Greetings:

Community engagement

is one of my life’s passions. Last year, I thought it would be apropos to share with the greater Charlotte area all the various civic outreach projects of which the JCSU Family was proud to be a part, as well as how much of a positive impact we are making in the lives of others. As a result, we created the inaugural issue of the Community Engagement magazine. Our student athletes graced the cover as they worked at a Habitat for Humanity site. Service learning is paramount in the education of our students. Most recently, the Corporation for National and Community Service honored Johnson C. Smith University with a place on the President’s Higher Education Community Service Honor Roll for exemplary service efforts and service to America’s communities. This is the fourth time JCSU has been recognized. As you can see, we are no strangers to community service.

For this second issue we wanted to take a different approach and focus on the 12 historic neighborhoods surrounding the University. We would like to extend a sincere thank you to the Beatties Ford Road Task Force and to Sherrill Hampton, Director, Center for Applied Leadership and Community Development, for being such vital catalysts in the process. Our writers interviewed association leaders, lifetime residents, and even some of the newest members of the communities.

Our hope is that the magazine will be used as a resource for city planners, visitors, and even those among us who ride along the Beatties Ford Road Corridor without realizing the rich history we pass daily. Regardless if you live in a thriving metropolitan area or in a quaint little town, it is the purposeful act of getting to know your neighbors that gives you that wonderful sense of community. Or, as Shakespeare wrote, “What is the city but the people?”

Sincerely,

Dr. Ronald L. Carter, President
Johnson C. Smith University

Published by the Office of President, Office of Public Relations, and the Center for Applied Leadership and Community Development for the Community Engagement magazine.

Legacy of Civic Engagement
Johnson C. Smith University is committed to servant leadership and civic engagement.

2020 Vision Plan + Beatties Ford Road
Interview with Harvey Gantt, Former Mayor and 2020 Vision Plan Steering Committee Co-Chair.

JCSU Makes No Small Plans
An Overview of the Beatties Ford Road Corridor Revitalization Initiative

Historic West End Cultural Market
A Resident-Driven Initiative to Promote Economic Revitalization Through Arts and Culture

The Neighborhoods of West End
Profiles of 12 of the 27 neighborhoods along the Beatties Ford Road Corridor
Community Engagement

Proud to Continue our Legacy of Civic Engagement

Johnson C. Smith University is committed to servant leadership and civic engagement. It is a learning community that is passionate about its responsibility to serve. To that end, the Center for Applied Leadership and Community Development was launched in April 2009. The Center serves as a community-based educational highway connecting Charlotte’s historic neighborhoods, the greater Mecklenburg region, the nonprofit sector, local government, faith-based institutions, and the business community with the faculty and student body of the University. The past year has been most rewarding. I deeply appreciate the warm and generous welcome the greater Charlotte community has extended to me, especially the Beatties Ford Road corridor residents.

Through my work with the neighborhoods along Beatties Ford Road, I witnessed first-hand the character, charm, and resiliency of the people and place. For that reason, I am extremely pleased to present this special edition of the BULLETIN, which showcases the great neighborhoods along the Beatties Ford Road Corridor. Whether one fondly remembers the area as the Historic West End, calls it the Northwest Corridor or simply Beatties Ford Road, the area is still a great place to live and is just a few minutes from uptown Charlotte. There are 27 neighborhoods along Beatties Ford Road and more are being created as new developments are built (see Neighborhood Listing on page 9). The uniqueness of each neighborhood in the Historic West End contributes to the collective spirit that permeates throughout Charlotte’s historical and cultural fabric. In addition, the newly created neighborhoods link the past and present with the future.

A place is nothing without the people who live there. The heart and soul of the Beatties Ford Road Corridor are its residents. They are the warmest, most generous, and determined I have encountered in any community in which I have lived and/or traveled. They are proud of their community and heritage, and rightly so. The Historic West End Market is but one example of resident-led initiatives that speak to the love that the residents have for their history, culture, and neighborhoods.

I could continue to expound on the people and neighborhoods. Instead, I invite you to read the various articles about the current revitalization initiative and the 2020 planning efforts, as well as to review the overall listing of the neighborhoods and feature stories on JCSU’s closest neighbors. The University’s gates are open! Smith is proud to continue its legacy of civic engagement and work with its neighbors to enhance community vitality and expand economic opportunity along the Beatties Ford Road Corridor.

Peace and Blessings,

Sherrill Hampton
Special Assistant to the President & Director of the Center for Applied Leadership and Community Development
Defining the Next Charlotte Decade
An Interview with Harvey Gantt, Architect and Former Charlotte Mayor
By Marguerite Williams

With an October 2009 Community Workshop, Charlotte began a project of critical importance to the future of the city: the Center City 2020 Vision Plan, which is a collaborative process among Charlotte Center City Partners, the City of Charlotte, and Mecklenburg County. Steering Committee co-chairs Ann Coolidge and Harvey Gantt have years of experience in community leadership and are determined to involve citizens in every phase of the plan.

Gantt, Mayor of Charlotte from 1983 until 1987, is optimistic about what this kind of planning can mean to the city and to the region. “This is a framework plan, as opposed to a master plan. This is our chance to determine how we want our city to grow. Charlotte has been involved in framework planning since the ’60s, and we know that the results can be impressive if we have enough citizen input and the right project team.”

MIK, Inc., a multidisciplinary urban planning and community design firm based in California, is guiding the project team. Local firms have joined them: Coleyner and Stone, urban designers and landscape architects; Kimley-Horn and Associates, transportation and infrastructure experts; Wray Ward, an integrated marketing communications firm; and Economic Research Associates, economics and marketing experts.

“As we approached 2010, we assessed the 1999 plan for the Center City, called Vision 2010, which helped pave the way for Center City to become more of a destination with entertainment and sports venues. Many other goals from that plan also have been met, such as redeveloping the old convention center into a mixed-use facility, building parks and housing that would appeal to average working families, developing the Little Sugar Creek Greenway, and designing pedestrian-friendly streets. It was now time to look forward, again, to the future of the city: the Center City 2020 Vision Plan and to learn how to become involved. Go to: www.cc2020.org.”

