



MUSIC

Tuesday at the Turf music series helping to reclaim Asbury Park's music legacy

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No roof, no problem.

The Turf Club at 1200 Springwood Ave. in Asbury Park is the last of the great Springwood Avenue clubs on the West Side of the city that still stands. Lenny Welch, the Broadways, Clarence Clemons before he joined the E Street Band, and more played the spot in the 1960s.

These days, it's just a shell of a structure with no roof. That hasn't stopped the Asbury Park African-American Music Project. The community group is seeking to renovate the venue, partly with revenue from their "Tuesday at the Turf" series.

"It has its drawbacks because of the weather but in terms of COVID it's a blessing because it's open air," said Jennifer Ward Souder, president of the

Asbury Park African-American Music Project, aka Asbury Amp.

The first show was July 13 with Al Holmes and the Tribe. There was music, food, dancing and good vibes.

"In each session there's a core group of people who come no matter what and all of a sudden you see a handful of new faces so it's growing with different groups hearing about it," Souder said.

The once vibrant music and cultural scene on Springwood Avenue came to an abrupt end in the summer of 1970s when a civil disturbance tore apart Asbury Park. Blocks of Springwood Avenue that weren't burned down during the riots were later bulldozed in a failed attempt at revitalization.

The musical history of the area, which has ties to the Great American Songbook, Broadway, and decades of music charts, was all but lost. A fully operating Turf Club will help recover that history, Souder said.

“The goal is it to be a music and community venue, yes with a roof, so we’re looking to renovate it, maintain it in the scale and atmosphere of a jazz nightclub from that era,” Souder said. “So we want to have live music and we want to have educational components for young people and not just young people, too.”

On Cookman Avenue: Asbury Park ShowRoom Cinemas new owner reveals plans to save it with 'homey experience'

Bob Lee, who's played bass with Eartha Kitt, Cab Calloway, Denise Williams and more, will play the Turf Club on Monday, Aug. 30. The final Springwood Park show of the season takes place that week on Tuesday, Aug. 31 with the Sensational Soul Cruisers.

Springwood Park is across the street from the Turf Club.

“I used to look in the side door of the Turf before I started playing there,” said Lee in a statement. “My first time playing in the Turf I was about 17. You could not say you were 21 as it was immediately suspect but if you told them you were 22, somehow it was believable.”

Asbury Amp, in addition to working to renovate the Turf Club, has recorded spoken testimonials on the history of the West Side from the people who lived it, and created an online digital museum at www.asburyamp.org. There are several other groups in the city also working to uncover the lost history of the West Side. The new interest in the area is part of a current national reckoning and rediscovery of Black American history.

“There are similar stories, all with their unique aspects but with similar narratives, being played out all over the country to varying degrees after being buried or communities being displaced,” Souder said.

The more notable examples include the “1619 Project” of the New York Times and the recognition of the 1921 Tulsa race massacre on its 100th anniversary earlier this year.

In Asbury Park, the legacy of the West Side is being reclaimed.

“I think there is, in a positive way, a growing recognition of the value of these stories in themselves,” Souder said, “and in the places that they’re tied to.”

Bob Lee and Friends, 6 to 8 p.m. Monday, Aug. 30, The Turf Club, 1200 Springwood Ave., Asbury Park. \$10. [instagram.com/asbury_amp](https://www.instagram.com/asbury_amp).



Al Holmes and the Tribe, July 13, 2021 at the Turf Club in Asbury Park. *Chris Jordan*



The Turf Club, how it used to look. *COURTESY ASBURY PARK HISTORICAL SOCIETY*