Project (AP-AMP) is a volunteer-run, community-driven 501(c)(3) organization working to preserve and share the music, stories, and heritage of Springwood Avenue, the heart of Asbury Park's African-American community.