

Play explores Rubbertown, pollution concerns

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Looking for [Lilith Theater Company \(http://lookingforlilith.org/\)](http://lookingforlilith.org/) seeks to tackle one of the most important issues that has confronted Louisville in recent decades - environmental justice and air pollution from industrial plants in Louisville's West End.



J.D. Green and Ebony Nolana Jordan in *Looking for Lilith's Prevailing Winds*, directed by Kathi E.B. Ellis. (Photo: HOLLY STONE)

Opening Nov. 6, "Prevailing Winds" will be the second time in recent years that Rubbertown has inspired playwrights to take a look at environmental justice issues. [Naomi Wallace's \(http://blogs.courier-journal.com/artsbureau/2013/09/18/louisville-playwright-gets-top-awards-and-she-could-have-a-play-in-future-humana-fest/#sthash.6M3WxEH8.dpuf\)](http://blogs.courier-journal.com/artsbureau/2013/09/18/louisville-playwright-gets-top-awards-and-she-could-have-a-play-in-future-humana-fest/#sthash.6M3WxEH8.dpuf) work, "The Hard Weather Boating Party," which was in the 2009 Actors Theatre Louisville Humana Festival of New American Plays, was set in Louisville's Rubbertown area. It's stories were woven with ideas about environmental justice and human rights.

Having covered air pollution and Rubbertown since 2000, I was interviewed for both.

The first several years of my life in Louisville involved intense coverage of toxic air, leading up to and including the 2005 passage of the city's landmark Strategic Toxic Air Reduction Program, with regular follow-ups that have shown a lot of success in reducing some of the most serious toxic emissions.

But Louisville remains among the cities with the largest total emissions of toxic chemicals from industry in the United States, and residents put up with strong odors and occasional explosions and shelter-in-place advisories. We rank fourth, actually, and that's nothing to sneeze at, and we no longer have anyone actually measuring toxic chemicals in our city's air, after having one of the most robust city networks in the country.



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[Louisville among worst for toxic air emissions](http://www.courier-journal.com/story/tech/science/environment/2015/09/17/citys-toxic-air-monitoring-remains-unfunded/32503537/)

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Those scars are playing out now with Mayor Greg Fischer trying to promote a green

technology of bio-digestion of organic food and distillery waste into methane, only to hit a wall of political resistance from residents who say they don't want more industry in their part of Louisville.

I attended the Wallace play and plan to attend the Looking for Lilith play, [Prevailing Winds](http://lookingforlilith.org/currentseason/prevailingwinds/) (<http://lookingforlilith.org/currentseason/prevailingwinds/>), as well.

From Lilith:

Our new play is focused on environmental issues in relation to Rubbertown and its surrounding communities, as well as how race and class have played into the Louisville community's dialogue and action around these issues. LFL researchers and devisers have interviewed community members of this area of Jefferson County, together with industry representatives, environmentalists and activists, scientists and people in the media, to create a multi-faceted exploration of the complex interrelationships in this part of our community.



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<http://www.courier-journal.com/story/tech/science/environment/2015/07/04/tackling-toxic-air-louisville-ten-years-later/29642515/?from=global&sessionKey=&autologin=>

It's the company's season opening and will be produced at the MeX Theater at The Kentucky Center, made possible by Louisville Repertory Company. Performance dates are November 6, 7, 9, 12, 13 and 14 at 7:30 p.m. and November 8 and 14 at 2 p.m. Tickets are \$20, students and seniors tickets are \$15. For our community night performance (November 9) all tickets are \$10.

Shannon Woolley, a founding member of Lilith and co-director, told me that the mission of the theater company is to lift up unheard voices, particularly those of women:

When looking at this mission through the lens of environmental justice within our city, it was clear that the stories of Rubbertown, Cane Run Rd., Lake Dreamland, and Riverside Gardens are the very kind of under-heard stories that we seek to share. There are still many people in Louisville that would say "where's Rubbertown?" There are many more who would only perceive Rubbertown as a toxic mess, and who are unaware of the incredible work done from 1996 to 2005 by the many people who played a part in passing the STAR program. In *Prevailing Winds*, we tell an intricate story that celebrates the progress that has been made so far, while at the same time lifting up the many ways that our city's environmental problems intertwine with the ingrained segregation of Louisville's East End/West End divide.



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<http://www.courier-journal.com/story/tech/science/watchdog-earth/2015/08/25/explosions-rocked-dupont-plant-50-years-ago/32347111/>

Company member and play director Kathi E.B. Ellis added:

We've spent the last 18 months doing the research, conducting interviews, and using this to collaboratively create what has become "Prevailing Winds", in which we tell the story of how the lives and work of residents and people working at the chemical companies have intertwined and impacted each other and the greater Jefferson County community. Although LFL has created nine other plays in our 14-year history, this is the first time we've created a play about our 'home,' where the company is based.

She raised an issue I've heard a lot over the years -- toxic emissions from Rubbertown are not just a West End problem:

As one of our characters says, it's not just a West End problem. It's a problem for all of us, which speaks to our title: the prevailing winds go from the southwest to the northeast -- one of the realizations we'd like folks to take away. We'll be scheduling talkbacks about some of the issues in the piece too, so folks will have some practical takeaways and contacts for organizations working on these issues.

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