

# Cottage Grove corridor spruces up

by Mema Ayi  
Staff Writer

One South Side community development group will try a pilot program to spruce up its business district, and offer meaningful employment opportunities to ex-offenders and recovering addicts.

The Quad Communities Development Corporation, which seeks to build healthier communities in the neighborhoods of Douglas, Oakland, North Kenwood and Grand Boulevard communities, partnered with Ald. Toni Preckwinkle (4th) and Cleanslate, a non-profit beautification agency, plans to clean up the Cottage Grove Avenue

corridor between 35<sup>th</sup> and 51<sup>st</sup> streets in an effort to bring more shoppers to the area.

"We need to spruce up the commercial district. There is a sense of grayness," Preckwinkle said at a kickoff ceremony Wednesday morning.

The launch was the culmination of an 18-month planning process that included a poll of the corridor's business owners. Many merchants in the area said they wanted to see the excitement and vibrancy return to the area, said Bernita Johnson-Gabriel, New Communities program director at Quad Communities.

"We thought Cleanslate was part of the answer to that," Johnson-Gabriel said.

Cleanslate launched last year in the Auburn-Gresham neighborhood. The move into the Cottage Grove corridor is one of four city communities that will use the program over the next two years.

Mario Newton, 35, said Cleanslate has given him opportunities he could not find elsewhere. It is difficult for him to find work, he said, because he served time for two felonies more than a decade ago.

"A lot of us, society has given up on," Newton said of the dozen "interns" who work with him, cleaning garbage from the streets and educating merchants on recycling. "The majority of us have (criminal) records, so this is a chance to



**Members of the Cleanslate crew prepare Wednesday morning to begin beautifying the Cottage Grove Avenue corridor at 47<sup>th</sup> Street.** Defender/Mema Ayi

fill in our resumes."

Cleanslate grew out of the Cara Program, which provides job training, placement and support services for the homeless and those at risk of homelessness, said Cara spokeswoman Maria Kim.

As interns in the Cleanslate program, Cara clients learn work skills as they perform tasks. The training includes five weeks of intensive life skills training, Kim said.

85-71 on Tuesday night to 10 assists. "You've got to be Eastern Conference.

BACK NEXT WEEK, WE'LL BE ON THE