

# Ministry's goal: Catalyst for community's growth

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continue at "the Park."

"Everyone knows about HIV, but what about HCV," asked Alexander. "It has the potential to overshadow HIV and AIDS in terms of damage and death in the long term."

In addition to working at University Park, Alexander is also on the board of directors of the Charlotte Chamber and Central Carolinas Collective Banking Group. He is vice president of the Hampton University Ministries Conference, assistant to the presiding bishop of the Kingdom Association of Covenant Pastors, as well as, co-chair of the Professional Sports Investment Group, and Community Building Initiative.

Early this month, Alexander greeted members of CBI to a stakeholders' breakfast, introducing them to the area that would soon be The Park's sanctuary. It was through the Community Building Initiative that Dianne English worked with Alexander, though she met him before that.

"I knew him before CBI," English said. "We served on the Ministry of Recovery together. He was really young, but you could see his energy, his insight, and passion. I saw a light and energy about him, probably what the church saw when they called him here."

In 1997, the CBI task force was brought together to work on what was intended to be a nine-month process.

Alexander "always says a nine month project became a 10 year mission," said English. Through the 10 years, Alexander has continually worked with CBI, a long term commitment English feels means a great deal. "In line with our work what our work is about...racial and ethnic equity...and understanding that it is long term work...for someone like Rev. Alexander to make a long term commitment is meaningful."

English said she was surprised to hear about the Merchandise Mart deal when it was announced, because she had not been tracking the explosive growth of the University Park congregation. Alexander, she said, has a knack for leadership.

"I think he's got a vision for what can happen if people are mobilized and supported...and that's newsworthy," explained English.

Members of University Park's congregation describe Alexander as "God sent." Ethel Palmer calls him "a man of God, who says what he means."

"On Sunday when he gets in the pulpit, there are no jokes - he's straight forward," she said.

When Alexander arrived in Charlotte in 1990, he met none of University Park's qualifications. "They wanted someone 35, married, with a

least five years pastoral experience," he said.

Alexander, who grew up in Jackson, Miss., was 26, single, and had three years experience. "But they were willing to set that aside."

Alexander's star in Charlotte's faith community continues to burn bright after 16 years, in large measure due to his leadership and innovation. It's much like his explanation for how ideas about the Merchandise Mart came about.

"There has to always be an openness to something you had not planned or considered," Alexander said. "I'm grateful the congregation has been open and flexible."

University Park's growth and success has been a team effort, Alexander insists. As such, newsmaker of the year is a collective honor.

"The church should be the newsmaker. We accomplished this as a whole. That's the way it should be. A leader with no followers is just taking a walk," he said.

"The other point to that is that it has been a partnership of pastor and people. I could

n't think of another way to frame it."

As he looks at 2007 Alexander hopes to continue what the ministry has started. With the purchase and investment The Park is making in the facility and community, he feels there will be further incentive for investment by others in the area. He hopes to see a change in attitude as well.

"I see the beginning of significant attention to this area of town," he said. "My hope is that the lid will have been lifted in terms of immigration, creativity, a sense of what's possible, both within the membership and outside."

The first phase of renovations will begin in spring, which will involve the top two floors of what is now Independence Hall, the atrium, and fifth floor of the Towers, and is expected to continue through spring of 2008.

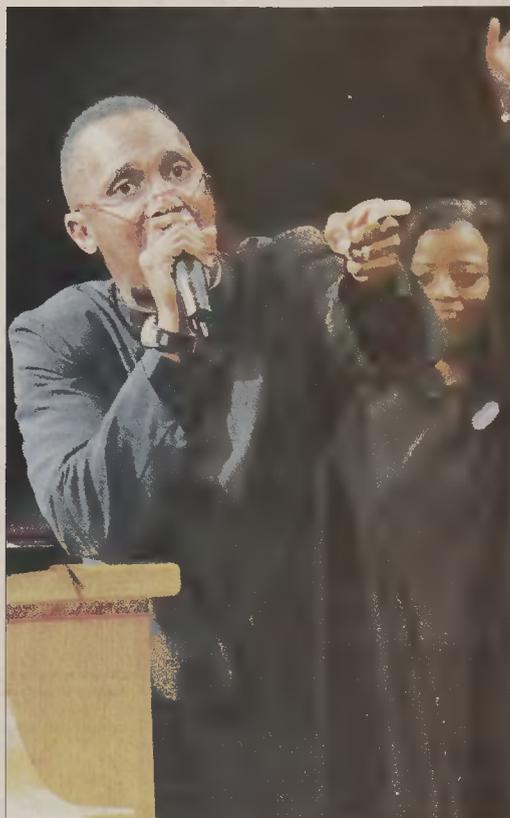
With plans for a restaurant, bowling alley, meeting and convention space and business courses, Alexander sees 2007 as a time to push "the

envelope in terms of how people consider church."

"We really want the com-

munity to see this site as being open," he said. "It's important they understand

it's not just about church being a place to worship on Sunday."



The Rev. Claude Alexander said moving University Park Baptist Church to the Charlotte Merchandise Mart will push "the envelope in terms of how people consider church."

PHOTO: PAUL WILLIAMS III

## POLITICS, ACTIVISM, BUSINESS

### Post newsmakers come from all walks of life

2005: CIAA Charlotte organizers **Ed Tapscott**, president of the Charlotte Bobcats, Charlotte Regional Visitors Authority president **Tim Newman** and Charlotte mayor pro tem **Patrick Cannon**.

2004: Mecklenburg County Commissioner **Wilhelmina Rembert**.

2003: Charlotte Bobcats owner **Bob Johnson**, the first African American to hold a majority stake in a major league U.S. professional sports franchise. 2002: Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools Superintendent **James**



Tapscott

**Pughley**, who instituted a pupil assignment plan devoid of court-ordered busing.

2001: Charlotte Housing Authority director **Harrison Shannon** turned CHA into a national model of self-sufficiency. Charlotte Convention & Visitors Bureau president **Melvin Tennant** opened the



Shannon

city's tourism and hospitality industry to more recruitment of African-American events.

2000: Arts & Science Council executive director **Harriet Sanford** led the non-profit to record growth by expanding programs and outreach.

1999: Charlotte-Mecklenburg School Board chairman **Arthur Griffin** was the first black elected to the top position.

1998: Northwest Corridor Community Development Corp. executive director **Isaac Heard**

led development of new housing and shopping options in north-west Charlotte.

1997: Civil rights attorney **James Ferguson** spearheaded high-profile civil rights cases across the Carolinas.

1996: Mint Museum executive **Dawn Womack** organized the slave ship Henrietta Marie exhibit. United Way of Central Carolinas executive director **Gloria Pace King** was the first



Womack

African American named to the Charlotte-area non-profit's top job.

1995: Transamerica Insurance executive **Bill Simms** raised the company's profile in Charlotte through charitable giving.

1994: Mothers of Murdered Offspring founder **Dee Sumpter** brought national attention as an advocate of crime victims and their families.

1993: Stop the Killing founder **Rev. James Barnett** launched a region-wide fight against violence and crime in the African American community.

1992: U.S. Rep. **Mel Watt** who along with U.S. Rep. **Eva Clayton**, were the first blacks elected to Congress from North Carolina since Reconstruction.

1991: Charlotte Hornets head coach **Gene Littles**, the NBA franchise's first black head coach.

1990: U.S. Senate candidate **Harvey Gantt**, who lost a close and controversial campaign to incumbent **Jesse Helms**.

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*Dinnont Clarke, Mecklenburg County commissioner*

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