

## Local Leaders Look To Residents to Lead Revitalization of Jefferson Ave

by Kevin R. Scott

The residents of Jefferson Avenue and surrounding community will finally see the long rumored revitalization of their neighborhood come to life as formalized efforts to get the project under way begin to take shape. Led by the Jefferson Avenue Business Association, in conjunction with SWAN, local legislators-- Calvin Lee Jr. (25th District) and Willie J. Lightfoot Jr. (27th District) -- alongside other local community leaders, residents of the community are being called upon to take on an active role in the revitalization.

Still in its infancy, the revitalization effort has received overwhelming support from Congresswoman Louise Slaughter who has helped to rally the support of the Urban League, Mayor Duffy and the University of Rochester's Simon Business School. Already, Slaughter's office has committed \$100,000 to be allotted to feasibility studies, business training and other educational outreach efforts. The city of Rochester has allotted \$1.6 million towards the revitalization which will go towards infrastructure-rebuilding curbsides, improving lighting and restoring the facades of many of the already existing structures on Jefferson Avenue.

As the project moves forward, the city's economic development department will also be involved in helping to garner potential investors as most of the property owned on Jefferson Avenue by the city are currently vacant lots. Investors play a key role in the development of new housing and businesses in the area--another concern of many of the community members.

After a walking tour and assessment of the district, a 'visionary' meeting was held on March 28th with residents of the community to flesh out the concerns necessary to have the revitalization be successful for all parties involved and to have the community itself identify the areas of improvement most important to them.

"The meeting was filled with a lot of energy and ideas," said Patricia Jackson, Executive Director of SWAN. "We addressed the issues of housing, business development, public safety and most importantly we addressed the services needed in the neighborhood. We worked on an assessment of the negatives and the positives of the neighborhood and what is needed to make the neighborhood not only more inviting to investors but stable for the current residents."

From the perspective of current business owners, one of the greatest concerns is how will this revitalization affect their ability to develop their property and services and ultimately broaden their profit margins.

"I have to assess the actual use of [funds] we are going to get to support the area," warns Lee. "If we are going to look at how we can truly enhance the businesses on Jefferson Avenue, we're going to have to be in a position to give them financial support...I am looking for the type of investment that will provide the existing local businesses with the support of grants and loans as well as developmental training."

All parties involved believe one of the main obstacles that must be surmounted in getting the revitalization in full

swing is the marketing and communication of the ideas of the entire initiative to the residents.

"Once you get the residents to buy into the idea of revitalization, you have to educate them on what the process is going to be," says Lee. "You cannot expect them to understand all the advocacy that needs to take place and who are going to be the players. Right now, most people are questioning 'what's in it for me?' And if you can't help them to understand that job opportunities, programs to assist their families and their children are going to come out of this process there is going to be difficulty in getting their support."

Separately, but equally as important, is the issue of public safety. Although the area has been plagued by drug dealing and other related crimes, policing the activities in the community must be approached in a delicate manner.

"Jefferson Avenue has always been a social area where we, as a culture, tend to congregate and we don't want it to be perceived that is a sign of pedaling and dealing drugs," contends Lee. "I have to be very cautious because if this is all addressed under the umbrella of public safety there is the issue of cultural sensitivity on behalf of law enforcement that must accompany this revitalization."

"When I think revitalization, I think that of all the systemic issues that have plagued Jefferson Avenue for the past 20 years are going to be addressed. Revitalization is not just about changing lights, renovations and making things look better," says Lightfoot who contends that the revitalization efforts must include a revision of thought of the community at large and those that govern it.

"What we are trying to develop is a more holistic model that places the community members and residents at the center of all the efforts."

One of the greatest concerns of a revitalization of any urban neighborhood is whether or not the long-standing residents will be ultimately displaced. An example brought forward by Lee is the redevelopment of the Cornhill Historic District which underwent a major regentrification. "Perception is 3/4 of anything and you don't want this to be perceived as a takeover," says Lee about how to ensure continued community support and involvement. "I've always encouraged, in whatever we do, we must be sensitive to the issues of shelter."

"There will be no gentrification in this effort," assures Lightfoot. "That is why it was brought about by the Jefferson Avenue Business Association. I have been very clear with the city, Congresswoman Slaughter and all involved that the community should have first access to whatever is provided."

In related news, Rochester's City Hall has announced that it will spend more than \$17 million in federal housing funds to revitalize city neighborhoods including the Jefferson Avenue area via a Community Development Plan. Under the plan, the city will spend \$4.5 million to promote economic stability, \$9.6 million to improve the housing stock and more than \$2 million for general needs.

