

New home construction to begin in Happy Hill

Long awaited revitalization project of historic African-American community will pull together several community agencies



Guests cheer on Cary Cain as he shovels the first bit of soil in the Happy Hill revitalization project.

Photos by Kevin Walker

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

About 100 people attended the groundbreaking for a long-awaited revitalization project in Happy Hill, but those who were not at the event took center stage.

People such as Lloyd Cuthrell, a longtime president of the Happy Hill Neighborhood Association, who worked for years to make the revitalization of Happy Hill a reality but did not live to see the first step in the process come to fruition.

Cuthrell died last November. He was remembered at the groundbreaking, along with the thousands of other men and women who for more than 100 years dreamed of a better Happy Hill.

"He would be overjoyed," the new president of the neighborhood association, Carl McLaughlin, said of Cuthrell. "He lived for this day."

More than 50 new homes are expected to be built in Happy Hill, a historic community settled by slaves, within the next few years. The homes will be the anchor for sweeping changes in the neighborhood, which may include a federal HOPE VI grant for Happy Hill

Gardens, the public housing complex that was erected in the community in the 1960s.

The project is being spearheaded by the Southside Community Development Corp. in collaboration with Local Initiatives Support Coalition.

"It's a great day upon (which) to build," Cary Cain, president of the Southside CDC, told the crowd at the groundbreaking, "and build is exactly what we plan to do."

Cain said the CDC is not only setting out to build new homes but homes that are of the highest quality. He promised the homes will be so classy that they will appeal to a cross section of families in the city.

"We are trying to raise the bar a little bit," he said.

Most of the new homes are expected to have three bedrooms and two baths, and will be available to low-to-moderate income buyers for \$500 to \$700 a month.

BB&T has agreed to work with prospective home buyers for financing purposes. The bank also is providing construction loans for the building project. Habitat for Humanity also will be a major player in the project. The group will construct one of the first seven homes in the project along Alder Street, and the group says it will build six to eight new homes next year.

The revitalization of the community could not come at a better time. Efforts are already under way to develop the area around it more thoroughly. Happy Hill is encased by Salem College, Winston-Salem State University and N.C. School of the Arts, a fact that only will enhance the community's push to change for the better, organizers believe.

"We hope to get rid of a lot of the negative perceptions that people have about this community," Cain said.

McLaughlin said the community is eagerly awaiting change and is growing excited about the possibilities of a revitalized Happy Hill.

"We always knew that this would happen for us," he said. "It was just a matter of time."



Cain

Adam's Mark

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Hamlin and Falceto then met briefly with Alderman Vernon Robinson present. Robinson said he was on hand only to "help the theater festival."

Falceto was brought to the Winston-Salem Adam's Mark soon after a black employee here filed a racial discrimination suit against the local Adam's Mark in late 1999. He replaced general manager John Wise. Falceto has said that his arrival at the hotel had nothing to do with the suit, although he has admitted to being a clean-up man of sorts for the chain, working short stints at several of the chain's 24 hotels in order to make adjustments.

As he was leaving City Hall, Falceto said he was unaware of the status of the suit filed by Telissa Ward, who claimed she was denied a promotion at the local Adam's Mark because she is black.

Falceto expressed dismay at the NAACP's decision.

"I was very surprised by the news last night," he said. "We have been having a good relationship here with the community. ... We have worked very hard to build a relation with our hotel, the community and the leadership."

Falceto also seemed to insinuate that the Winston-Salem Adam's Mark should not have to suffer for problems alleged at the hotel in Daytona Beach.

"We are very independent," he said. "Each hotel operates on its own."

But Bill Tatum, president of the Winston-Salem NAACP, says the Winston-Salem Adam's Mark does not have a clean track record itself in terms of allegations of racism. Tatum said he and George Allison, state director of the NAACP, met with Falceto as recently as March to discuss a list of complaints received by the local NAACP from African-American employees at the Winston-Salem Adam's Mark, complaints charging everything from unjust treatment to being denied promotions because of race.

Tatum said some Winston-Salem Adam's Mark employees are trying to join employees from other Adam's Mark hotels in a possible class-action lawsuit against the chain.

"To say that there have not been problems here is false," Tatum said.

