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Bronzeville sites make top endangered list

by Tedd Carrison

The Landmarks Preservation Council of Illinois named two Bronzeville buildings to its annual "Ten Most Endangered Historic Places" list March 1.

The Pickford Theater, 3459 S. Michigan Ave., and the fire-ravaged Pilgrim Baptist Church, 3301 S. Indiana Ave., joined nine other Illinois sites (Pilgrim received a special 11th designation) on LPCI's 2006 list, which highlights historic properties that face potential demolition.

In the past two months, Pilgrim Baptist has received a flurry of media coverage following the Jan. 6 fire that gutted the former synagogue and birthplace of gospel music. Shortly after the errant flame of a roofer's heating torch sparked the blaze that destroyed the building, a movement was underway to rebuild it. But its future is still uncertain.

"With Pilgrim, we want to address it as a special designation simply because what's left of the building doesn't qualify as a building anymore," said LPCI Director of Preservation Programs Elisha Tuffy. "It's really a remnant and it presents a challenge as we move forward in trying to preserve it."

She said that the Pilgrim congregation is hopeful about restoring the 115-

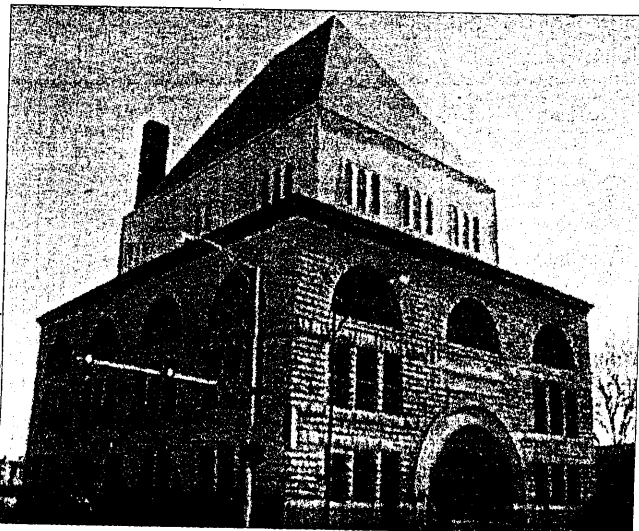


Photo Courtesy of Pilgrim Baptist Church

Historic Pilgrim Baptist Church recently burned to the ground.

year-old church and inspectors have determined that the limestone façade is stable enough to reuse. But resurrecting the work of famed architects Louis Sullivan and Dankmar Alder will not be easy.

While Pilgrim's plight has been broadcast around the world, the nearby Pickford Theater has concealed its history in an abandoned, non-descript

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Incumbent pols fight for seats in primary

by Brian Wellner

For politicians representing the South Side in Washington and Springfield, 2006 is not the beginning of the end.

Illinois House Majority Leader Barbara Flynn Currie, state Rep. Lovana "Lou" Jones and U.S. reps. Danny K. Davis and Bobby Rush tell the Herald they will not quit, not even after this next term, if they are elected. "It's too much fun," Rush said.

The four incumbents face challengers in the March 21 General Primary. Jones and Currie have run unopposed for the last several elections. Now South Sider Ranoule Tatum wants Jones' 26th District seat. Rep. Davis cannot shake Robert

Dallas of Oak Park, a Democratic convert who has challenged the veteran congressman for the last four elections. And former Chicago Housing Authority CEO

Phillip Jackson accused Rush of having "gotten lazy" and wants his seat.

Rush joined the U.S. House of Representatives in 1993. Davis got there in 1997. Currie is one of the oldest members of the Illinois House, since 1979. And Jones arrived in 1987.

"I enjoy the challenge of being a leg-



islator," Currie said. The Hyde Parker is the first female House Majority Leader in Illinois' history.

Davis said he has a lot more legislative years left in him. "It takes so long to get things done," he said.

Dan Ryan jobs

Phillip Jackson criticized Rush for being "in hiding" when President George W. Bush recently visited Chicago to talk about the country's robust economy and unemployment rate at 4.7 percent. The U.S. Department of Labor reported the unemployment

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Job center proves to be invaluable

by Nykeya Woods

After being homeless for two months, Jason Blackwell did not expect to be turning away prospective employers. But that is exactly what happened after he discovered the Center for Working Families (CWF) in January.

