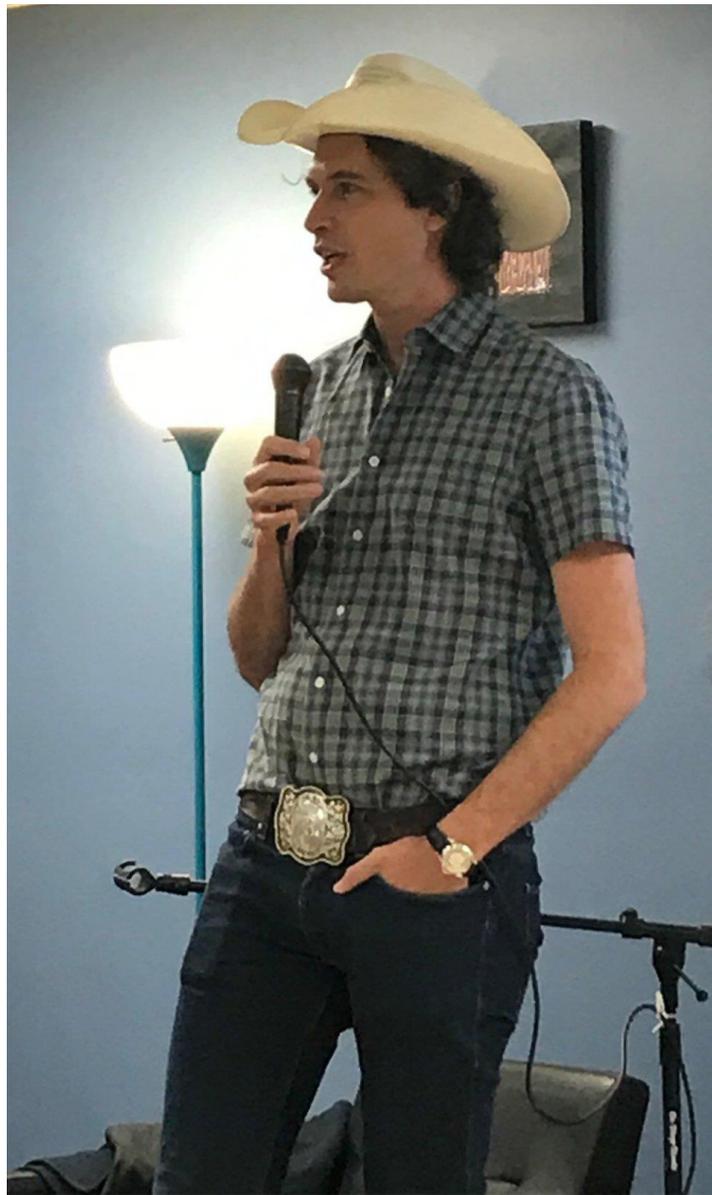


Kimbal Musk Speaks at TURN Festival

By Shawnta S. Barnes – October 2, 2017



Kimbal Musk, keynote speaker at TURN Festival at Paramount School of Excellence

In 1989, I was six and lived on Nowland Ave which was walking distance from my elementary school Brookside #54. My mom stayed at home and my dad didn't make much money at the time, so we had to settle for sharing a house with another family. It was a bleak spot during my childhood. There was never enough hot water and we had mice. I didn't feel safe in the neighborhood and I was constantly picked on at school. Before I finished 1st grade, my parents bought a home, where they currently reside today, and I thought I would never voluntarily step foot on Nowland Ave again.

On Friday, April 17, 2015, I went back into my old neighborhood as part of the Mind Trust's Education Bus Tour which highlights excellent schools. And although I was impressed with how my former elementary school improved to an A school, the school that captured my heart was the Paramount School of Excellence. It was built on the street that brought me terrible memories.

I am a proud urban educator, but I am also a proud urban gardener. This school, which has an urban farm, was a culmination of my two loves. During the tour, we learned about the TURN (Transforming URban Neighborhoods) Festival and I knew one day I would return to attend.



