

...Back To The Community "SHOP FREEDOM DRIVE AREA"

A Better Image For Freedom Drive

By John Minter
POST CORRESPONDENT

Given Aladdin's choice, a wish for the one thing that would do the most to revitalize Freedom Drive, Wynne Parker didn't hesitate: She wished for the westside to have a more positive image.

"Once we get our image problem solved, which is media-based, we will be on our way," said Parker, chairman of the Freedom Drive Task Force residential committee. Joe Clark, Parker's counterpart on the task force's business committee, is floating another revitalization idea — an outlet plaza. "It would be similar to (the outlets) in Burlington," said Clark, owner of Beauregard's restaurant on Freedom Drive. Clark and Parker both are excited about the community

policing program begun this summer along the Freedom Drive corridor and in several adjacent residential neighborhoods. "It is going to be one of the most popular things," Parker said. "At one meeting, a man said crime in his community had been reduced by 85 percent, since community policing began." "It is making it easier for the citizens to know the officers patrolling their area," Parker said. "They have a face assigned to their areas every single day. They know the police officers."

"The officers deal with more than just emergency problems," Parker said. "They are helping with community problems. They helped get grass cut on empty lots. The officers are helping them to form a neighborhood watch." "It has done great in my neighborhood," Parker said. "It is in effect throughout Westchester and Thomasboro," said Parker, a nurse who

moved into Westchester two years ago with her husband Robert. She is an example of what the Freedom Drive area can be. "We liked Westchester," Parker said. "It was very clean. It has nice homes."

"The westside has gotten an image of being the side of town that is not as attractive as a lot of other areas," Parker said. "It seems you have to get other places to do your shopping. People on the westside need to support merchants here and not go out of the area."

"The Freedom Drive Task Force, formed this summer, is working on plans to beautify the area and to attract new businesses."

The city is rezoning hundreds of acres of industrial and multi-family land to make the area more attractive. The Charlotte City Council will take a vote on the rezonings Oct. 25. Plans are for a number of streetscape improvements,

such as planting of trees and flowers, along Freedom Drive, but that project must be funded.

Parker said the efforts already underway will make a big difference.

"I think people pulling together is going to bring it back," Parker said. "We are making subcommittees to deal with direct issues of how to get businesses to move into the corridor."

"I would like to see revitalization of the business district," she said. "We have also spoken to the Parks and Recreation Commission about cleaning up the parks in the area so residents can use them and feel safe in them."

"Crime prevention is one of our goals," Parker said. "It is more of an image problem on Freedom Drive. There is crime in every neighborhood."

She said local media often lump the entire westside in its crime reports, no matter

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