



Everyone's swinging into 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



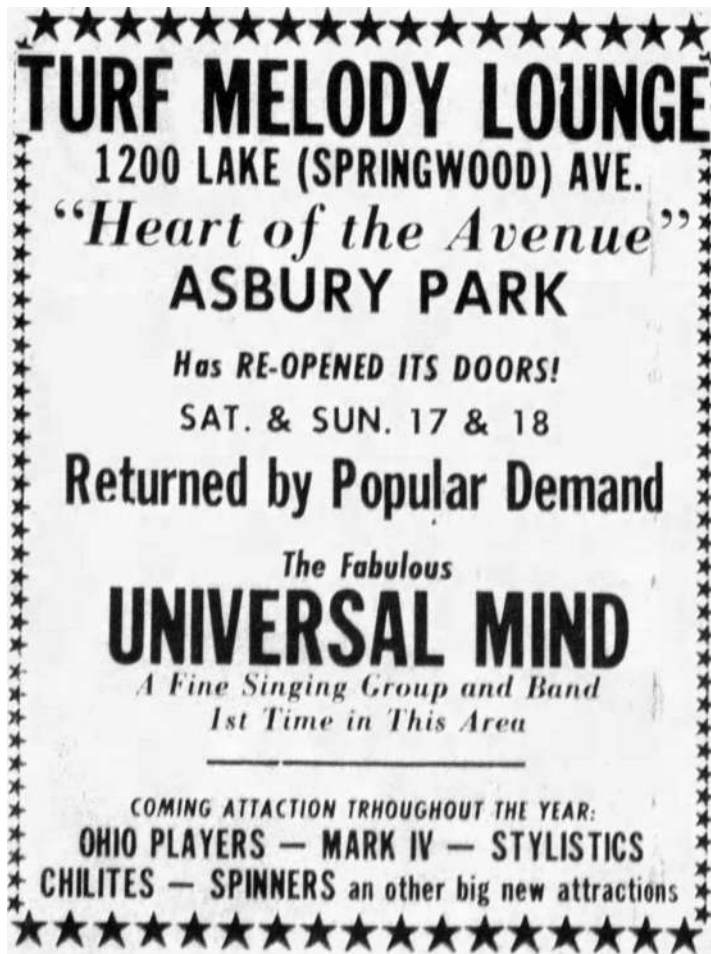
**ASBURY PARK  
AFRICAN-AMERICAN  
MUSIC PROJECT, INC.**

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 — over two dozen places were listed in the Green Book on Springwood Avenue alone. 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

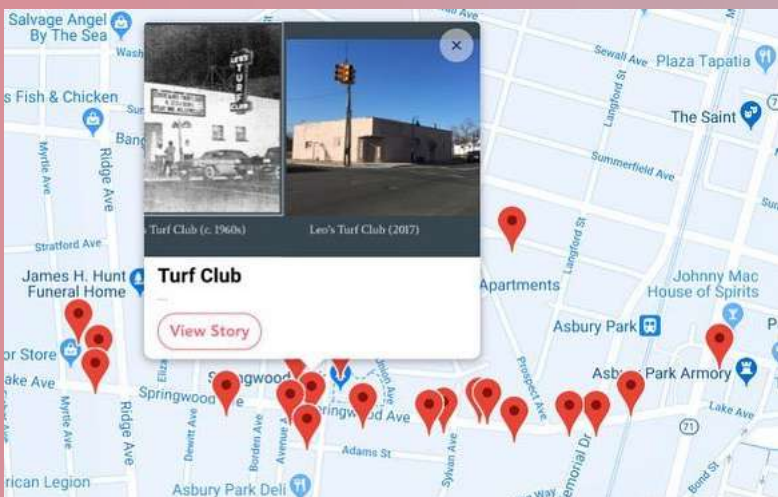
## The Heart of Asbury Park's African-American Community

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



*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. It would be located across the street at **1200**

**Springwood Avenue**. There is a history of notable buildings located at 1200 Springwood Avenue. Karp tore down the dilapidated Victory Hotel which was on the site in 1955. Before the Victory Hotel, this address was the home of The Metropolitan Hotel, which was "one of the more upscale establishments catering to African Americans on Asbury Park's west side at the time." In fact, the Metropolitan — and thus, 1200 Springwood Avenue — was listed in the Green Book.

