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Doors Open to Rhetorical Listening

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By Madison Williams

Historic Milwaukee's Annual Doors Open

[Historic Milwaukee, Inc. \(HMI\)](#) is a small nonprofit organization that is enthusiastically committed to increasing the general public's knowledge and awareness of Milwaukee history and architecture. HMI uses a number of events to open the doors of historically significant buildings to the public in order to teach the public about the history of Milwaukee, including its buildings, businesses, and communities.

HMI's biggest and most popular annual event is [Doors Open](#), "a two-day celebration of Milwaukee's art, architecture, culture, and history," that offers the public a behind-the-scenes look at buildings spread across the city and its surrounding neighborhoods. Over 32,000 visitors flock to this free, citywide event to tour over 170 buildings over the span of a weekend. The event features sites clustered downtown, in the "spotlight neighborhoods," and throughout the [entire Milwaukee area](#). The overarching goal expressed for Doors Open Milwaukee is to "showcase the architecture and community stories of Milwaukee's downtown and [culturally diverse neighborhoods](#)," to improve the perception of these neighborhoods, and foster pride in residents of the city's communities.

Each year, Doors Open selects 2-3 different "spotlight neighborhoods" to be highlighted during the event by featuring a substantial number of exciting sites clustered in those neighborhoods. The spotlight neighborhoods are usually culturally diverse, going through the process of revitalization, and contain unexpected treasures. Doors Open provides communities with the opportunity to to make connections and foster relationships; to advertise and promote local businesses and organizations; and to share their neighborhood pride and culture with others. Some spotlight neighborhoods from recent years include Lindsey Heights, Layton Boulevard West, Historic Mitchell Street, Oak Creek, and Bronzeville.

Spotlight Neighborhoods: Lindsay Heights

[Lindsay Heights](#) is located in the heart of Milwaukee's North Side and was once the center point of Milwaukee's growing African American community following their migration from the south in the early 1900's. After decades of economic instability, largely due to the abandonment of the Park West Freeway plans that caused the demolition of thousands of homes in the area, Lindsay Heights has been revitalized.

Local businesses, organizations, foundations, and community members have united in a communal effort to rejuvenate the neighborhood to its former glory by "connecting Lindsay Heights to itself and the rest of Milwaukee" ([Inouye](#)). Some of the many organizations and

businesses working to nourish the community include restaurants, like Jake's Deli and Tandem, outreach programs, like Innovation & Wellness Commons and Walnut Way Conservation Corp, and spaces for connecting to others, like Alice's Garden Urban Farm & Community Garden and the Fondy Farmers Market (Inouye). All of these locations are just a few examples of sites that have been opened to visit and tour during Doors Open in the past, with new sites being added each year.

Rhetorical Listening

The access and opportunities provided by the sites and tours during Doors Open allow residents and visitors alike a peek inside other communities, to learn about their diverse cultures, values, and spaces. Doors Open serves as a space for rhetorical listening, which is "a stance of openness that a person may choose to assume in relation to any person, text, or culture; its purpose is to cultivate conscious identifications in ways that promote productive communication, especially but not solely cross-culturally" ([Ratcliffe 25](#)), where different people can learn, listen, and connect across community spaces.

Doors Open as an event promotes the development of an understanding of the context and identifications of those we interact with who are different from ourselves. Rhetorical listening is important to "promoting an understanding of self and other" (27), a comprehension lacking for many people within "normative" society and positions of power. Furthermore, the choice to engage in rhetorical listening, attempting to understand others' experiences without relating them to our own, is the only way to begin to understand others perspectives, experiences, and ways of being. Ultimately, by engaging with community funds of knowledge through rhetorical listening we're able to integrate what we learn into our worldviews and decision-making (29), be it consciously or un-consciously.