



Tanya Debose

Tanya Debose is a fifth-generation Houstonian.

Since 2005 she has been working to improve the lives of [Independence Heights](#) residents — and to preserve the history and integrity of this historic black community.

Ms. Debose has roots in both the historic black town of Independence Heights (incorporated in 1915) and Freedman’s Town (established in 1865 — Houston’s present-day 4th Ward). Both neighborhoods were founded by African-Americans and both neighborhoods now face pressures unique to historic black neighborhoods, towns and settlements. She serves as the executive director of the [Independence Heights Redevelopment Council](#).

Detailed Biography

Tanya Debose began her work in community development after working for years in the criminal justice field as a parole officer for the Texas Department of Criminal Justice. She returned to her roots and connected to her heritage in historic Independence Heights. It is there where Debose learned skills and gained hands-on experience to engage and organize communities for sustainable success. It was also there that she learned the rich history of her ancestors and discovered they were pioneers who helped initiate the first city incorporated by African Americans in the State of Texas.

Through her work in Independence Heights she achieved many goals that include leading a 3-year community initiative that resulted in the first written community plan. She has also secured protection for the first landmarked home in in the community and the first local historic district. Throughout her work in Independence Heights, she has lead various small and large scale community projects and has a track record of getting things done in under-resourced communities.

After more than 25 years of work in social service and community development, Debose developed a desire to share her work and strategies with other communities particularly those with rich historic and cultural assets. Her passion grew after discovering how significantly important these

communities were to the fabric of America and how the contributions of blacks to the nation was a rarely told story. Her focus shifted to learning more about other places similar to Independence Heights and how she could use her background and network to assist other communities and build a platform to bring awareness, leverage resources and help others to passionately embrace their own communities through leadership in preservation and revitalization.

In 2015, she began lending her experience and expertise to other local community leaders by helping them organize and build capacity to serve and lead their communities. By working with existing leaders, her intent was to inspire them to the next level while at the same time it helped her gain an understanding of how to effectively work with communities that lack skilled leadership but have rich history, passion and tenacity.

In Spring 2016, through her networks and connections, she assembled a committee of well respected leaders to help spearhead the first Preserving Communities of Color Conference in partnership with the Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance (HBTSA). The focus of the conference was to provide networking opportunities, tools and resources to others working to preserve and develop historic communities into inclusive vibrant places and cultural destinations. Debose eventually blended her “on the ground” work in communities with the annual conference and an online resource and information center entitled, “Preserving Communities of Color”. Today, her work spans multiple states and with a team of culturally competent professionals, she works at the local level to help communities preserve and revitalize.

In 2017, she initiated a statewide membership organization called the Texas Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance. The THBTSA serves as a state chapter of the HBTSA.

Selected Articles about Tanya Debose

2017, May 26 [Honoring black history / resisting erasure by renaming Whole Foods in Independence Heights](#), Houston Chronicle

2017, March 10 [Working to ensure preservation by stabilizing existing homes](#) — with Rebuilding Together Houston and Lowes, via Lowes Newsroom.

2016 Dec. 16 [When Historic Doesn't Mean White](#), Houston Chronicle

2016, Nov. 22 [Tanya Debose, Honorary Mayor of Independence Heights](#), Houston Chronicle

2016, Nov. 16 [Managing Change Starts with Memory: Preserving Communities of Color Workshop](#), Cheryl Joseph and Raj Mankad, Off-Cite: Design. Architecture. Houston, Rice University

2015, July 2 [Historic Homes in Independence Heights are Testaments to Black Self-Sufficiency](#), Houston Chronicle

2013, June 1 [Community's Revitalization Efforts Bear Fruit](#), Houston Chronicle

Selected Accomplishments

2018 Partnered with Citgo to bring in \$6M for [Independence Heights Legacy Project](#) — to help current residents restore their homes and remain in the community after hurricane Harvey (with Rebuilding Together Houston).

2017 Heritage Square Design Project with Prairie View AMU Design Team: Developed designs for commemorative site that honors and shares the history of the Independence Heights (a goal articulated in the Independence Heights Livable Centers study, 2012).

2016 Organized and hosted inaugural [Preserving Communities of Color conference](#) in collaboration with the *Historic Black Towns and Settlements Alliance* (HBTSA)

2015 Established [Preserving Communities of Color](#)

2015 [First locally protected house in Independence Heights](#) (with Carroll Parrot Blue)

2014 established [Starkweather Historic District](#) in Independence Heights.

2014 ; 2012 participant, [Microsoft Convergence](#) (technology conference now called [Microsoft Envision](#))

2012 [Independence Heights Northline Livable Centers Study](#) (with Greater Northside Management District)

2010 [Independence Heights Quality of Life Agreement](#): “Vision: A New Future for Our Historic Community.”

2009 selected participant, [LISC Go Neighborhood Challenge](#) (multiyear place-based initiative for revitalizing Houston communities)

2007 Invited to apply for the LISC Go Neighborhood Challenge

2005 Independence Heights Initiative (Dec. 31, 2005, after Hurricane Katrina)

2001 Independence Heights [Super Neighborhood](#) recognized by the City of Houston

Selected Lectures and Presentations

2016 [American Leadership Forum](#)

2015 [Creating Community Engagement with Non-Cash Resources](#), Neighborhood USA Conference