In April 1956, Karp reported that construction had begun on the site, and that he planned "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 Parrott 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

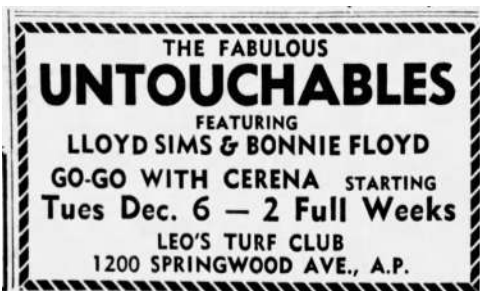
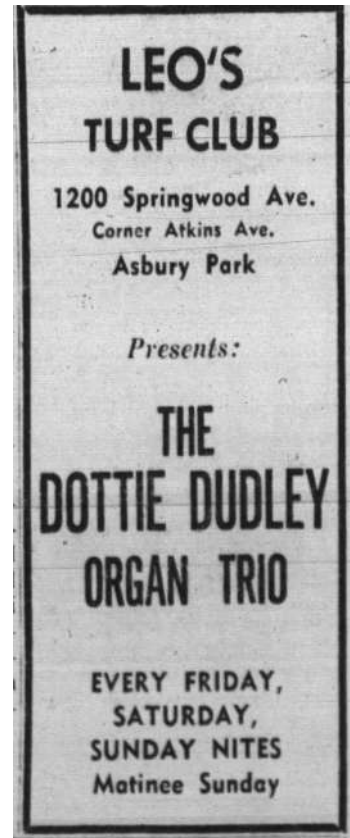
1940 — The Turf Club opens at 1125 Springwood Avenue, owned by Robert and Carrol Brown.

1947 — Leo Karp & 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.



1966



1968

1959

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 planned to convert it into a laundromat. The roof was removed for repairs.

● **2012** — The building was purchased by Vince Gifford.



c. 1970s



● **2020** — The Asbury Park African-American Music Project (AP-AMP) 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.



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



● **Summer 2022** — AP-AMP hosts the second annual “Tuesdays at the Turf” concert series.

● **June 2023** — Two new exterior doors installed.

● **Summer 2023** — AP-AMP hosts the third annual “Tuesdays at the Turf” concert series.



● **October 2023** — Roof construction completed.



● **November 2023** — The State Historic Preservation Office deemed the Turf Club individually eligible for listing in the New Jersey and National Registers of Historic Places.

● **Spring 2024** — The Turf Club was added as a site on the inaugural New Jersey Black Heritage Trail.

● **June 2024**— Application for the Turf Club to be listed in the New Jersey and National Register of Historic Places submitted.

● **Summer 2024** — AP-AMP hosts the fourth annual “Tuesdays at the Turf” concert series.

# 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)

"What happens is we play on weekends, and sometimes people would come in. Count Basie's trombone players used to come in, and sit in with us. It was an exciting time. What happens a lot of times, when musicians from the other venues came in and took a break, they would come in and sit in with others, and play for a few minutes, and then go back to their jobs. We would do the same going back and forth. Cliff Johnson was down at the Savoy, Heppenstall was at the Turf Club."

— **Dorian Parreott** (Interview with AP-AMP, 2018)



*Ben Dinkins, center, at the Turf Club.*



*Photo courtesy Gregg Bouie*

*In the 1970s-80s, the club was called the "Turf Melody Lounge." In this photo from the 1980s, the marquee advertises a show by the band "Toogie and the Gang," of which Gregg Bouie was a member.*



"By the time I was a teenager, I started putting groups together. I met this brother named Charles McMillan around 1966-1967. We started out with a five man group and dwindled down to two people, him and I. We always wanted to get in the Turf Club. So we worked hard at trying to get there. At that time, Wakie Goldston, who was running the Turf, we would come in and ask him: 'Give us a shot.' But it was, 'maybe, maybe, maybe...'

So one particular night, we were sitting in the club and they had a band from Paterson here. And the people didn't like them. So usually, if you play [the Turf Club], you work Thursday night, Friday night, Saturday night, a Sunday afternoon matinee, and then Sunday night. This band was here Thursday night and Friday night - but nobody liked them.

