



BY WILLIAM RICH

An Interview with Thelma Jones

For almost 30 years, Thelma Jones has been a community activist in Southwest, working countless hours on a slew of Board committees, organizations, and causes. Jones is a fighter, evidenced by how she has been able to bring change to people's lives and with her successful battle over breast cancer. She says she gets her passion for community service from her parents. "My parents are civic-minded – my mom was the president of the PTA and my dad was a sharecropper farmer and a handyman who helped anyone who needed assistance," said Jones.

A native of eastern North Carolina, Jones came to Washington in 1972 after graduating from Durham College in Durham, NC. "My mother didn't want me to become a farmer's wife, so she arranged for me to live with my aunt in Southeast DC," recalled Jones. Once settling in DC, Jones started working full-time at The World Bank, where she worked for a summer while in college. She worked at The World Bank for 33 years until retiring in 2005. While taking the V7 bus each morning from Southeast to her job, she would pass by the Southwest neighborhood and say to herself: "What a great looking community, I'd like to live here one day." That wish came true when Jones moved to Channel Square apartments at 3rd Street, SW & P Street, SW in 1976. Jones' community service began in 1982, when she served on the Southwest Neighborhood Assembly's (SWNA) Scholarship Committee. Since then, Jones has served as SW-

NA's President, Vice President, District Representative, and Advisory Board member. SWNA was founded in 1964 to help mitigate social tensions as a result of urban renewal.

One of Jones' greatest achievements has been her work with youth. SWNA's Youth Activities Task Force,



Thelma Jones has been serving the Southwest community for nearly 30 years. Photo by Jim Johnson

which was created in 1985, established a Summer Jobs Program which helped place more than 800 kids in summer jobs, including local businesses and The World Bank, during the almost eight years the program was in existence. "The Mayor's Summer Jobs Program was modeled after what we did in Southwest and once that city-wide program took off, we no longer needed to continue ours," said Ms. Jones. Based on her success with the Summer Jobs Program, Jones founded a similar program at

The World Bank in 1999 that is still in existence today. Another popular program of the Southwest Youth Activities Task Force is "Computers for Kids," an 8-week training program that teaches children ages 10-13 to use Microsoft Office programs, including Word, Excel, and PowerPoint.

Since the program began in October 2007 at the King-Greenleaf Recreation Center, more than 45 kids have graduated and upon completion, each received a refurbished computer donated by businesses or individuals.

As someone who has been involved in the community for several decades, Ms. Jones has been witness to many changes in Southwest. Following a decades-long lull of development in the neighborhood, Capitol Square townhouses on G Street, SW were built in 2001. According to Jones, "the townhouses (where former DC Police Chief Charles Ramsey used to live) were practically sold out by the time they were completed." Following Capitol Square was Potomac Place Condos, then the refurbishment of the apartments at Town Center and

more recently Waterfront Station and Arena Stage. Along with all the new development over the past few years, new people have been moving to the neighborhood, bringing with them a change in attitude about the renaissance occurring in Southwest. "Many of the newer residents welcome the development in the neighborhood which is some-

what different than some of those who have lived here longer," said Ms. Jones. With new development closing in on the neighborhood, from the Capitol Riverfront area to the east and the Southwest Waterfront to the west, Jones feels that those in public housing especially are concerned about their future in Southwest because "they have little or no voice." A challenge that Southwest faces as the neighborhood moves forward, according to Jones is "we need to rethink how we regard each other as it relates to building and maintaining trust and understanding. We must determine how we can better help those in need to become more self sufficient instead of adding to their fears which only creates more tension and misunderstanding."

New Apartment Building to Start Construction

The apartment building boom that occurred over the past few years in the Near Southeast neighborhood has now crossed South Capitol Street. After more than three years of delays due to the economic down-



Camden South Capitol will be the first brand-new apartment community to be built in Southwest in decades. Courtesy of Camden Property Trust and WDG Architecture

turn, Camden Property Trust will finally start construction at their Camden South Capitol project this March, located at the northwest corner of South Capitol Street, SW & O Street, SW. The project was approved by the District in 2007, but the only progress made since then was demolition of existing buildings on the site, including a taxi garage. In the past year, financing has loosened for multifamily construction, resulting in a recent increase in apartment building activity.

Despite the thousands of apartments built in the city during the past decade, Camden South Capitol will be the first brand-new apartment building to start construction in Southwest since the 1970s, although Potomac Place Condos began construction in 2003 as apartments. The 276-unit, high-rise apartment building designed by WDG Architecture will be located directly across the street from Nationals Park and contain about 3,000 square feet of ground floor retail. Twelve of the residential units will be reserved as affordable housing and there will be a total of 250 below-grade parking spaces.

According to Mark Coletta, Vice President of Real Estate Investments at Camden Property Trust, the total development cost will be \$88 million. "The rooftop pool and deck look very cool" said Coletta. From the rooftop, residents will get a great view of the Friday night fireworks show that takes place during Nationals home games, as well as the Washington Monument, the Capitol building, and the Anacostia River. Balconies on the upper floors of the South Capitol Street, SW side of the building will also get a view of baseball games. Leasing will commence in April 2013 and construction should be complete by June 2013.

William Rich is a blogger at Southwest...The Little Quadrant that Could (www.southwestquadrant.blogspot.com). ★

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