

National Underground Railroad center hits snag

Cincinnati officials say look of the design is unappealing

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS
CINCINNATI - Two months after architects unveiled plans for the National Underground Railroad Freedom Center, city and county officials are now joining the criticism of the design.

City Councilman Jim Tarbell says he hasn't found anyone who likes the exterior.

"My concern is this will be the centerpiece, the jewel of our riverfront," he said. "(The design) has nothing to do with what is going

on inside, which is inspiring." The museum will commemorate the system of secret routes and hiding places used to smuggle slaves to freedom in the Northern states. There were several stops in Cincinnati.

The design consists of three buildings representing freedom, courage and the cooperation needed to support freedom movements, project leaders said when plans were introduced in November. Glass passageways link the buildings, which feature undulating

walls and roofs.

Building materials include stone, to symbolize the rugged nature of the slaves' struggle for freedom, and wood in warm tones intended to make the building an inviting landmark along the city's Ohio River shore.

"My only hope is we get something people are truly impressed with," said Hamilton County Commissioner Todd Portune. "The design for the (new) Contemporary Arts Center is internationally acclaimed. We need the same type

of design for the Freedom Center." Ernest Britton, Freedom Center spokesman, said the design was meant to evoke the spirit of 1800s safe houses.

"There's never been any intention on our part to create any grand spectacle," he said. "Spectacular places were the homes of slave masters. Our design team went all over the country visiting the simple places that were a part of the Underground Railroad."

Freedom Center officials said

the design - by Indianapolis-based Blackburn Architects - has received letters of support from architects and won a predesign award. But only about half the project's funds were allocated for the buildings, because organizers wanted the main focus to be the exhibits.

The city contributed \$6 million to the \$100 million-plus project. So far, about \$62 million has been raised. Other large contributors include Hamilton County, the state of Ohio, Procter & Gamble and

Federated Department Stores.

"The Freedom Center wants to have a world-class building ... but architecture is not our main program," Susan Redman-Rengstorf, the museum's assistant development director, told The Cincinnati Post.

City Manager John Shirey must approve the design. Shirey says he's waiting for a recommendation from the city's urban design review board. Board Chairman Lee Carter said the plans still are a work in progress.

Martin

from page D2

Hunter. "Pat, you are beautiful. You were right there. You showed up like a champ today. We thank one and all today."

Several choirs and vocalists participated in the celebration. They included the Camp Meeting Choir, The Spiritualaires, The Soulful Travelers, Eddie Bines of Shiloh Baptist Church, Matilda Glover, The Ebonette Gospel Singers featuring Elnora Webb, The New Jerusalem Male Chorus, The Napper Singers, and Tasha.

Having lost his wife of 33 years on Jan. 20, Al Martin embraces his music more than ever. He has fond memories of his wife, Lillian, who was also a radio personality. Martin and his wife attended Shiloh Baptist Church, where they read the church announcements and welcomed the visitors each Sunday for 24 years, beginning in 1974.

"Everything I wanted to do, she wanted to be a part of it," Martin said.

Their bond as soul mates was evident even as their career paths came together. As the story goes, his wife went with him to take the test for his radio operator's license. Although he had trained for the test, he failed it, but his wife passed and attained her license before he did.

"Because she helped me through school, she was able to pass the test. I am very proud of that," Martin said.

Martin still laughs at the irony of this situation to this day. He did acquire his license the following year. One of the programs that Lillian Martin is remembered for is "Personalities in the Community."

"I lost my wife, and I'm sad when I get along all by myself. I feel the tears will be flowing. Usually, during the funeral, a person will have more company than ever, but after the services, the visitations dwindle off," Martin said. "The Lord has allowed us together one more time. Another day has gone on into history. As you can see, I don't have a leg to stand on, but I'm standing on the promises of God."

Again, Martin has come out of retirement to share good old-time gospel favorites with the community.

"This is my fifth retirement. I guess gospel music is a part of me, and I love it. Hi, everybody, and a very pleasant good evening," Martin said in his familiar radio voice. The audience clapped joyfully.

"I have lost many things, but I have kept my voice. Even though I've gone through a lot, I've still got joy. I thank you for coming out," Martin said.

He gave special thanks to his sister-in-law Dora who came down from Chicago to assist him during his loss. He also gave special accolades to Pat Landingham.

"My good friend Pat is a God-sent woman. I love you....Pat Landingham is a double amputee just like me. She has no legs, but she is a lot younger. The doctors told me that I could not get two prostheses because my heart is too weak," Martin said. "But again I have the opportunity to get back on the air every Saturday on 1340. That's all the radio you'll ever need."

Martin's journey to Radio Land was not a straight path. It had bends and twists, hills and valleys. Having grown up on Derry Street in The Pond, Martin was born the sixth of seven children. However, his mother put him up for adoption. The late Grover and Irene Martin adopted Martin.

"Out of seven children, I was the only one they put up for adoption when I was 3 months old, but I'm glad they did. I ended up being more successful because of my loving parents," Martin said.

After graduating from Atkins High School in 1944, Martin spent two years in the U.S. Army before attending the Dela Watts Radio School to learn how to repair radio equipment. Now defunct, the school was on the corner of 14th and Dunleith streets in Winston-Salem. He later attended Friendship Junior College of Rock Hill, S.C. He left for New York in 1951 and studied at the New York School of Announcing and Speech. The walls of his home are decorated with various awards he has earned in this field. He graduated with honors from the New York School of Announcing in 1966.

After graduation, Martin began his career in Huntsville, Ala., but he and his employer had a less than cordial relationship. Therefore, Martin returned to Winston-Salem, where he began working for WAAA in February of 1967. The station was then owned by Bob Brown, a white man. Having opened in 1950, WAAA was the only black station in the area at the time. Martin's colleagues included Robert "Bobcat" Roundtree, the rock jock and Daddy-O on the Patio (Oscar Alexander). After the death of Bill Langford, the gospel DJ, in 1967, the position became open and Martin walked into destiny. He began "Down Memory Lane" in 1967.

"Gospel music has meant a lot to black people because of the struggles he have had. Most of our music originated from the spirituals, and many of our famous singers started singing in the church or at the Apollo Theater," said Martin. "The black church as been a mainstay because it gives us so much inspiration. We needed to hear gospel music then and we need to hear it now."

Martin remembers when the news came across the wire at the radio station that Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. had been assassinated.

"Another announcer was on the previous shift, and he made the first announcement that, 'Martin Luther King Jr. has just been shot by a sniper.' He should have said sniper. That's what I call spreading ignorance," Martin said. "I am a firm believer in diction. We are cultured now, more educated. We need to maintain a certain decorum."

Martin's radio program "Down Memory Lane" aired on Feb. 10. He is proud of the opportunity to reach the masses with his special brand of music.

"I play music that you can't even purchase anymore. No one else plays it because they don't even know about these classic artists," said Martin. "I always open with a word of prayer. In times like these, prayer is certainly necessary."



Photos by Felicia McMillian
Sadie Brown of Camp Meeting Choir presents a monetary tribute to Al Martin from the choir as emcee Pat Landingham looks on.



The Napper Singers make a musical dedication to Al Martin.

Where do ideas grow?



It can happen at any moment: a discovery becomes an inspiration that becomes a lifelong pursuit. Isn't this why we cherish learning in the first place?

Bank of America is proud to support **Black History Month.**

Bank of America.

Bank of America, N.A. • Member FDIC
 ©2000 Bank of America Corporation