I could fully express myself in lacrosse. I could duck between players, I felt free to make plays that suited me best ... I’d rather play lacrosse six days a week and football on the seventh.

Jim Brown
Inductee, National Lacrosse and College and Pro Football Halls of Fame

MISSION:
As the sport’s national governing body, US Lacrosse provides national leadership, structure and resources to fuel the sport’s growth and enrich the experience of participants.

US Lacrosse National Headquarters
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America’s first sport
Long before Columbus arrived, tribes in the Northeast, Upper Midwest and Southeast played lacrosse, using curved sticks with webbing (crosses) to carry and throw a piece of hide-covered stone. Goals were as much as a mile apart; players could number in the hundreds; games could last for days. Known to some as “the little brother of war,” lacrosse was often played to settle disputes instead of fighting. Others called it “the Creator’s Game,” and offered up competition as a sacrifice for a good harvest or good health, if a member of the tribe was sick. The sport engaged the entire community.

Back to the city
One hundred fifty years ago, lacrosse clubs began forming in cities like Montreal, Toronto, Brooklyn and Baltimore. Industrialization, which made work less physical for many, and newly-built city parks provided the desire and space for vigorous exercise. Lacrosse fit the bill perfectly. The sport grew with the suburbs, but has seen a revival in cities from Boston to Los Angeles and Seattle to Miami. In 2014, US Lacrosse founded the Urban Lacrosse Alliance (ULA) with 14 member programs and leagues. Three years later, there are nearly four times that number, and growing.

Rock in the pond
Fostering sustainable urban growth requires a strategic approach. In developing the Lacrosse Communities Project, US Lacrosse is using US Census and other demographic data to find the most racially, ethnically and economically diverse neighborhoods in cities across the country. The plan is to make those communities the focal point for growing the sport in each city. They become the place where “the rock hits the pond,” from which the sport ripples out as newly-trained players, coaches and officials share their knowledge.

Why a national pilot in Ohio City?
In many ways, Ohio City mirrors the experience of much of urban America over the past five decades, from decline to rebirth. It has suffered from disinvestment and the related departure of residents, jobs, and opportunities for a better life. The neighborhood—a diverse mix of races, ethnicities and incomes—is home to 1,200 units of public housing and 37 percent of its residents live below the poverty line. A significant number face challenges to their health as a result of inactivity and a lack of access to healthy food sources. Fortunately, a number of residents and community institutions—among them the Ohio City Community Development Corporation (CDC), St. Ignatius High School, and Urban Community School—are deeply committed to the neighborhood and have invested heavily in it. The CDC, in particular, oversees the highly-regarded Ohio City Farm and Near West Recreation. The fruit of their efforts has been new jobs and investment. And the population of 9,200 has not only stabilized, but is growing for the first time in decades.

Ohio City’s dedicated residents and stakeholders are the reason US Lacrosse and the leadership of its North Coast Ohio Chapter have chosen the neighborhood to serve as a national pilot for the Lacrosse Communities Project. It will:

- serve as a model for creating a vertically-integrated series of opportunities for children in urban neighborhoods to participate in lacrosse from grade school through high school to college and beyond;
- integrate CPR and AED training with education on heart-healthy food choices;
- provide connections among the community’s diverse residents through the universal language of America’s first sport;
- construct the first neighborhood field in partnership with Urban Community School.

US Lacrosse believes that every young person should have the same opportunity Jim Brown had, regardless of his or her ability to shoulder the costs, and that the city where he rose to national fame will show the way.

LACROSSE COMMUNITIES PROJECT

OHIO CITY | CLEVELAND

"Ohio City's dedicated residents and stakeholders are the reason US Lacrosse and the leadership of its North Coast Ohio Chapter have chosen the neighborhood to serve as a national pilot for the Lacrosse Communities Project."

Straight to the heart
Key steps: (1) Make strong connections with local stakeholders and community organizations and every school, after-school, and recreation program in the neighborhood. (2) Identify a “hub”—a park or school—that’s accessible to all. (3) Provide focused resources and programs such as US Lacrosse First Stick equipment grants, the nationally recognized PE curriculum, and certified coaches and officials training. (4) Work together to build or improve an athletic field where boys and girls can play. (5) Finally, and most critically, promote lifetime heart-healthy habits through partnerships with the American Heart Association and Coaching Healthy Habits.