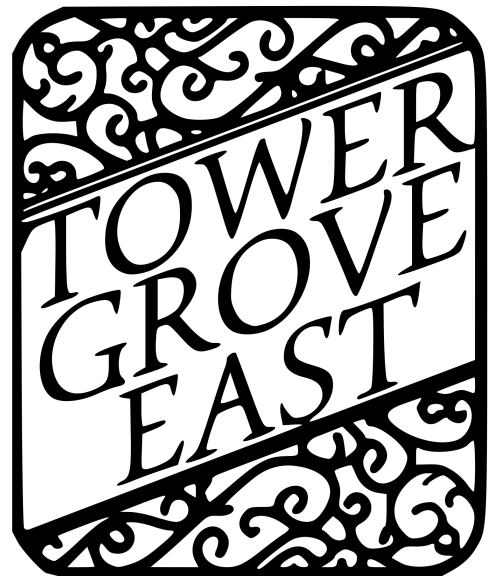


MARCH 24, 2026

TOWER GROVE EAST NEIGHBORHOOD ASSOCIATION

MARCH MEETING RECAP



Tower Grove East Neighborhood Association

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INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE PRESIDENT ADDRESSES TGENA MEMBERSHIP MEETING

Blake Hamilton, CEO and President of the International Institute of St. Louis, says ICE (Immigration and Customs Enforcement) has made 25,000 immigration checks and put 1,000 people from the St. Louis area into detention since January 2025.

Hamilton was a guest speaker at Tuesday evening's Tower Grove East Neighborhood Association membership meeting at Stray Dog Theatre.

"The last year has been very tough," he said. In January 2025, a funding freeze forced him to furlough 90 people—60 percent of his staff—at the Institute, he said.

However, "we are making our way back," he said. He has been able to rehire 27 of the 90 and indicated eight more people will follow soon.

"Things are changing very quickly" and government policies are making immigrants' lives "miserable," he said.

For instance, under the old rules, refugees were allowed to submit their application for a green card after completing one year in the U.S. They could apply any time between that year mark and up to five years after arrival. The new rules require applying for the green card on the 366th day. If the refugee does not apply on that date, he is now subject to detention and deportation.

In addition, the applicant must have his health screened by a designated civil surgeon. Health screening costs \$450 per person, and many applicants have trouble coming up with that kind of money, he said.

Also, people who arrived legally eligible to work are seeing their work eligibility or legal status taken away from them, he said.

The Institute, at the corner of Louisiana and Arsenal, offers assistance to newcomers who are applying for residency and green cards. It also offers to provide a person to accompany an applicant going through the process at a government facility.

“We recommend people go with somebody” who can then be a witness to what is going on. The witness can also keep loved ones informed about what the applicant is going through.

Hamilton added, “we have suffered as an organization as a result of rumor and conjecture.” People are so fearful that they are drawing back from getting help, he said. The Institute’s website points out: “The International Institute is NOT A BRANCH of the U.S. immigration service. We are a private, non-governmental organization (NGO).”

Hamilton noted that the Institute also offers a food pantry for all—not just immigrants—every Friday from noon to 3pm, and advises people to show up early to avoid lines.

The Institute also is working with the MICA (Migrant and Immigrant Community Action Project) in St, Louis, St Francis Community Services and other groups to help immigrants.

For more information: <https://www.iistl.org/>

With some emotion, Hamilton recalled that when the Institute moved to the old St. Elizabeth High School property, it received a letter from the Tower Grove East Neighborhood Association pointing out that the surrounding homes and apartments were built by immigrants. He said they printed the letter in 10 different languages to show to newcomers.

During the discussion, Susan Herzberg, who is active in the Orchard on Virginia, said she was so upset about the killing of Renee Good by ICE agents earlier this year that she drove up to Minneapolis to show her support for the community there. She noted that many homes in the area had signs supporting their immigrant neighbors.

OTHER SPEAKERS AT THE MEETING

—Fielding Jezreel, PTO President at Shenandoah Elementary School, thanked TGENA for its donations, which she said helped to purchase the book *Hey Black Child*, for all kindergarteners. The book was a hit, she said. Jezreel also urged neighbors to take part in the Dine Out for Shenandoah on Wednesday, April 1, at local restaurants. Participating restaurants will donate 20 percent of their proceeds to the school. Jezreel tool neighbors that “if you’re interested in learning about Shenandoah, I’m happy to talk to you about it and recruit you to be on the PTO.”

TGENA FEBRUARY 2026 MEETING

—Andrew Hernandez, TGE Neighborhood Improvement Specialist, said green yard waste is now being collected again. He asked neighbors not to overfill the green dumpsters to the point of where the lid stands up. This makes it difficult for a truck to empty it, he said. He said the city’s recycling program has been doing better since it stopped alley recycling pickup and moved to recycling centers around the city.

—Anne Moore, beautification chair, asked all to show up at the polls Tuesday, April 7th, to vote to keep the earnings tax in the city. The tax pays for about a third of the St. Louis budget, she said. Also, as beautification chair, she asked residents to water newly planted trees in the neighborhood. (A new line of trees has been planted in the tree lawn alongside Roosevelt High School.) She recommended getting three 5-gallon buckets, drilling a one-quarter inch hole in the bottom of each, filling them with water and placing them around the base of the newly planted tree. The water will slowly feed the tree for a week.

—Social chair Amy Kurz invited all to TGENA Adventures on Tuesday, March 31, from 6 to 8:30pm at Adventures of Intrigue VIP Room, 2400 S Jefferson. Children are welcome and the event will be in an open room. A ticket, regularly \$35, will be only \$5, she said. They need headcount by Saturday, March 28. See TGENA’s Facebook page for the QR code to register. She also announced the neighborhood yard sale will take place Saturday, May 2, with a rain date on May 3. Go to the TGENA website to sign up for the yard sale. The Orchard also will have a kids’ yard sale on May 2.

—Susan Herzberg announced that the Orchard will hold an egg hunt on April 4, the Saturday before Easter beginning at 10am.

—Seventh Ward Alderwoman Alisha Sonnier presented an official proclamation from the City of St. Louis thanking TGENA’s safety chair Lane Forman for his years of dedicated service and leadership on public safety, including a local campaign against firearm violence.

NEXT MEETING

April General Neighborhood Meeting: Tuesday, March 28th, 2026 @ 7PM - Stray Dog Theatre + Zoom