This past Saturday, I went to the festival and was treated to hearing Kimbal Musk, co-founder of The Kitchen, as the keynote speaker. I learned about Musk's work last school year while I was an elementary literacy coach and the coordinator of the K-2 STEM Challenge Club through The STEM Connection. Executive Director Vera Vander Kooy told me about The Kitchen Community, Musk's nonprofit, and its program to bring learning gardens to Indy. She encouraged me to apply and thought if the school was granted a garden we could incorporate it into the club. Luckily, we were chosen, but the day after we were notified, I learned my literacy coach position was being eliminated at the end of the year which meant I would be going to another school within my school district. I continued as garden lead until the beginning of this school year; now my role is garden team member because I could not walk away from what I started. This work, bringing a community together through growing food, is too important. Kimbal Musk feels the same way.

Early on in his address at the TURN festival, Kimbal Musk shared the moment that sparked his entrepreneurship in food.

In Silicon Valley everyone just loves scale and scale alone and I did this for many years before I decided to focus on my joy which was food. I went to New York and I trained there for three years learning about what food is, how to make it, understanding the joy that it brings, but a very profound thing happened to me during 9/11. I lived very close to where the towers fell and I had a security pass to be very close to the firefighters. I just graduated from cooking school and I was able to cook for the firefighters and it was the most amazing gift that I could ever imagine giving. No matter how traumatic that was to see those buildings fall and to see the destruction that happened in that city – but to come and work for the firefighters, to feed them, to have them come out of these giant piles of melting metal, to give them food that we cooked very carefully with love and then they would connect together and they would go right back out again. When I saw that – that's when I realized I had to be in food and that's when I looked at it as a career for myself.

Musk then relocated to Boulder, Colorado and started The Kitchen. Using profits from the restaurant, he decided to build school gardens; it was enjoyable, but didn't have scale. After recovering from a terrible ski accident where he broke his neck in 2010, Musk made a decision. "Back to the original point about Silicon Valley

– they do have a point if you can scale, you can really reach the world...I decided that if I was able to walk again, I would focus entirely on food at scale.”



Learning garden at Wendell Phillips School #63

He had built two school gardens a year for seven years, but in 2012 he began building learning gardens. These gardens are durable, aesthetically pleasing and serve as an outdoor classroom. Today, 450 learning gardens exist. Musk shared some of the benefits. “School gardens are just a phenomenal way to reach kids, to reach every child within the school...and you can double their intake of fruits and

vegetables. You can also improve their test scores especially in 5th grade science; you can improve their test scores 15 points on an 100 point scale.”

In addition to bringing learning gardens to Indy, he is opening two restaurants. Next Door is expected to open around January at 46th & College and will serve real food at affordable prices and Hedge Row, a more upscale restaurant, will serve wood roasted food, on Mass Ave.

If learning gardens and restaurants weren't enough to tackle, Musk also explained his other endeavor Square Roots, located in Brooklyn, NY. Young entrepreneurs learn how to grow food vertically during a 13 month program. These entrepreneurs learn about farming, but also about the business side of the work.

Kimbal Musk's work aligns with the mission of the TURN Festival to transform communities through: farming, food, health and environment. In addition to hearing Kimbal Musk speak, attendees were able to view cooking demonstrations, attend a gardening 101 class, participate in yoga and learn about beekeeping, chicken keeping, making cheese and the importance of recycling.

This festival and Musk's keynote address inspired me to continue this work. Although getting real food to everyone is important, I want to see more minorities like me involved. When I talk about being an urban gardener to other minorities, many times I receive strange looks. I want the time to come when you receive a strange look because you are not growing your own food.

Today, Nowland Ave has a different feel, a different vibe. I believe if more people join the cause for growing real food, which Kimbal Musk says, “is the food we trust to nourish our bodies, our farmers, and our planet,” we will not only live longer, but we will also revitalize neighborhoods across the country.