

Atlanta Journal-Constitution, The (GA)

June 16, 2002

Section: Metro News

Edition: Home; The Atlanta Journal-Constitution

Page: C1

Carver Homes renewal spreads Bush to spotlight rebounding area

D.L. BENNETT; Staff

President George W. Bush's visit Monday to the Pryor Road corridor will focus national attention on a rebounding area that was once so unsafe that housing project residents walled themselves off for protection from the surrounding community.

What the president will see as he tours the south Atlanta neighborhood is a community quickly coming back from a period of decline and disinvestment. New houses, apartments and condominiums are rising and older homes are being fixed up and sold for record prices.

Atlanta and community leaders see it eventually becoming a success story mirroring the rebirth of East Lake, Reynoldstown and East Atlanta. Developers say that may take another decade.

"This is the most revolutionary redevelopment in the city," said Councilman Derrick Boazman, who represents part of the area. "We are moving. Good things are happening all over the area."

The catalyst for much of the new investment has been the ongoing redevelopment of Carver Homes, a 50-year-old housing project that became synonymous with illegal drugs and crime.

Private developers HJ Russell & Co. and the Integral Group joined with the Atlanta Housing Authority to raze Carver. At its place, they plan to build a mixed-use, mixed-income community called the Villages at Carver.

The huge tract sits at the gateway to seven communities that span the Pryor corridor and are all part of an ambitious effort to redevelop a wide swath of south Atlanta.

Five years ago, Carver residents stayed behind a huge iron fence built to keep dope dealers from fleeing an open-air drug market at the Joyland Plaza shopping center across Pryor Road and disappearing into the complex.

President Bush won't see the fence, Carver or Joyland. They have been razed.

The private developers behind the new Carver say its mixture of apartments, homes, townhomes and retail is spurring a transformation that will sweep across the area over the next decade.

So far, Carver has only its first phase, a 220-unit apartment complex, finished. Managers say it is full, with 30 percent rented at market rate and the remainder subsidized in some way.

"We've brought in a good cross section of Atlanta," said Jerome Russell, president and chief operating officer of HJ Russell & Co.

Bush is expected to visit **Park Place South** and welcome the first homeowners to what will eventually be a 500-unit community with townhomes, condominiums and apartments for senior citizens. So far, 34 townhomes have been completed. They sold for between \$130,000 and \$180,000. Special financing through the Atlanta Housing Authority cut the price of 10 percent of the units by about \$40,000.

Before the redevelopment, the site held Lakewood Village, which scattered dozens of two-, three- and four-unit cir

block buildings over 38 acres. Some were livable. Many were boarded or standing open and used by squatters, dr dealers or prostitutes.

Paul McMurray, a 20-year resident of nearby Chosewood Park and local neighborhood planning unit chairman, sa razing Lakewood Village has been of more immediate benefit than Carver.

"It gave an opportunity for a different direction," McMurray said. "We used to have a lot of crime along Pryor Road really don't have that anymore except in a few areas."

McMurray said community residents love seeing all the new development. Their only complaint, he said, is it hasn moved fast enough.

On Pryor Road just past the Downtown Connector, work is under way on High Point Estates, the first subdivision t built in the area in decades. Urban Residential Design Corp. is building 108 single-family detached homes and 96 apartments for senior citizens on 36 acres where a run-down apartment complex once stood.

The work along Pryor Road is far from complete and everybody's not happy.

None of the retail has been built. Developers say it may be years until enough homes and apartments are in place support it.

Also, like other housing project redevelopments, many of the residents won't be coming back. And, far fewer publi housing units will be in the new project. Some residents lament the loss of housing for Atlanta's poorest residents.

"For those of us who can come back, it's good," said Louise Whatley, a longtime resident. "For those who can't, a homeless."

But many local residents and city officials are encouraged by the changes at Carver and what's happening along t Pryor Road corridor.

The president's visit Monday will only speed the transition, officials said, by bringing more attention to a communit than five minutes from downtown, but previously overlooked because of blight and crime.

Renee Glover, who runs the Atlanta Housing Authority, said the rebirth along Pryor is a perfect place for Bush to showcase homeownership because it shows what good can happen when federal and local governments work wi private developers.

"What you are seeing is the beginning of a huge transformation," Glover said. "This [visit] gives us the opportunity showcase a number of successes here in Atlanta."

Photo: President George W. Bush

Photo: Jerome Russell (left), COO of HJ Russell & Co., and Egbert L.J. Perry, CEO of Integral Group, are at the r Villages at Carver, which their firms are developing. / BITA HONARVAR / Staff

Copyright 2002 The Atlanta Journal-Constitution