“The 2020 Vision Plan cannot be successful without public outreach,” Gantt observed. “We cannot plan in isolation. People must have the chance to express their feelings and hopes. It is gratifying to see people from all over the city. Our goal is to expand the notion that people will claim Center City as theirs, not just a place for those who live and work there. Uptown must be a cultural center and an economic growth engine for the whole region for it to survive and thrive. It has to become the region’s living room.”

One aspect of economic development of special interest to Gantt is the preliminary planning for a streetcar that would connect the Beatties Ford Road Corridor to Center City. “I am pleased with the City Council’s willingness to proceed with this planning and to give it high priority. Businesses along Beatties Ford Road will see the value of the permanent infrastructure that a streetcar brings in the quality and kind of development. Because the route doesn’t change, a streetcar creates certainty about the number of people coming by those businesses, which will enhance growth and economic development in the Corridor.”

With the Steering Committee’s commitment to citizen engagement, the planning process has been divided into five working groups, each comprised of 15 members of the community. Each one is being asked to contribute ideas and concepts to the project team in one of five areas: economic vitality; urban living; transportation and mobility; arts, culture and entertainment; and parks, recreation, and the environment.

“This is a framework plan, as opposed to a master plan. This is our chance to determine how we want our city to grow. We must have citizen input. We must bring everyone together to guide us to a successful future.”
Beatties Ford Road Task Force works hard to revitalize Historic West End

Close your eyes and imagine this: Young professionals scurry to the transit stop to catch the streetcar uptown.

Johnson C. Smith University students meet to review for their exams over a cup of coffee. An older couple sits in the corner of the bookstore reading the morning newspaper.

Students head towards the Arts Factory facility for morning classes. You take it all in as you stroll down the tree-lined street.

It’s 7:30 in the morning, and West Trade Street is bustling with activity.

JCSU, in conjunction with its Beatties Ford Road Task Force, is hard at work to make that dream a reality. The task force was created in 2008 by a unanimous vote of the JCSU Board of Trustees. Its goal is to revitalize the area around the University that reinforces the University’s presence in the area and attracts both students and residents to Historic West End.

The Historic West End Neighborhood Association is an informal collaborative gathering of the 15-plus neighborhood associations and other community-based groups that call the Northwest sector home. The group meets on a monthly basis and shares information on areas of interest that affect the quality of life for residents.

The Historic West End Neighborhood Association is proud to stand with JCSU and the neighborhoods along Beatties Ford Road Corridor in shaping a new era of excellence. They are: Avery Glen, Biddleville/Smallwood/Five Points, Capps Hill Village, Cindy Park, Dalebrook, Davis Meadows, Eleanore Heights, Firestone, Garden City, Garden Park, Northwood Hills/Northwood Park, Hamilton Circle/Hamilton Village, Hyde Park, Lakeview Village, Lincoln Heights, McCrorey Heights, Northwood Estates, Oxkllawn Park, Oakview Terrace, Seversville, Slater Springs, Taylor/LaSalle, Trinity Park, University Park North, Washington Heights, Wedgewood, Wesley Heights.

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The Historic West End Neighborhood Association is proud to stand with JCSU and the neighborhoods along Beatties Ford Road in shaping a new era and improved quality of life for all residents in the Northwest sector.

Historically, the University has been an integral part of the Northwest sector and especially the Beatties Ford Road Corridor. It is evident that the commitment of the University is as strong today as it was in years past. Presently, it is playing a pivotal role in the current revitalization efforts for the area.

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With Warmest Regards,

Aaron McKeithan, Jr.

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Aaron McKeithan, Jr.
A Cultural Market Aims to Revitalize West Trade Street

By Benny L. Smith, MMC, APR

Any people have ideas on how to make life better. But, only a few of them choose to put in the hard work it takes to transform those dreams into realities.

In 2009, a small group of West End residents led by Tanya Adams dreamed of having a cultural market on West Trade Street. A few months after going to the right people, they transformed what used to be a vacant lot into a thriving cultural market where an array of art and products can be found.

“It’s exciting to know that we came together and did what we were always able to do,” said Adams, founder of the Historic West End Market and chairperson of Historic West End Partners, Inc. “We did not allow the many obstacles and unfulfilled promises to halt the creation of our market. We took nothing and fashioned something of substance.”

The idea for the market began in April 2009 when Adams asked the neighborhood presidents of Seversville, Biddleville/Smallwood/Five Points, and Wesley Heights to support the cultural market concept as a vehicle to define the Urban Cultural Arts District. Their union would establish a destination place in the Historic West End Corridor.

“No one is better equipped to present our rich history, culture and talents,” Adams said.

The group agreed, and Adams then identified 1601 West Trade Street, a Griffin family property and former car wash and ice company, as the appropriate site for the market. The designated neighborhood representatives talked with Mike Griffin, offering him more details about the market’s operations and its potential impact for the Historic West End community.

“Mike was pleased to ask his father to aid us with the community revitalization initiative” said Adams. “It is destined to spur economic development, and historical and cultural awareness in the area.”

Impressed, Larry Griffin, Sr. and sons Larry Jr. and Mike leased the two-and-a-half acre property to the neighborhood group for a nominal annual fee.

Recognizing the need for a more formal structure, the group formed the Historic West End Partners, Inc., a nonprofit organization with an 11-member board of directors. The new organization is working diligently to make the market sustainable. This year, vendors are being called upon to a pay a reasonable fee for space. The market will open on May 1, 2010 and run through October 31, 2010.

“Building this market gave us an opportunity to demonstrate through our collective efforts what was and is the fabric of the Historic West End,” said Adams.

Months after the idea was presented, the Historic West End Market opened in August 2009 with 65 vendors participating.

“The opening day of the market was exhilarating and overwhelming,” Adams said. “The synergy was unbelievable. The mood was festive.”

T'Afo Feimster, CEO and founder of LATBAH (Life and Times in Black American History) Collard Green Museum, was one of the vendors last year at the market and plans to participate this year.

“I am in total support of the committee’s efforts with this cultural market,” Feimster said. “It is going to take a minute for this new venue to catch on, but in time it will with the support of the community and vendors as well.”

Feimster said the foundation for the cultural market has been laid out well for it to operate properly.