Tatum says although he has had a positive, open and cordial relationship with Falceto, he will be encouraging local African Americans to stay away from the hotel until the chain settles claims against it. But Tatum said he will not try to deter people from attending National Black Theatre Festival events. He says the festival's cultural significance to the city and the nation is much too important to jeopardize.

"We will not put any undue burden on Larry Leon Hamlin," Tatum said, speaking for both the local and national NAACP. "We are fully aware of his activities and we are fully supportive of the festival, whether it is at the Adam's Mark or not at the Adam's Mark."

The NAACP first began to consider a boycott of the hotel chain in the summer of 1999 after several African Americans staying at the Daytona Beach, Fla., hotel claimed that Adam's Mark employees discriminated against them by, among other things, using security guards and barricades to intimidate them and offering them less desirable rooms.

The NAACP moved to file a class-action lawsuit on behalf of the hotel guests. A few months later, the U.S. Justice Department filed a suit

of its own against the Adam's Mark chain, charging that the chain routinely violated the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by charging African Americans more than whites for rooms and implementing an unwritten policy that limited the number of nonwhites in Adam's Mark bars, lounges and restaurants.

The St. Louis-based chain quickly moved to settle with the Justice Department. Without admitting to any wrongdoing, the chain agreed to diversity training for its more than 10,000 employees and started an independent monitoring program with the civil rights group Project Equality to ensure that all Adam's Mark guests are treated fairly.

But the NAACP claims the chain has chosen to "stonewall" its attempts to reach a settlement for the original plaintiffs who got the ball rolling initially. The chain did agree to a settlement of more than \$8 million in March 2000, at which time the NAACP called off its initial boycott; but a U.S. District Court in Florida would not accept the proposed settlement. The NAACP appealed the ruling, but the organization says the chain has lost interest in settling the matter and has refused to meet with the Florida attorney general and the NAACP to try to come to some compromise.

"The NAACP has no other choice than to call for an all-out, long-term, massive boycott against the Adam's Mark chain until it publicly apologizes and accepts responsibility for its wrongdoing," National NAACP President Kweisi Mfume said as he announced the renewed boycott. "That the Adam's Mark is trying to reach a partial settlement with the Justice Department, while not talking to other parties to the lawsuit, shows a lack of good intention by the Adam's Mark."

From all outward indications, the Adam's Mark and its parent company, HBE Corp., are not coming to the table with the NAACP anytime soon. A spokesperson for the chain says the company is "outraged" by the NAACP's renewed boycott.

"This action is totally unfair, undemocratic and possibly illegal,"

said Sharon Harvey Davis, vice president of corporate affairs for the chain. "Adam's Mark has a strong diversity record within the hospitality industry, and the NAACP's allegations are completely groundless."

Harvey Davis went on to say that the chain enjoys "substantial" business from African Americans. "These guests would not stay at our hotels if they were not treated absolutely equally and with respect," she said.

The Winston-Salem Adam's Mark has especially done well in appealing to African-American groups. In addition to the theater festival, the hotel has been the hub to several black church and beauty conventions. The Urban League, the Winston-Salem NAACP, The Chronicle and many other black businesses and organizations also have held banquets at the hotel within the last year. Falceto has been especially vigilant at recruiting black business at the hotel since the Daytona Beach accusations arose. According to sources, many black groups have been wooed by the hotel with hefty incentives such as discounts and free rooms.

Hamlin is not shy about expressing his desire for the Adam's Mark to send a positive message to the black community and the thousands who will come to Winston-Salem late this month for the festival, a message that would be a first step in showing the black community that the chain is committed to its black patrons.

When asked, Hamlin said a donation to the financially-strapped festival could send such a message and make celebrities and other guests less apprehensive about staying at a hotel that's the focus of a national boycott by the most prestigious and oldest civil rights organization in the nation.

"I hope that within these two weeks, that I will be able to announce to my guests, the celebrities, the performing companies and the general public, something of some positive magnitude that would say that this is the first step for the Adam's Mark in resolving this boycott," Hamlin said. "That would be the ideal thing I would like to happen."

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Quotables:

"If you run, you might lose.
If you don't run, you're
guaranteed to lose."

- Jesse Jackson



Joseph Falceto talks with Horace Rogers, an assistant of Larry Leon Hamlin's, as he leaves City Hall.

Photo by Kevin Walker

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