

New hotel to break ground Gell speaks on prison struggles

Ceremony tentatively set for Jan. 11

BY ZACH JEPSEN
STAFF WRITER

Recent efforts to rejuvenate West Franklin Street have resulted in the groundbreaking of new complexes such as Rosemary Village.

Now, after several years of planning and delays, the Franklin Street Hotel is nearing the time when it also will touch fresh dirt.

The principal architect on the hotel, Josh Gurlitz of GGA Architects, said he hopes the project, which has been in planning stages since 2001, will break ground formally next month.

"The date that I've proposed is January 11 at noon," he said.

But, he added, the date is not set in stone because other stakeholders needed to be consulted before proclaiming a groundbreaking date.

The hotel, which will be located at the site of the old Greyhound bus station on West Franklin Street, is planned to be two stories high on the street front and five stories high further back from the street. It will contain 66 boutique-style rooms.

"There are certain things that have to happen to a site like this before you can begin construction," Gurlitz said.

Parts of the previous building had to be recycled and asbestos removed, he said.

The trees and bushes near the site's walls must be cleared away before the site can be excavated for construction, Gurlitz said. The site had been secured, and demolition was set to begin Tuesday, he added.

After it is constructed, the hotel will help invigorate West Franklin

Street by providing visitors with a place to stay in the downtown area, he said.

"It's a small upscale hotel, and the focus is on personal service," he said. "(The prices) will be competitive with the Carolina Inn and the Siena (Hotel)."

Gurlitz said the hotel will only serve breakfast in order to promote local restaurants. "The people staying in the hotel will have a wonderful assortment of dinner places."

The hotel has received positive reception from Franklin Street businesses, he said. "I'm really pleased that it's starting right now."

University Florist owner Charles House said he is glad to hear the project is almost under way.

"This has been on the burner for a long period of time," he said.

House said he sees West Franklin Street as a work in progress.

"It's not a question of revitaliz-

ing," he said. "Downtown is always in a state of work and change."

But House added that the hotel still will help spur new growth.

Chris Ehrenfeld, co-owner of Build Ex Inc., the company constructing Rosemary Village, a mixed-use complex with luxury condominiums on West Rosemary Street, said he is looking forward to the addition of the hotel to the western part of downtown.

He said the hotel will bring an influx of people for businesses.

"There's other projects in the works coming to that area," he said, adding that those also will attract future developments.

Gurlitz said it will take about 10 months to construct the hotel. But, he said, "That depends on what this winter is like."

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

BY JAMES EDWARD DILLARD
STAFF WRITER

Alan Gell was supposed to be dead long before he spoke to an attentive crowd Tuesday night on campus.

His manner was relaxed — he didn't poke at his wire-rimmed glasses or pull at his red embroidered tie.

Calmly, in his deep Southern voice, he explained to his audience the tragic history of his trip to death row and back.

Almost 10 years ago — in April 1995 — Gell was arrested for a murder he didn't commit.

Gell already was in prison for stealing a car he says he never stole when the N.C. State Bureau of Investigation showed up at his cell to question him about his girlfriend and a friend in connection with the murder of Allen Ray Jenkins.

But four days later, Gell said the SBI returned, this time for him. "(They told me,) 'We know you did it because (your friends) told us you did it.'"

The police gave him witness statements to read and asked him to prepare his own.

He spent two years and 10 months in solitary confinement waiting for a trial.

"I can't tell you how hard it is to be bounced from lawyer to lawyer to lawyer," he said.

He said he remembers particularly bad lawyers — one who handed him a Bible and told him that his best legal defense was to find Jesus and ask for forgiveness.

Ironically, after all the failures of the justice system that brought him to the feet of death, he said it was another failure that ultimately saved his life.

Mary Pollard, a corporate lawyer with no trial experience, was assigned to his case.

But where others had failed him, Pollard succeeded.

"Mary was the greatest lawyer I

"We make mistakes and learn from them. Not in North Carolina."

ALAN GELL,
FORMER DEATH ROW INMATE

could have," Gell said, adding that she was the first to show the determination a capital case is due.

Pollard discovered lawyer and police misconduct, including evidence withheld that clearly indicated Gell's innocence and began the tiresome road to freedom.

Gell said he expected an overhaul of the system to prevent similar situations, but it didn't happen. "We make mistakes and learn from them. Not in North Carolina."

Speaking before Gell, Chapel Hill Town Council member Mark Kleinschmidt, an attorney for the Center for Death Penalty Litigation, said Gell's case is an example of the problems that plague the system.

Kleinschmidt said problems range from race discrimination to lawyer misconduct and even a bias in the jury selection process.

John Steen, a UNC senior who came to hear Gell speak, said he found inspiration in Gell's struggle.

"Gell's frustration of the system is something we should mirror in a positive movement for change," Steen said.

Still, Gell is affected most, especially when he thinks of the approaching execution of Charles Walker, whom he knew personally from his time on death row, and whose case he said mirrors his.

"If they execute him, that will probably be the first innocent person North Carolina executed that I know of," he said.