“This cultural market is not just geared towards visual artists, which is what you find at most cultural markets,” he said. “I felt there was a reach to be inclusive with other vendors that makes for a broader customer base.”

Adams said she wanted to be very clear: the market “is not a flea market.” Among the items offered, are fresh cut flowers, produce, new books, handbags and accessories, pottery, fiber art, natural oils, glass art, apparel, photography, collectibles, furniture, baked and canned goods, organic products, and ethnic cuisines.

In the future, the Historic West End Partners, Inc. (Jeanette Praylor, Honourable Linwood Foust, Michael Doney, Charles Aveeno) will strive to incorporate spaces for small businesses and expanding retailers into the existing market format. The cost of a 10-foot by 10-foot space will be affordable for artists and vendors. Those funds will be applied to the market’s operational budget. Historic West End Partners, Inc. will continue to work with JCSU, the Historic West Neighborhood Association, and the Historic West End Business Association “until the vision for a vibrant West End area is fulfilled.”
The Heart of the West End
By Benny L. Smith

To some people, West Trade Street is just a way to get to Interstate 77 and Uptown Charlotte, but to Attorney J. Charles Jones, it means much more.

“I have lived on this street for most of my life,” Jones said during an interview inside his Biddleville home.

Jones, 72, has lived in the Biddleville community for 62 years. His parents, the Rev. Joseph Thomas Jones and Ione Jones, moved to Charlotte from Chester, S.C., in 1947. His father was a Presbyterian minister and his mother was an English teacher at Johnson C. Smith University. More than 20 of his family members, including himself, either received degrees from JCSU or Biddle University.

Biddleville is Charlotte’s oldest surviving black neighborhood. At its heart is Johnson C. Smith University, which opened shortly after the Civil War as Biddle Institute to train black preachers and teachers. Biddleville began in 1871 as a village next to the college, distinctly separate from Charlotte, two miles from the center of the city.

Around the turn of the century, the city grew out to meet the village. The suburbs of Western Heights and Roselyn Heights were built, followed by the Smallwood Homes and Crestview subdivisions after World War II. Today, the whole area is called Biddleville/Smallwood/Five Points, taking its name from the original village and from the intersection of West Trade, West Fifth Street, Rozelles Ferry Road, and Beatties Ford Road adjacent to the JCSU campus near the center of the neighborhood.

The neighborhood has several of the most historic buildings in the City of Charlotte – Biddle Hall, located on the University campus, the Davis House and Mount Camel Baptist Church.

The Biddleville community always has had people fighting to make sure that its residents get the best out of life. JCSU founders were two young white Presbyterian ministers, Rev. S.C. Alexander and Rev. W.L. Miller, who believed there was a need to train leaders for the newly freed black population.

Jones is no exception to this line of visionary leaders. He has had an interest in making sure that the Biddleville/Smallwood/Five Points area is sustained and that residents had their say in how they wanted their community to look in the future.

Today, Jones focuses most of his attention on serving as a leader of the Biddleville/Five Points/Smallwood Neighborhood Community Association. In the last decade, the group has been successful in spearheading the incorporation of several neighborhood groups in the areas of Sevenmile, Wesley Heights, and Lincoln Heights.

“All of these neighborhoods are still viable,” Jones said, “Our goal for Biddleville/Smallwood/Five Points is to build a beloved community where all people can live together whether we are white, black, gay, or straight. We want to bring back that closeness that existed in the community during the 1940s to 1960s where everybody looked out for each other.” He and the residents are working hard to fulfill the vision for a beloved community.

The vision is evident in the work of people like Jan Gadsden, who lives in Biddleville Townhome Condos a few months out of the year, she said. Residents must work to help their communities to survive. Although she is considered a part-time Charlotte resident, the 1993 JCSU graduate gets involved in helping her Biddleville community.

“It is good for me to be a part of my community; I love being here because it’s where I grew up,” she said. Just a few years ago, the Five Points Park located on French Street across from her home was an overgrown area full of drug activity. Instead of doing nothing about it, Gadsden wanted to return the park to its original grandeur and purpose – a place for families to enjoy.

Working with the other residents and community groups, she convinced Mecklenburg County Parks and Recreation officials to cut down trees, put up lights, and install a colorful playground on the nine-acre property.

“Everything that I have done has been with the assistance of all the neighborhood associations in District 2 and Mrs. Louise Sellers,” Gadsden said.

Historical information in this article is from a report by Dr. Thomas W. Hanchett.
The small neighborhood known as Dalebrook is tucked away, hidden behind the streets off of Beatties Ford Road. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the community was built by Charles Ervin of Charles Ervin Construction. The neighborhood includes eight streets spanning from Gilbert Street to Holly Street. This close-knit community has been hidden for years, but many there believe it is their time to shine. Dalebrook features lovely ranch homes with colorful shutters. Most of the homes here are well kept with manicured lawns.

This hidden treasure is a beautiful surprise to many who are not aware of the neighborhood. This community has not been completely isolated during all of this time. It has contributed to building a stable Beatties Ford Road Corridor such as the Mecklenburg Health Department, the Beatties Ford Road Bridge over I-85, the University Shopping Center, and the Beatties Ford Road Library. Serving as a stimulus to change to several small groups and small businesses is the Dalebrook Professional Center. The center has created a sense of self-containment in the community, and residents and former residents of Dalebrook have been a driving force in the betterment of Charlotte.

Many of those residents are educators and political officials. One in particular is Charlotte’s Mayor Anthony Foxx, who grew up in the community. Raised in Dalebrook by his mother and grandparents, Foxx understood the value of hard work and service. His grandparents worked as educators, and he witnessed them give up everything to ensure he had the best education. Foxx was elected to Charlotte City Council in 2005 and became mayor in 2009. He has given back to all of the communities of Charlotte. Another proud product of Dalebrook is Howard Bankhill, who was born and reared in the community; he serves Francis Bailey Middle School as its principal and served in the North Carolina General Assembly. The community is proud of both men’s service.

One person creating a more diverse and prominent neighborhood is Sentron Nicholas, the president of the Dalebrook Neighborhood Association. He and his family moved to Dalebrook when he was five years old. Today, he resides in that very home in which he grew up.

