

PRESERVATION FORWARD



2022 Landmarks Illinois Influencer

CHERYL JOHNSON

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, PEOPLE FOR COMMUNITY RECOVERY

Cheryl Johnson advocates for the safety of Altgeld Gardens residents with the nonprofit People for Community Recovery (PCR), which she has led as Executive Director since 2001. Cheryl is the daughter of the late Hazel Johnson, credited as the mother of the environmental justice movement, who founded PCR. Altgeld Gardens, a historic public housing community located on Chicago's Far South Side, was constructed adjacent to polluting industries, and residents there suffer higher rates of disease and death related to the toxic environment. By fighting for the preservation of Altgeld Gardens and a healthy environment for its residents, Cheryl is redefining preservation in the context of environmental justice. Cheryl learned the fundamentals of community organizing from her mother and carries on the work of PCR's mission to enhance the quality of life of residents living in communities affected by pollution. A lifelong resident of Altgeld Gardens, Cheryl is a well-known and highly trusted community leader. Under her leadership, PCR has been a fierce advocate for environmental justice and economic equity for south side and south suburban residents. Cheryl and the members of PCR recently stopped the demolition of two historic Chicago public schools at Altgeld Gardens that were listed on Landmarks Illinois' 2021 Most Endangered Historic Places in Illinois list. People for Community Recovery has prevented resident displacement by stopping the demolition of hundreds of Altgeld Gardens' housing units, pressured the Chicago Housing Authority to include community input in its redevelopment plans, halted construction of a nearby landfill and secured safe environmental cleanup of nearby toxic sites. Cheryl's deep community connection and long-term vision for a thriving Far South Side, and her commitment to carrying out her late mother's legacy, fuel her work. Cheryl has presented about, and co-written, several journal articles on environmental health and risk factors. She serves on the Environmental Protection Agency's National Environmental Justice Advisory Council and the Illinois Environmental Justice Commission and is an International Chemical Workers Union Health and Safety Council/Coalition of Black Trade Unionists certified trainer.

