

# EWCDC, Back To Life Rally Community For Rehab

By Patricia Smith-Deering  
Phoenix Managing Editor

Economic development in the Black community must go hand-in-hand with human development. That is the driving philosophy behind the East Winston Community Development Corporation (EWCDC).

The latest project that EWCDC has undertaken is the rehab of 36 vacant, boarded-up apartments in the Cleveland Avenue area. Once completed, the apartments will provide more affordable housing for low-income renters. But, if the rehab effort is to succeed, the people in the neighborhood must be involved in the undertaking.

Aside from getting community input, McNeill sees the residents as an integral part of a security system for the apartments when construction is underway. "We want to have them be our lookouts to prevent vandalism," she explained. She added that EWCDC has also been discussing the issue of security with local members of the Nation of Islam to serve as "a policing agent during construction."

Thirty-Six East is considered a "scattered site" project, qualifying for tax credits which should appeal to equity investors, McNeill said. The 36 units are divided among eight buildings in a four-block area: one on Cleveland, two each on 18th



Working towards community involvement in "Thirty-Six East" are Sylvia Boyd, Veronica Bitting, James Grace, Jr., Robert Winfrey, and Reverend Lee Faye Mack.

Photo by L.B. Spears Jr.

Resident Education Program, currently being piloted at Rolling Hills to assist tenants in the care and maintenance of their new homes.

EWCDC's Thirty-Six East project embodies the organization's focus on full economic revitalization of East Winston and the attendant community development. As Grace has stated numerous times: "Community development is about empowerment, about getting people to do things for themselves. It's not

just bricks and mortar. It involves human resource development. We want to build the human infrastructure."

And McNeill echoes that philosophy. Thirty-Six East "is part of doing economic development, a small piece, but a very important piece." Has it been a tough step? According to McNeill, "It has been a lot of hard work, but it's worth it. We're looking to the community for a lot of support."



Friends and neighbors enjoy the unseasonably warm day at the "Thirty-Six East" community cookout.

Photo by L.B. Spears Jr.

Recently, EWCDC took the initial step to do just that. Neighborhood residents were invited to a cookout to get acquainted with those who put the idea together, to voice any concerns, and to become involved. An estimated 125-150 neighbors and friends totalled the hotdogs, hamburgers, and other tasty munchables, served up by the award-winning Custom Catering by Wynn. Providing entertainment for the community event was Bill McClain of Mr. Bill's Production.

In keeping with the informal yet informative nature of the gathering, comments were brief on the goal of the rehab project by James Grace, Jr., EWCDC Executive Director, and the Reverend Lee Faye Mack, founder of the Back To Life Center, located not far from the site of the apartments. And as first steps go in getting those affected involved and informed, it was a success.

"What we wanted to do," according to EWCDC's Linda McNeill, manager of "Thirty-Six East," the official name of the project, "is to bring the community there into the project, to introduce them to CDC, and to let them know what is going on in terms of the project."

and 19th streets, two on Locust Avenue, and one on Dunleith Avenue. The project is now approaching the formation of a limited partnership between EWCDC and interested investors, and closing on the purchase of the apartments is imminent.

The next step will be to secure bids from contractors to do the actual rehab work. EWCDC will work with those selected so that, wherever feasible, the skills of those who indicated at the cookout their interest with working on the project can be put to use once the construction is underway.

Community involvement, however, goes beyond the actual rehab effort. "We want people to really take an interest in the revitalization of East Winston," McNeill said, which means involvement after the apartments are completed with tenants moved in, the grounds landscaped, and the area cleaned up. "We want them (tenants and neighbors) to help us keep it that way, help us maintain the buildings, keep down our maintenance costs," she added. Reverend Mack will be instrumental in bringing to the residents of Thirty-Six East the

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