Nicholas is an educator and works as an administrative assistant and teacher’s assistant at Lake Wylie Elementary School. Nicholas already has made efforts in improving the neighborhood and getting the word out about Dalebrook. The association has hosted yearly trips to the Cherokee casino. “It’s to raise money for the neighborhood.”

The neighborhood hosts an annual picnic the third Saturday of September. They provide scholarships for students, conduct clean up campaigns, provide floats for the Martin Luther King, Jr. Parade and circulate zoning petitions. The neighborhood now works tirelessly to bring money into the community for infrastructure improvements that appeal to existing and new Dalebrook residents. Nicholas looks forward to the journey of improving and helping the neighborhood grow economically, and for all to appreciate the lovely neighborhood known as Dalebrook.

Residents and former residents of Dalebrook... including Charlotte Mayor Anthony Foxx, who grew up here... have been a driving force in the betterment of Charlotte.
Small but Strong
By Margaerite Williams

Eleanore Heights comprises three streets, seven blocks, and 55 houses south of Rozelle’s Ferry Road.

As resident Lois D. Moore likes to say, “We are small but strong.”

After just a short turn off that major industrial thoroughfare, a visitor encounters tall trees and spacious front yards, with neat brick and wood ranch houses set on rolling hills – a little oasis tucked in behind the commercial buildings that line Rozelle’s Ferry. It is a diverse, harmonious neighborhood made up of Afri[...]Asian, Somalians, and Caucasians. Though there are many who have begun moving into the neighborhood, there is a mix of housing types, with rentals, single-family homes, and Habitat for Humanity houses.

Moore was elected president of the neighborhood organization in 2000, after serving as vice president since its inception in 1996. When Hattie Harris, the first president, moved away, Moore, as one of the founders, willingly took on this new leadership role. The organization meets once a month at New Macedonia of Faith Church, and Moore is striving to increase participation.

Eleanore Heights Community Incorporated was started when neighbors went from house to house to form a Bible study. They enjoyed their time together and decided to form a neighborhood association because they all wanted the same thing: a safe, crime-free place to live and the strength that having a unified voice would give them in dealing with issues.

They have worked in a number of areas to protect their neighborhood. One is establishing a good relationship with their police officers. As Moore said, “We incorporate our officers into the life of our neighborhood. We want to know them and hope that they will get to know us as people. We invite them to our annual Christmas potluck supper, and they seem to enjoy our good food and hospitality. Sometimes they even ride their bicycles through the neighborhood. And we believe that our officers could be the best role models possible for our youth.”

Consequently, the organization encourages officers to develop a trusting relationship with some of the boys who live in Eleanore Heights, acting as mentors and helping them learn courtesy and respect. “They could listen to our boys and help them, while they learn the things that our teenagers have to deal with in society. It could be good for both parties.”

The organization’s members also arrange for residents to participate in an annual spring cleanup by passing out flyers and making it a community event.

Another important goal Moore identifies is keeping the lines of communication open with the city and county. Their members have been to city council meetings numerous times through the years and currently are working with city officials to help determine the future of a piece of vacant land. Formerly the site of the Coronet Apartments, the vacant land would be ideal for senior housing, but so far Eleanore Heights Community Association has not been able to make that possible. No agreement has been reached, but the community’s leaders plan to keep advocating for their vision.

The association also supports keeping the environment beautiful and clean by working with nearby businesses on Rozelle’s Ferry Road. Currently, they are negotiating with one businessman who has promised to plant a vegetative buffer, such as cedars, between his site and the neighborhood to cut down on noise and to improve the view.

One of the most important services of the association is bringing people together in fellowship. “We have a back-to-school picnic for the children with hot dogs and homemade ice cream, and we distribute school supplies that we are able to buy because of neighborhood contributions. In the past at Thanksgiving time, we have taken dinner to some of our seniors, and we make care packages for the homeless population when the weather turned cold. We have collected coats for the WSCC coat drive. We help whenever we see a need to be filled; and we have time for celebration, too,” said Moore.

Moore spent 36 years as an elementary classroom teacher. Today, she offers tutoring free-of-charge to any of the elementary school children whose parents ask for her help. “I hope to make a difference. I’m a disciplinarian, and I expect them to work, but we have fun, too,” she said.

Moore is proud of Eleanore Heights. “We are a pretty neighborhood in the spring and summer with nice yards. We are clean and crime free, where people like to live and want to protect their quality of life. This is where I live, and I’m going to give it the best I can.” With Moore at the helm, Eleanore Heights is in good hands.
Lincoln Heights Educates Charlotte

By Kristian Coley

A community once called “Peaceful Valley” was mostly farms and trees. It wasn’t until the 1950s that the name was changed to Lincoln Heights. This thriving community, famous for its beautiful vegetable gardens and flowers, spans from Gilbert Street to Russel Street adjacent to Beatties Ford Road. It had its own barber shops, beauty salons, stores, and churches. Lincoln Heights was home to many educators and influential African-Americans who contributed much of the success of Charlotte.

Many of these inspiring residents built homes that still stand today. Riding through Lincoln Heights’ streets, visitors have to admire the architecture that many families built with their own hands to be passed down to future generations. While some were modest bungalows with beautiful brick visage, some feature unique stonework. The community is decorated with distinctly structured homes of all sorts.

Today, Lincoln Heights is considered a bedroom community. Those who are originally from the neighborhood can appreciate the charm, which is why they never left. Attorney Thelma Byers-Bailey, president of the Lincoln Heights Neighborhood Association, is one of the residents who cherishes community. Those who are originally from the neighborhood can appreciate the charm, which is why they never left. Attorney Thelma Byers-Bailey, president of the Lincoln Heights Neighborhood Association, is one of the residents who cherishes the childhood spent in the community. The home she now occupies is one her parents built in 1955. Byers-Bailey remembers as a child the fun she had playing in the framework of homes under construction, such as the home of the late Dr. Alexander, and spending much of her time at the home of Beatrice “Precious” Wilson. Wilson owned one of the oldest homes in Lincoln Heights and one of the largest. The house still stands today and serves the community as a salon and spa.