Contact the State & National Editor at stntdesk@unc.edu.

Child abuse center to receive funding

Program to be extended nationwide

BY ARLEY WOLBER
STAFF WRITER

A Chapel Hill social service agency is using a grant to establish a national center to provide help with training in child abuse prevention programs across the country.

Chapel Hill Training-Outreach Project Inc. received a federal grant from the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services that will be issued each year for the next five years.

CHTOP will use the grant to establish and maintain the FRIENDS National Resource Center for Community-Based Child Abuse Prevention.

The center will provide training and technical assistance to state agencies that work to fight against child abuse.

Mike Mathers, executive director of CHTOP, said the organization is mainly concerned with early childhood education and children's issues.

He said that while many of the employees will be scattered across the country, he is pleased that the organization will be based in Chapel Hill.

"Chapel Hill is always such a great place for a program such as this," Mathers said, referring to the town's educational resources.

Linda Baker, director of FRIENDS — which stands for Family Resource Information, Education and Network Development Services — said the transition into the new resource center would be easy.

"We already have the infrastructure in place," she said.

But Baker said it might be difficult making the transition with all the partner institutes.

FRIENDS is a partnership of six organizations: CHTOP, the School of Social Work at UNC, the Child Welfare League of America, the National Alliance of Children's Trust Fund, Prevent Child Abuse America and Circle of Parents.

Cynthia Savage, project manager of Circle of Parents, said the organization is in the process of developing a training curriculum of planned activities with FRIENDS.

Baker said that although FRIENDS would not focus on working with community-based programs around the state, community programs could contact FRIENDS for information through the state's lead agency.

Bernadine Walden, who works with the North Carolina Division of Social Services, will submit these requests to FRIENDS.

FRIENDS moved to CHTOP on Oct. 1.

The organization had previously operated through Family Support America.

Mathers said more information is available at the CHTOP Web site at <http://www. chtop.org>.

Information about FRIENDS can be found at <http://www. friendsnrc.org>.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Palestinians ordered to tone down media

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

JERUSALEM — Interim Palestinian leader Mahmoud Abbas ordered a halt to anti-Israel incitement in government-controlled media, officials said Tuesday, meeting a key Israeli demand and adding to the new signs of goodwill that have emerged since the death of Yasser Arafat.

Israel has long complained of incitement in the Palestinian media, citing fiery anti-Israel broadcasts by Muslim preachers and programs praising the killing of Jews. It blamed Arafat, who died Nov. 11, for the objectionable content.

Radwan Abu Ayyash, head of Palestinian radio and television, said he instructed all of his department heads, at the request of Abbas, not to broadcast offensive material.

"Abu Mazen asked us to be sure that the material we broadcast does not contain any material that could

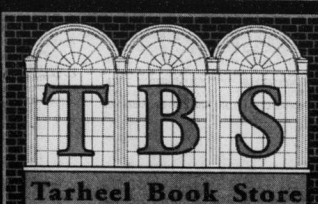
be considered incitement," he said, referring to Abbas by his nickname. Officials said the new instructions were given last week.

Israeli officials welcomed the development but said they were waiting to see actual changes in the Palestinian media.

"If we see a reduction in incitement, this will indeed be a positive signal," Israeli Foreign Ministry spokesman Mark Regev said.

Late Tuesday, gunmen in a taxi shot and killed Nasser Badawi, 37, a Fatah political leader in the Balata refugee camp next to the West Bank city of Nablus, Palestinian security officials said. It was not known who the gunmen were. Israel said it had no troops in the area.

Fatah is Abbas' party. Announcements over camp loudspeakers blamed collaborators with Israel, but some residents said the shooting could have resulted from an internal Palestinian conflict.



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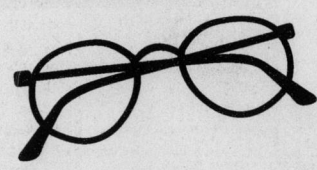
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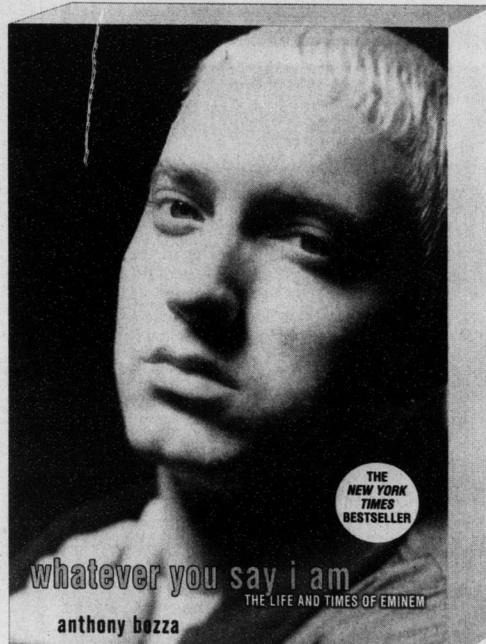
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