

Church pastor, member aim to galvanize Mooretown renewal on Carver Street

April 2, 2007

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A Mooretown church plans to sow the seeds of community renewal on Carver Street.

Emmanuel Church of God in Christ will start building houses on three church-owned lots in the next six months. At the same time, the church will ask city officials to donate 25 adjudicated properties on Carver Street to expand rebuilding activities.

The church anchors the corner of Carver and Kennedy Drive. Shady Oaks Bar, with rooms to rent by the hour out back, sits on the other end of the two-block street. A hand-lettered sign tacked on an outside wall of the bar notes that people wanting to use a room for more than three hours must talk to the owner.

In between are aging but tidy wood-frame homes, a Baptist church, vacant houses, weedy lots, a shade-tree mechanic and a fenced compound piled with a flea market's worth of junk.

Sheena Miller, who works at Innovator hair salon, applauds the church's renewal ideas. Miller's family owns the salon, which draws more customers from elsewhere in Shreveport than the street where it sits. She and others on the street weren't aware of the church's plans.

"The house across the street, it burned down and nobody's done anything about it," Miller said. "If they would take those (vacant) houses, tear them down and rebuild, it would bring the property values up some."

Mesh on the salon's doors and windows, permanently locked doors and a security camera attest to concerns about neighborhood crime. However, Miller said, police are stepping up enforcement, and things seem to be calmer than in the past.

Fourth-grader Oneisha Thompson is concerned about safety on the street where her grandmother lives.

"I would like to stop all the crime," Oneisha said. "I would stop people from littering, too."

Toys on front porches and in yards attest to the children living on Carver. They ride bikes along the street, stopping to play tag or made-up games.

Rickie Keys, who created a renewal plan for Mooretown, sees the children and their parents as the generations to breathe new life into the neighborhood, one block at a time.

He and Brian Hollins, pastor of Emmanuel Church, hope the proposed revamp of Carver Street will become a model for similar projects in Mooretown and Shreveport.

"We will work with other churches," Keys said. "If each of us can take on 10, 15, 20 houses, whatever we can control, then we can work on renewal throughout the neighborhood."

Keys, a New Orleans native, came to Shreveport with his wife, Angela Keys, a Keithville native, after Hurricane Katrina. He previously worked with Tenet Healthcare and is associated with the Center for African-American Policy at the University of Denver.

In 2006, he started Renewal Financial Services. He proposes helping line up financing for housing construction, offering first-time homebuyer and credit education to potential Mooretown residents so they can earn more favorable interest rates and helping find low-interest mortgage funding to create more owner-occupied houses in the neighborhood.

A member of Emmanuel Church of God in Christ, Keys created the renewal plan at no charge. The proposal goes beyond building a few houses and fixing up a few more. Keys said he wants to address community needs, from banks to health care. His goals include luring a primary care clinic to Mooretown.

The plan also calls for construction trades training in conjunction with home building to give residents a shot at higher wages and a better



Kitty Jackson (left, seated) has her hair done by Sheena Miller recently at Innovators Beauty Salon & Hair and Body Care in the Mooretown neighborhood in Shreveport. Shirley Pierson (right) is having her hair done by owner, Lee Washington. (Jim Hudelson/ The Times)

What's next

Residents can discuss what changes they want to see in the Mooretown neighborhood during a community meeting at 6 p.m. April 23 at Airport Park Recreation Center, 6500 Kennedy Drive in Shreveport. Call Emmanuel Church of God in Christ at (318) 636-0453 or Rickie Keys at (888) 736-3990 for more information.

Multimedia:



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standard of living.

"Besides building houses, we'll go to each of the residents on Carver Street and ask them what their needs are, like paint or repairs," Keys said. "There are a lot of property owners who don't live here. We'll ask them if they want to sell to the church, then the church can offer those properties on a rent-to-own plan to the people who already live there. We want to develop a culture of ownership."