

# FOCUS

THE ANDREWS UNIVERSITY MAGAZINE



## Harbor of Hope

AU's mission and service in Benton Harbor, Michigan

**In This Issue:**  
After the Flames  
REACHING OUT

## Nearly 37 years



**T**he period between major riots in Benton Harbor, Michigan, closed in June 2003, when the most recent disturbances drew national attention to our local community. God willing, those riots of just over a year ago will be the city's last.

At the time, I was in Colorado for a cousin's wedding, and many of my relatives asked me what happened to cause the alarming violence near my home (I live in St. Joseph, Benton Harbor's "twin" city, an ironic pairing whose relationship had come under increasing scrutiny long before last year's riots—see Alex Kotlowitz's *The Other Side of the River* [1999]).

I had few answers. Although I arrived in southwestern Michigan as a ten-year-old in the summer of 1977, and had an awareness of the difficulties

Benton Harbor has faced and continues to face, trying to describe for outsiders what may have ignited the rioting proved difficult without resorting to familiar stereotypes—a cycle of poverty, racism, and community unrest.

My more thoughtful relatives pushed further, wondering how a little town like Benton Harbor could find itself in the same predicament as a big city ghetto. I had no satisfying answers.

I'd been around for many of those 37 years, and I know there have been repeated attempts to rejuvenate and revitalize the city. It is proving a monumental task. There are a lot of factors to blame (institutions and individuals) for the city's problems, and depending on whom you ask, you're likely to hear explanations emphasizing either the shortcomings within the mostly Black community or the inequities imposed from outside it. Unfortunately, with Benton Harbor, there are good reasons to hold all sides in the equation accountable.

In this issue, *Focus* examines Andrews University's involvement and work in Benton Harbor. From one of the university's first efforts, which Meredith Jones Gray recounts in *Timepieces*, to the current AU out-REACH program, the subject of Beverly Stout's feature article, Andrews has offered the Benton Harbor community hope and assistance.

But more needs to be done. In two additional articles addressing the city's future, Professors Joseph Warren (English) and Desmond Murray (chemistry) propose further strategies in which Andrews can partner with Benton Harbor as the city attempts to overcome its own legacy. Additionally, with an eye toward spiritual nurturing, Karen Pearson looks at an upcoming evangelistic series Campus Chaplain Tim Nixon will hold in the city this September.

As just about everyone in and around Benton Harbor knows, the city's plight will not be easily resolved. It continues to demand perseverance and patience. And renewed commitment begins with the realization Barack Obama championed recently: "For alongside our famous individualism, there's another ingredient in the American saga. A belief that we are all connected as one people."

It is a Christian principle as well.

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### FEATURES

**14** **Benton Harbor: Hope and Opportunity**  
*by Desmond H. Murray*  
 Desmond Murray, chemistry professor and *Benton Spirit* editor, showcases Benton Harbor residents who are making a difference, and suggests how the Andrews community might become more involved in reaching out to the nearby city.



Page 6

**18** **After the Flames**  
*by Joseph W. Warren*  
 A new Andrews University / Benton Harbor Partnership  
*by Joseph W. Warren*  
 An expert on diversity and multicultural issues, English professor Joseph Warren examines ways Andrews can continue partnering with Benton Harbor to improve conditions for residents.



Page 14

**22** **REACHing Out With Both Hands**  
*by Bev Stout*  
 Begun in 1996 by a small but enthusiastic group of AU students, AU out-REACH has become a pivotal service program in the lives of Benton Harbor residents and Andrews students alike.



Page 18

**26** **Empowering Through Evangelism**  
*by Karen Pearson*  
 Preparations have begun for a major evangelistic effort led by campus chaplain Tim Nixon. The series of meetings to be held in Benton Harbor will offer city residents the hope and assurance of Christ's love.



Page 22

### DEPARTMENTS

- 2 In Focus
- 5 Letters
- 6 Campus Update
- 11 Faculty & Staff
- 28 Timepieces
- 29 Alumni News
- 30 Class Notes
- 31 Life Stories
- 32 Campus Cache
- 35 Student Spotlight



Page 34



Page 35

**ON THE COVER:** The "New Benton Harbor" city limits sign, located near the bridge between Benton Harbor and St. Joseph, speaks to the hopeful changes now underway. *Photograph by Ivan Davis.*