Over the years, the neighborhood has changed from the peaceful place where Byers-Bailey grew up. Many of the original homeowners have passed away. While some of the homes continue to be occupied by family members, many have been put up for rent. Byers-Bailey said “the character of the neighborhood has declined, and safety has become problematic; however, it’s now reviving.”

The Lincoln Heights Neighborhood Association has worked hard to turn things around by securing grants, overseeing rehabilitation projects, and conducting collaborative partnerships and sponsoring community events. Some of the events the association has instigated to bring back the neighborhood that was once known for beautiful vegetable gardens and flowers are the National Night Out events against crime, back-to-school festivals, community clean-up campaigns, and land beautification projects.

So many residents have pride in their community and faith that it will certainly become the Lincoln Heights it once was. One of those residents is Allegra Westbrook, a retired librarian. This witty, sharp-minded lady has dedicated her life to improving the literacy of African-Americans and was the first director of the Brevard Street branch of the Public Library in Charlotte, which was the only library to which people of color could go. She was dedicated to obtaining more quality books and supplies for the branch, and if she couldn’t get any help from organizations, it would spend out of her own pocket. She spent decades spreading the gospel of reading by speaking at various events, partnering with organizations, and creating a bookmobile. She drove it to schools and throughout the community to pass out books to children of color. Westbrook recalls being told to leave the parking lot of a school by the superintendent and pleading with him “but the black children don’t have any books.” She laughs about it now. Many of the children and parents waited for Westbrook and the bookmobile, and she was always there giving out books and promoting the importance of reading. In reminiscing about her career in Charlotte, Westbrook stated “I preferred to work at a public library that served people from all walks of life." Today, Westbrook is retired and recently celebrated her 89th birthday. She has been highly honored for her work in the community and says “just let me rest now." But her work will never be forgotten.
Celebrating the Past, Framing the Future

By Benny L. Smith

In 1924, the city of Charlotte acquired land in the neighborhood through eminent domain and built the Vest Water Treatment Plant which was the only treatment plant in Charlotte-Mecklenburg until 1959. The land, now used for the plant, was formerly a park/recreation area in front of land plots designated for residences. Mccrorey did not want his investment in land negatively impacted, but neighborhood association representatives said the city did not share the same vision for land plots owned by black residents. The treatment plant, easily visible from Beatties Ford Road, blocks motorists from seeing a good part of the neighborhood.

During the 1970s, the layout of the community changed with the advent of the Brookshire Freeway. The freeway divided the neighborhood in half, with people living in the southern part of the neighborhood having to relocate. Beard said some literally uprooted their homes and transported them to Hyde Park. No homes were left in the impacted areas. Later, more of the original owners continued to leave, causing the quality of life in Mccrorey Heights to suffer. Abandoned homes, absentee landlords, and negligent renters took their toll on a once vibrant community.

How have the lessons of the past influenced current initiatives of Mccrorey Heights Neighborhood Association? The community is led by a strong neighborhood association that revised the 1949 protective covenant to reflect current regulatory advancements in city code requirements, along with the historical integrity and culture of the neighborhood. Young families are once again choosing the neighborhood as their home. “We chose Mccrorey Heights because we felt it was the cleanest of all the historically black neighborhoods, and it had that nice, warm, old feel to it,” said Didier “Dj” Ambroise. Ambroise, 35, and his wife Cynthia moved into the neighborhood in 2005 and said it has been the right choice for them and their three children, twins Aniyah and Ariel, and four-month old Yahmir.

Recently, the Mccrorey Heights Neighborhood Association is to preserve their neighborhood’s history and improve the quality of life for its residents. The current focus of the Mccrorey Heights Neighborhood Association is to preserve their neighborhood’s history and improve the quality of life for its residents. The association is working with the city to implement the Neighborhood Improvement Project. It also is involved in the Center City Vision 2020 for upzoning development, the Historic West End Neighborhood Development, and JCSU’s revitalization of the Beatties Ford Road Corridor.

This article features information from an article by Dr. Shana Benjamin.
Respect for the Past, Hope for the Future

By Marguerite Williams

When Aaron Sanders was elected vice president of the Oaklawn Park Community Improvement Association, he had come full circle back to the neighborhood of his youth. After a lifetime of travels and a career in the telecommunications industry, he lives again in the house in which he grew up.

Oaklawn Park was fully developed when veterans returned from World War II and needed homes. Many were built using the GI Bill. According to Sanders, “These were nice, solid brick homes. My parents’ house dates from 1958, but some were there much earlier and were mostly wooden homes. All of it was rural, like Dilworth and Myers Park.”

He remembers a thriving place, with kids everywhere running in the woods and playing in the streets with his friends. “All of us Baby Boomers who grew up in Oaklawn had a perfect place to play. Sitting inside and watching the television just wasn’t an option. It is still a great place to raise a family and to feel safe and supported by your friends and neighbors.”

With the beautifully manicured Oaklawn Park Cemetery at its border, the neighborhood feels forested and cloistered, even though it is only minutes from the spires of uptown Charlotte. The topography is hilly and elevated, making for great views of Charlotte’s center. The tiled dome roof of the mausoleum is an architectural gem and acts as a centerpiece to the cemetery. “We hold a bi-annual summer reunion in the park next to the cemetery, and there is a huge turnout for that. Everyone is welcome, whether or not they buy a ticket. The park is full. Oaklawn Park has generated loyalty among its residents, both past and present,” Sanders said.

The preamble reads, “We, the residents of Oaklawn Park, in order to form and promote neighborliness and friendship among ourselves, work our solutions to common problems, to influence wholesome attitudes among ourselves and our children, and to disseminate helpful information, do establish this constitution.”

Sanders foresees a bright future for the neighborhood. He and fellow residents are trying to build on what was created by their far-sighted parents, encouraging 45-50 year-olds to return and make improvements to older homes. Many have realized that Oaklawn Park has better mortgages, some with houses that parents have paid for, and that it is a safe place to raise their families. “He proudly points out there are many notable people who have chosen to call Oaklawn Park home. ‘We have some wonderful younger families – two Morehead scholars live in this neighborhood – one is a public defender. One lady has been a piano teacher for over 50 years, training her students to be classical pianists, and they are in orchestras and churches around the world. We have a former assistant superintendent for Charlotte-Mecklenburg Schools, who is devoted to kids. He returned to a local school to help out as a principal in the trenches.’”