## A Homerun for Historical Omissions America's favorite pastime, not American

by Rajesh Barnabas

The book club Moving Beyond Racism celebrated its 7th Anniversary with cake and a visit from controversial author LeAnne Howe. The Native American novelist joined the club in their monthly discussion circle on the second floor of Barnes & Noble in Pittsford. Cultural miscues between Natives and Americans provide a reservoir of material for Howe's historical fiction Miko Kings. The premise for the book remains the hardest hitting: Native Americans invented baseball.

Howe provided a behind the scenes look at writing her novel. Using a first-person narrative technique, the character Lena has many parallels to the author's own life. Both are Choctaw Indians, both grew up in Ada, Oklahoma - once the queen city of Indian Territory. The setting of her story is 1907, white settlers are making plans to turn the Territory into the state of Oklahoma, but the focus is Henri Day's all-Indian baseball team, the Miko Kings.

Howe explained that the 7th U.S. Cavalry was stationed in Oklahoma, and the various soldier's teams would play baseball with the Indian Territory teams. Like her character Lena, the author LeAnne still lives in her grandmother's house in Ada.

"In its heyday, Ada had its own opera house and a twenty-four hour restaurant," Howe noted nostalgically. For a small town this was unique. Its location on a major railroad route and in the middle of the Pacific-Atlantic time zones explains its importance. Today Ada remains the headquarters of the Chickasaw Nation Indian tribe. Howe says the candy store, described in the book, really exists. "Their Bedré Chocolates are marketed all over the country."

One of the difficulties a reader had with the book was it's flipping in and out of fact and fiction. For other readers it was the two different endings, and non-sequential time structure that frustrated them.

The author admitted that many of her friends were physicists, and she had spoken to them during the process of writing the novel. But beyond that, she explained that her Native culture has a different way of seeing reality. The Alikchi, is an Indian spirit doctor, who can bend time and space. She described the cloud splitting ceremony, where the Alikchi recognizes the sky turning blue-green - a sign of a tornado coming, and can split the cloud and save the community. "It's called doctoring the tornado," Howe said.

The duality of time, can also be noticed in baseball, Howe said. Any other game played by Americans, has shot clocks, and time periods and rounds. Baseball is played according to runs and outs, and innings are not bound by time. Another sign that indicates the game was not invented by Europeans nor American settlers says Howe, "the run-

ner moves around the bases counter-clockwise." She continues, "Yet the scholars and historians look all over the world for the origin of baseball, instead of researching the tons of evidence right here among Native cultures."

Another issue Howe addressed, separate from her novel, was the persistent use of Indian mascots by schools and sports teams. At the University of Illinois, where Howe is Associate Professor of American Indian Studies, the Chief Illiniwek was recently dropped as the school mascot. Howe was behind the efforts to terminate the Chief's use, and for doing so, her office received a number of death threats. Even though the Chief was retired last March, the problem is continuing. Howe said that 10,000 students signed a petition recently to try to re-instate the Chief.

"They've held demonstrations, in ridiculous costumes and dance outside the stadium," said Howe. "We are trying to end this racism that continues to make us invisible." She said that the use of the mascots keeps up inaccurate stereotypes. "People think we look like that. We never did wear feathers. The Choctaw wore early burlap. We were farmers and lived in houses."

"We had the same issue here in Penfield," said Patricia Mannix - a member of Moving Beyond Racism. "When they changed their name from Chiefs, you can't imagine the vitriolic comments community members made."

Howe agreed, "We have to realize that language is power, which is another message in my book. When they make you think of Iraqi soldiers as 'terrorists', that is the way they can turn the language."

Howe had discussed earlier how each culture has different speech patterns and verbs, which symbolize sometimes, entirely different ways of seeing the world. Coming full circle, she explained how these inaccurate names and mascot symbols have serious impact.

"It's all pretty troubling for our youth," Howe said. "We want to be recognized just as ourselves. We hope they will come to not be so hateful." Howe then thanked the group for inviting her to join their discussion of Miko Kings.

Pictured on the cake, celebrating Moving Beyond Racism's anniversary, was the symbol of a broken heart. Co-founder of the group - Bob Cobbett, said the picture was meant to signify that racism is damaging to all of us.

Moving Beyond Racism meets the first Monday of every month at Barnes & Nobles in Pittsford. For more info: <http://www.movingbeyondracism.org/>

As an aside: Has anyone informed Curt Smith, the conservative-leaning local WXXI radio talk host of Perspectives. He is Rochester's resident expert on politics and baseball, having been a speech-writer for the former President George Bush in 1989 and written several books

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