

A Great Place to Live!

Comments made at the Raleigh Community Relations Commission Forum: Jan. 31, 2015

Southeast Raleigh is a wonderful place to live.

Not only are we near downtown and the state, city and county governments, we have proximity to great parks and community centers, and we have easy access to our interstate and some of the best highways in North Carolina. This means we can get to points east, west, north and south, for jobs and travel to our leisure destinations---our coast to our South and East and our mountains and major cities to our west.

But Southeast Raleigh is not a neighborhood. It is a community made up of many diverse neighborhoods. Since the end of slavery and the implementation of urban renewal, we have become a community not only known for its large African American population; over 70% of our residents are African American, but a place where all people and ethnicities are welcome. As a matter of fact, it would be hard to find any community in Raleigh that can match the broadness of population as we are home to people from many countries, speaking many different languages, and bringing their own cultures and points of view to Southeast Raleigh.

So we have grown since slavery has ended. From our traditional neighborhoods of Fourth Ward and Hungry Neck, South Park and the area that has become known as downtown east and our public housing communities of Chavis Heights and Walnut Terrace; we have ventured into Lincoln Park, and Joe Louis Park, and College Park. We have built Rochester Heights, Biltmore Hills, Kingwood Forest, Southgate, and Apollo Heights. We built other homes in Foxfire, Lyndhurst Drive, Battery Heights and Delany Drive. We assumed homes on Glenbrook Drive and Rose Lane, and bought homes in Worthdale and Longview Gardens. We extended outside the beltline to Heddingham and Rogers Lane, and Poole Road to Barwell Road and Holiday Estates, and out Rock Quarry past the high school and the Amphitheater and Jones Sausage Road.

We have grown to become a community of diverse neighborhoods where people of diverse economic means can still live comfortably together. Our anchors have been Shaw University and St. Augustine's University and our churches. Founded right after the Civil War, the Universities have not only been the economic underpinning of our community, they have provided the education that has been the key to African American mobility within our city. For many years they educated our teachers, our ministers, our doctors, our businessmen, our state government workers and our political leaders. And our churches, not only Saint Paul and First Baptist that remain downtown, but also Rush, Tupper, Davie Street, Martin Street, Grace, St. Mathew, St. Ambrose, First Cosmopolitan, Macedonia, First Congregational and the many others that could be named who have made long standing contributions to the Southeast Raleigh Community.

However, a quick look at the community may cause one to underestimate its strength. The fact that First Baptist Church was co-founded in 1812 at the same time as the "White" First Baptist, or that what is now called Moore Square was once called Baptist Grove where black farmers brought their produce to be sold. Washington School may be overlooked though it stands majestically on a site that was once surrounded by houses

and was the pride of South Raleigh as the site of the new public high school. Shaw University, though it was founded in 1865, may not be known as the mother of college education for African Americans in North Carolina or Estey Hall as the first residence hall for women, or Leonard Medical Center as the first and only four year medical school in the country. Dr. Manassas Pope, whose house remains near downtown on Wilmington Street, not only provided Medical Care, he was first black man to run for political office in the city.

You might pass Lightner Funeral Home and not recognize that it was owned by Lawrence Lightner, one of city's finest entrepreneurs or that its subsequent President, Clarence Lightner, became the city's first and only Black Mayor. You would not recall the grandeur of Chavis Park as the site of Shaw Athletics, but also the place where African Americans would come from across the Southeast to swim and participate in the J.D. Lewis hosted Teen Age Frolics. You might miss Ligon High School and its glorious athletic and academic record in the 50's and 60's that produced Sheriff John Baker and Pat White among many outstanding graduates.

You may overlook the Martin Luther King Gardens and not understand the serenity of a place within the heart of community where people can come to reflect on the distance traveled and things yet to be accomplished. As you journey down Rock Quarry, you may not grasp the importance of the Crosslink Road Shopping Center or having a grocery store in proximity to those who may be transportation challenged. It may be difficult to comprehend why it was important to locate Southeast Raleigh High School or Walnut Creek Elementary inside the community, or the pride we feel when we look at the inventions celebrated at the African American Cultural Center on Sunnybrook Road.

We are happy to host Wake Medical Center as the primary health care center within the county. Not only does it serve as our most significant employer, it continues a tradition of medical care that began at St. Agnes Hospital on the campus of St. Augustine's University. It is significant as we travel down New Bern Avenue to notice Richard B. Harrison Library and the huge accomplishments of Molly Lee to the preservation of Black Literature. And Saint Monica's School that gave so many a head start in their education. It is notable that it has now been reclaimed as a Youth Center.

Saint Augustine's University, by the way, remains a vital contributor to our community. Since its founding in 1867, it has continued to be relevant to our future. We are pleased that the interim President, Dr. Everett Ward, is a Southeast Raleigh native. We are confident they will continue to play a significant role in our future. If you haven't been on campus, I would suggest their chapel as a good destination. Built from an on campus quarry with rocks hauled by students, it is a special place and worth the time spent there.

There are many people who have contributed to Southeast Raleigh. There are too many to be mentioned. But names like John Winters, Fred Carnage, Elizabeth Cofield, Ralph Campbell, Margaret Hinton, Jessie Copeland, Top Greene, Dr. Debnam, HB Pickett, Clarence Lightner, the Wimberleys, George Greene, Dr. Johnson, Dr. Ward, Father Calloway, Rev. Johnson, Vernon Malone, Dr. Fleming, Dr. Robinson, Dorothy Allen are among them. They struggled against adversity. They stood up to be counted. They helped make Southeast Raleigh the great place it is today.