The organization has other goals. It hopes to bring more computer technology to the neighborhood. The group also encourages more people to become involved in the green agenda with more recycling, ride sharing, and energy savings. “The African-American struggle has always meant that we helped each other and shared resources, so we’re green out of necessity. Caring for each other is really the green agenda,” Sanders said.

On behalf of the Oaklawn Park Community Improvement Organization, Sanders invites everyone to come and enjoy the beauty of his neighborhood, even those who do not live there.
Oakview Terrace, located near Interstate 85 and Brookshire Freeway, is a neighborhood that promises more than one can see at a glance. Established in the 1960s, one of the unseen but important aspects of the neighborhood is the tireless work of its residents to build a more stable environment for the neighborhood’s families and children.

A fearless and headstrong resident, Virginia Anthony, known as “the pioneer of the neighborhood,” has fought many battles to clean up the streets and improve the neighborhood that she has called home for many years. Anthony was not afraid to protect her neighborhood in any way she could. She performed most of the foundational work and brought improvements, accomplishing many of Oakview Terrace’s goals. Anthony set out to bring public transportation to the neighborhood. She, and other residents, reached out to the Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) to get a bus stop in the area. As a result, residents were able pursue jobs and enhance their quality of life. Under the leadership of Anthony, Oakview Terrace has formed a longstanding relationship with the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Police Department to help combat illegal activity.

After many years of being so dedicated to Oakview Terrace, Anthony was succeeded by Thomas Cowans as president of the neighborhood association in 1994. He has continued efforts with the CMPD in enhancing the neighborhood.

Cowans’ tireless work on behalf of the neighborhood has paid off. Habitat for Humanity has built many homes there, which according to Cowans, “enhance the quality of life, a sense of ownership.” The neighborhood’s Solomon Park has been renovated, making Oakview Terrace a more desirable place for newcomers. He said the neighborhood is “not at-risk anymore. Look at where we come from and where we are today.”

But not all is done. Cowans still works towards a vision of a “proud environment promoting unity, individual acceptance, and respect, and ownership towards a more common good for ourselves and others.” In creating this vision, the neighborhood has formed partnerships with Commander Cochran and Officer Blake Hollar, a team that set out to reduce criminal activity and create community safety and has become a dependable resource for the residents of Oakview Terrace. Cochran continues to be involved in maintaining a neighborhood that residents are proud to call home, while Officer Hollar has been promoted and transferred to another division.

Cowans hopes for funding for beautification projects and benches at the bus stops, but mostly wants all to appreciate the serious transition of Oakview Terrace and to involve the residents in the future of the neighborhood.
Seversville, one of the Queen City’s original ring villages, was a bustling streetcar community developed around a country store on property owned by Henry Clontz Severs. The village spanned from Wesley Heights Way (formerly Tuckasegee Road) to Rozzelle’s Ferry Road and was bounded by West Trade Street. Its streetcar line provided service from Charlotte Center City to Biddleville, Biddle Institute (now Johnson C. Smith University) and Seversville, as well as other white areas. Today, Seversville is a multifaceted neighborhood that is slated to regain its place as an urban streetcar community.

Seversville Village’s beginning was not one of diversity. The urban renewal destruction of Second Ward, affectionately known as “Brooklyn,” ushered in the massive shift of Charlotte’s black population into the Historic West End in the 1960s. During this time, the neighborhood was quiet, children attended the Seversville School, and Five Points boasted a Broadway Furniture company, Bass grocery store, the Ice House, a restaurant, a service station, and bus service, along with other amenities. As middle working class blacks transitioned into the area, the owners fled, selling and renting their properties for less. The increased quantity of affordable, unkept housing stock attracted tenants with undesirable associates and activities to the community. By the early 1980s, the neighborhood no longer appealed to middle class families.

This brought about the “Taking Back Our Neighborhood” project initiated by the residents, local churches, civic groups, the school system, and local government. The project focused on restoring the community. This movement birthed the joint building of the Bruns Avenue Elementary School (replacing the Seversville School) and the Wallace Pruitt Recreation Center (formerly named Phillips O. Berry). Adjacent to the center is Seversville Park, a playground, spacious playing fields, and the lush Irwin and Stewart Creek Greenway System with routes to three destinations. One route flows from Tuckasegee Road through Wesley Heights under Interstate 77, linking to Frazier Park and ending at Rays Splash Planet (an indoor water park). A second route terminates on Freedom Drive, while a third path continues to the Wesley Heights Greenway, that ends at the Bank of America football stadium.

Wallace Pruitt, president of the Seversville Community Organization, is delighted to see his community come full circle and go beyond. Today, his multicultural community has surpassed its segregated beginnings. Nestled along tree-lined streets under the city skyline are quaint bungalows and luxurious homes with roomy backyards. These dwellings (listing up to the mid $400,000s) are inhabited by singles, retirees, and families.

Seversville is continuing its tradition of partnering with others. Together, Seversville, Biddleville-Smallwood, and Wesley Heights began the Historic West End Urban Cultural Arts Association (The Historic West End Partners, Inc. 2010) to define the Urban Cultural Arts District (streetscape between I-77 and Five Points) now the Historic West End Partners, Inc. In August 2009, this union yielded the Historic West End Market (an open air cultural venue) under the direction of J’Tanya Adams, a Seversville resident.

The community’s charge is echoed to the masses by JCSU President Dr. Ronald L. Carter. The University’s bold initiative to move beyond its gates by erecting the Arts Factory along Beatties Ford Road is evidence that the Historic West End will become a destination place. The Seversville neighborhood is joining with the University and other neighborhoods along the corridor to lead the charge for the revitalization and renewed economic vitality of the area.
udie Goins is an interesting woman. After graduating from Johnson C. Smith University in 1941 with a bachelor’s degree in elementary education, she married her college sweetheart, Harry Goins, Sr. The couple decided to settle down and raise a family on Taylor Avenue, just a few miles away from their alma mater. He had his own bar, working until the wee hours and also managed the Zodiac Band. She worked as a third grade teacher. Both raised their son Harry Goins, Jr.