So [Goldston] told us Friday night, 'I'd like to give y'all the chance because nobody liked the band.' Later on that night before the club closed, he came to Charles and I asking if we had a band, we could play Saturday night. We told him yes. We didn't [have the band together], but we told him yes anyway. So he said, 'Be here Saturday night, 9 o'clock, to start playing.' So we left the club, started knocking on doors, getting people together. And at 6 o'clock that morning, we were at the barbershop, Jam's barbershop rehearsing. And that night, we were onstage."

— **David Peace** (Interview with AP-AMP, October 2021)

"We started this band, J.B. and the All Stars. Bill Carter, Larry Peek, Fred Wynn, and myself. We practiced for a little while and got a couple of songs. We started playing around at different venues. We were still kids in 1964, I was 15 years old. My first time in the Turf Club, I was probably 17... Goldston — we used to call him Goldie — managed the band [Charles and Dave]. At some point, we were playing around and Goldie said that he could get us gigs and manage the band. And this is in the late 1960s... During the [Civil Unrest in 1970], we stood in the Turf Club all night protecting them from burning the place down. "

— **Bob Lee** (Interview with AP-AMP, October 2021)

The Turf Club was our main place that we played at... they had a lot of jazz in The Turf Club and The Orchid Lounge back in the day. In the Turf Club, I can remember The Ohio Players played there. We enjoyed playing [at the Turf Club]. We probably made \$250 and there were nine of us in the band... One weekend at the Turf Club, it was like three days in a row that we played... there were so many people there in those three days."

— **Gregg Bouie** (Interview with AP-AMP, 2022)

"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. The group "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.*



*Turf Club Jam, August 2023. Al Holmes, seated in center with guitar.*





Samual Markey Photography



# 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 for repairs, as the building suffered a fire sometime before 2000, but the roof wasn't replaced and 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. In the summers of 2022 and 2023, AP-AMP produced the annual "Tuesdays at the Turf" concert series.

**Construction on the roof** was completed in 2023, as well as the installation of two new exterior doors. Special thanks to the design team, led by Connolly & Hickey Historical Architects, for making sure the character of the Turf Club was preserved.

The Turf Club was deemed eligible for listing on the **New Jersey Historic Register** in 2023. In 2024, it was added as a site on the inaugural **New Jersey Black Heritage Trail**.

**As AP-AMP moves forward with the next phase of the Turf Club's renovation, you can help by donating, volunteering, & sharing your Turf Club memories.**

Visit us at [asburyamp.org](https://asburyamp.org) for more information.



*Photo: Conni Freestone*

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



*After the Turf Club clean-up in October 2020.*



*During roof construction in October 2023.*





# Tuesdays at the Turf

## Summer 2021

*Photos by Conni Freestone*





# Tuesdays at the Turf

## Summer 2022

*Photos by Conni Freestone*





# Tuesdays at the Turf

Summer 2023

Photos by Shilpa Iyer





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# 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.

## Leadership Support for Turf Club Renovation

- African American Cultural Heritage Action Fund, a program of the National Trust for Historic Preservation
- Bruce and Patti Springsteen
- State of NJ FY2024 Appropriations Act allocated as Grants-in-Aid, administered by the New Jersey Historic Trust
- Leadership support for Turf Club purchase from Nancy & Robert Ward

Please see [asburyamp.org](http://asburyamp.org) for full list of supporters.

## Asbury Park African-American Music Project Team

|                 |                 |
|-----------------|-----------------|
| Bruce Booker    | Kathleen Melgar |
| Ruben Bray      | Jennifer Souder |
| Yvonne Clayton  | Charles Trott   |
| Melissa Keeling | Phil Unger      |

## Architect

Connolly & Hickey Historical Architects

## Contractor

Lewis-Graham, Inc.

## Cover photo credits

Top row, photos 1 and 3: Gregg Bouie  
Middle & Bottom rows: Conni Freestone

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# ASBURY PARK AFRICAN-AMERICAN MUSIC PROJECT, INC.

AP-AMP PO Box 485 Asbury Park, NJ 07712



*Illustration by Charles Trott*









***The Turf Club, c. 1960s***

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

*© Asbury Park: A West Side Story Collection*

**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.