Today, the sharp-minded 91-year-old former teacher occasionally drives to play cards with friends. She taught for 30 years at Lincoln Heights Elementary and Double Oaks Elementary, retiring from Long Creek Elementary. The amazing thing is that she did most of these things while residing in the same residence on Taylor Avenue.

“I have lived here for 53 years,” Sudie said. “Everything in her home has its own special place, and you can’t help but wonder about all the marvelous things that have happened at the residence since she moved there.”

She and her husband purchased a vacant lot and built the modest two-bedroom home in 1957 that now sits at the corner of LaSalle Street and Taylor Avenue. Encircled by an ornate, decorative brick wall, Goins remembers a time when she didn’t have as many neighbors.

“There were no houses here except one across the street that had burned down and another one down the street occupied by Rev. Jenkins who went to Johnson C. Smith too,” Goins said. “The rest of the land in the area was wooded, which was why she and her husband bought the house on Taylor Avenue.”

The Roberts family was similar to the Goins family. They, too, were one of the first families to locate on the road. Gwendolyn remembers a happier time in the community growing up as a child.

“Our neighbors were not just neighbors, they were family,” she said. “When my mom and dad needed a babysitter, the oldest child in the community would come and sit with us. The kids were good, and there were no problems with drugs or alcohol. I don’t think we locked our doors.”

Gwendolyn said it wasn’t until the late 1950s that La Salle Street emerged. Before that time, there was only a wooded area. The Mecklenburg County Library branch for the western part of the community was also located in the old police station location off La Salle Street. Her mother said she would always have her children pick up trash in the community on Saturdays to show their pride.

Today, the community is looking for leadership in its younger residents so that Taylor/LaSalle can continue to be a safe place to live.

Instead, the street is filled with several rental properties. Still, Goins likes her neighborhood.

“It’s a peaceful neighborhood,” she said. “You don’t have a lot of people bothering you.”

Lillian Roberts, 90, started the Taylor/LaSalle Community Organization more than 20 years ago because she saw her neighborhood’s quality of life declining.

“My mother is a fighter and strong leader,” said Robert’s daughter, Gwendolyn Roberts. “She started the community organization after she started seeing people sell drugs in front of her house.”

Gwendolyn moved back to Charlotte 25 years ago from Atlanta for better career opportunities and to take care of her family. Her mother currently is recuperating from a long illness. The Roberts family was similar to the Goins family. They, too, were one of the first families to locate on the road. Gwendolyn remembers a happier time in the community growing up as a child.

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Gwendolyn moved back to Charlotte 25 years ago from Atlanta for better career opportunities and to take care of her family. Her mother currently is recuperating from a long illness. She said her mother also was responsible for discovering an abandoned slave cemetery adjacent to the entrance of University Park Creative Arts Elementary School. The discovery has helped some people to connect with the final resting place of their ancestors.

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Developing a Recipe for Success

By Marguerite Williams

he 2003 bylaws of the University Park Neighborhood Association state that the association “shall be concerned with the community and economic development, ecology, transportation, health, education, safety, and other related matters that indirectly and directly will affect the quality and character of the neighborhood.”

North Carolina State Representative Kelly M. Alexander, Jr. was an early participant in the association, which began in the 1960s. With participation from residents, he helped write and approve the first set of bylaws. Current association president Percell Bowser believes that those bylaws have served them well. “These ideals are relevant for us today.”

Bowser’s involvement with the association began more than 40 years ago when he moved to University Park, allowing him to know and work with the association’s many leaders. J.C. Champion was our first president, and Eleanor Washington served in that capacity for many years. Then came Hattie Anthony, who was responsible for bringing in the Neighborhood Farmers’ Market on Saturdays. Hattie also worked with the Fighting Back Program. Our neighborhood has had three other great presidents: Willie Flemming, Kelly Alexander, and Carolyn Fuller. I will try to keep up, as much as I can, with their model.”

Bowser, who served as the group’s financial secretary before being elected president, can be found every Thursday delivering Friendship Trays. A retired high school science teacher and assistant principal, he has a wealth of leadership experience with a number of local, state, and national organizations.

One of the issues of concern is the neighborhood’s relationship with West Charlotte High School located in the core of the neighborhood. “We hope to better utilize the swimming pool at West Charlotte for our neighborhood kids with it staying open more hours and with classes where they can learn to swim. And we support more after-school tutoring opportunities at the recreation center,” Bowser explained.

The City of Charlotte undertook a “Quality of Life Study” several years ago and the results were disappointing for University Park residents. It was designated a “challenged neighborhood” in some areas, and the association is determined to make improvements to receive better ratings. The study evaluates the community using a number of factors — physical nature, economic indicators, crime occurrences, and social life.

Bowser told how the association is using the study to address some of the problems. “As our residents get up in age, their houses might become rentals and not receive proper maintenance. That can be hard for a neighborhood. County code enforcement officers are located right in the Northwest Neighborhoods Services Center building, and the association is collaborating with them to help people follow the codes and make improvements to their houses.”

University Park is glad to participate and volunteer with the other neighborhood associations, that meet at the Northwest Neighborhoods Services Center, realizing it makes them stronger politically when they can speak with a united voice.

When issues have arisen, such as the potential loss of community policing, they went as one group to speak to city council. “We fought to keep our community police officer who reports to our group every month. We appreciate our officers so much that we purchased 11 bicycles and all the equipment for them through our dues and fundraising. Our officers are located right in the northwest neighborhoods Services center building, and the association is determined to make improvements to receive better ratings.

The neighborhood leaders have organized a Youth Police Program that has been very successful. We have worked with the association, which began in the 1960s, to make a difference. The association is determined to make improvements to receive better ratings.

Making a real difference is a goal for Bowser and the other neighborhood associations, that meet at the Northwest Neighborhoods Services Center, realizing it makes them stronger politically when they can speak with a united voice.

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The Unity of Washington Heights

By Kristian Coley

Washington Heights is a neighborhood that has “so much to offer,” said Ruth Pleas, a newcomer to this historic neighborhood. “It was everything I wanted.”

With a historical legacy dating back to 1910, Washington Heights is the first neighborhood built for middle-income blacks and the only original streetcar suburb in all of North Carolina. Nestled in the back streets of Beatties Ford Road, just miles from Uptown, this handsome neighborhood features eye-catching and beautiful vintage homes. The architecture and Southern charm of its homes and commercial buildings makes it one of Charlotte’s most attractive historic districts.

One of the most architecturally and historically interesting commercial buildings that is still standing is the Excelsior Club. This club is an example of Charlotte’s best Art Modern architecture, its white concrete finish and black accent is a sight to remember. Built in 1946, it was owned and operated by Jimmy McKee. During the 1950s and 1960s, the club became a meeting place for influential African-Americans and political leaders. Today, it still continues to be a landmark, and every weekend you can see people lining up in extravagant suits and dresses waiting to get in.

Living in an inner city community, Washington Heights residents have a vision to “develop and maintain an attractive, historic neighborhood that has a variety of stable housing opportunities and safe, pedestrian friendly streets that provides access to jobs, parks, transit, schools, businesses and other resources.” They plan to build on a sense of pride and place to make it an even better neighborhood to live, work, and play. Mattie Marshall, on staff at Johnson C. Smith University and president of the Washington Heights Community Association, is proud of her community. The neighborhood began to revitalize by initiating an action plan in 2002 adopted by the city council. “You don’t have to move to live in a better neighborhood, it’s the power of the people,” she explained.

“And its residents are what make this community inviting,” Pleas said. She explained the warm welcome she received when moving to the community three years ago, making her feel a part of something when the neighbors went out of their way to greet her.

The residents consider themselves more like a family than just neighbors. Washington Heights is often described as one of those rare communities that prides and cares together, as well as networks to share resources. Its residents are firm believers in community building and enjoying each other’s company.

The community has created traditions such as taking trips once a year to the Valle Crucis Conference Center and helping community children write “Dear God” letters on Sundays. Community and education are vital responsibilities of Washington Heights, demonstrated by the Washington Heights Youth Services Academy’s after-school tutorial/leadership programs and partnerships with Charlotte Mecklenburg Schools and Time Warner Cable to bring computer access to the neighborhood.

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Washington Heights is a neighborhood that has “so much to offer,” said Ruth Pleas, a newcomer to this historic neighborhood. “It was everything I wanted.”

With a historical legacy dating back to 1910, Washington Heights is the first neighborhood built for middle-income blacks, and the only original streetcar suburb in all of North Carolina.

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WESLEY HEIGHTS

The neighborhood’s vision is a “proud environment promoting unity, individual acceptance, and respect, and ownership towards a more common good for ourselves and others.”

Located on the Westside, Wesley Heights was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1994, in part because much of the original character of its early development in the 1920s and 1930s is still intact. The predominant housing type is the Craftsman-style bungalow, and then in the 1930s, builders added Tudor Revival and Colonial Revival.

There are 356 houses in Wesley Heights, mostly located on four major streets: Walnut Avenue, South Summit Avenue, Woodruff Place, and Grandin Road. West Morehead, I-77, and Wesley Heights Way bound it, making it a self-contained district that is only 1.5 miles from the corner of Trade and Tryon Streets in uptown Charlotte.

The president of the Wesley Heights Community Association, Steve Thomas, moved there over three years ago. “Our house is new. But because we followed the strict guidelines for building in an historic district, it looks like it has always been here. People have even asked us when we finished our renovation. We are glad for these guidelines because it keeps the neighborhood consistent in beauty and design. And we are so close to work in downtown that I can actually walk there on nice days.”

Though Thomas moved to Charlotte from Dayton, Ohio, 10 years ago, he did not know about Wesley Heights until more recently. “I didn’t know that such a wonderful place existed right in the shadow of downtown until a friend introduced us to it. Through our friend, we met community members right away. In fact, before we moved in, we realized that we knew more people in Wesley Heights than we had for the whole time we lived in the suburbs. People here want to live in a community and are open to establishing meaningful relationships. It almost feels like a small town.”

Thomas and the community association face a number of important issues in keeping that open, warm feeling alive. Huge, stately trees abound, creating a gothic archway over many of the streets, and the health of these trees is of great interest to them. “We are taking an active role in a grassroots effort, along with several surrounding neighborhoods, to ask the city to have dedicated funding or the preservation, maintenance, and importantly, replacement of our tree canopies.”

The association also encourages the ongoing renovation of older homes in keeping with the community’s character, while maintaining diversity and adding to the younger population. Thomas understands that Wesley Heights will continue to grow and prosper with children living there. He does not recall there being so many baby carriages along the sidewalks when he moved there three years ago. And the Association is pleased that a Mommy’s group has been formed that meets once a month.

There are many events and programs sponsored by the association, from the annual neighborhood clean up to an Arbor Day festival. This past Halloween, they had their first parade for kids to march in costume along the greenway on Littaker Avenue next to Frasier Park.

The annual Christmas party is often held at the George Pierce Wadsworth Estate on South Summit Avenue, which was designed by a local architect, Louis H. Asbury and built by E.C. Griffith in 1911. After numerous ownership changes, Judge Shirley L. Fulton, a resident of Wesley Heights, purchased it in 2001 and restored much of the main house to its original glory, creating an events and conference center. It is a source of great pride for the neighborhood.

Thomas points to the fact that he has inherited great momentum achieved by past presidents, and he hopes to continue their fine work. He is determined the Wesley Heights Community Association will play a role in the city in planning for the Fourth Street extension from Johnson and Wales University. “We are lucky to live here and we hope to increase the visibility of our neighborhood in Charlotte, maybe through a home tour. We want to establish good relationships with builders and developers to ensure that everything conforms to the historic guidelines and our goal of being a safe, happy place for people of all ages and races.”

Wesley Heights, then and now, — one imagines that the founders would be pleased to hear their vision is still intact.
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Johnson C. Smith University and Livingstone College invite you to attend a two-day, pre-game symposium. This joint initiative will address issues, opportunities, and actions related to the Black/Minority male crisis in the U.S.

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GAME: JCSU VS. LIVINGSTONE COLLEGE
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