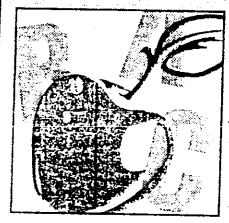
Servicing the North Kenwood, Oakland, Douglas and Grand Boulevard neighborhoods, the Abraham Lincoln Centre, 3858 S. Cottage Grove Ave., held a grand opening for the CWF on March 2. The Center for Working Families officially opened its doors Jan. 9, and has helped at least 60 people through employment and financial services since mid-November. "One of the unique things about our center is that we are not just here to help people who are unemployed or under employed," said CWF Program Director Amanda Deisch. The center has partnered with several employment agencies like CleanSlate, Jobs for Youth and Project Match.

Deisch said people who look for assistance are as young as 17 years old and looking for their first job. Other people that venture into the center are people looking to supplement income, looking to gain additional skills or certifications or seniors looking for part time employment.

"I am happy that I walked through the door," Blackwell said. He said he was in the neighborhood heading to the library to use the Internet when saw the Center for Working Families. The facility offers computer classes and Blackwell asked if he could use them to look for a job. He was told he could as long as he came back for orientation later that week. "I try to tell the other guys that walk through the door that...if you ask questions [and] come prepared then all you have to do is get up and do it," Blackwell said.

Although currently staying in a North Side shelter, Blackwell expects to move into a studio apartment this month and his is currently talking to several employers including Dial America Marketing, Inc. and AT&T.

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Soul Salon Grand Opening

by Nykeya Woods

A salon specializing in natural African-American hair held its grand opening last weekend on Cottage Grove Avenue as the city builds on its proposed master plan in the area.

Tracy D. and Joyce Kelly-Brown, owners of Soul Salon Spa, 4256 S. Cottage Grove Ave., decided to open in Bronzeville to give the neighborhood a salon that focused on natural hair care. "There are a lot of people in their homes just salivating over the opportunity to come into something nice, [a place] that they don't have to go up north or to the suburbs for," Tracy said. "They see things are changing and they want to see nice [stores] in their neighborhood."

The couple also owns Jazz Barbershop, 748 E. 43rd St., around the corner from Soul Salon Spa. Tracy said it was a no-brainer to purchase the space when it became available. They also own Blues Barbershop, 1376 E. 53rd St. "A lot of people in Chicago don't know how to really deal with our hair, how to treat our hair, how to console and educate on the multiple styles," Joyce said. "When we got the space, I told Tracy we have to do a salon because I need a place where I can go personally, and as well as my sorority sisters and friends and people like me."

The salon, which will be the exclusive home outside of New York for the Miss Jessie's hair technique, is the only salon to do Sisterlocks, and is also one of two locations in the city that offers the Carol's Daughter line, Joyce said. They also offer massages, pedicures, manicures and workshops.

The Cottage Grove Avenue corridor, from 39th to 51st streets, could see more retailers like Soul Salon Spa according to a Master Plan

presentation by Andre Brumfield of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill LLP at the February 43rd/Cottage Grove Tax Increment Financing (TIF) meeting. "The idea is to create an active mixed-use district that incorporates all three retail residential/commercial and office [spaces] and has a vibrant pedestrian-friendly corridor," Brumfield said.

The architectural company is proposing to create a residential heavy area — creating several condominium buildings with retail storefronts and town homes — along Cottage Grove after they identified 10 parcels on 23 acres that could be redeveloped. In the parcels, more than 500 residential units would be available and more than 200,000 square feet of retail would be available. Brumfield said that in 2003, the firm identified five sites on 15 acres of land and 43rd and 47th streets as key residential/commercial areas. Sine then, the company has added 45th Street to the key areas. "We see every two blocks there is a major intersection where there is new development happening on the corridor," Brumfield said.

While nine of the 10 proposed parcels are mixed-use, Brumfield suggested placing a grocery store on the southwest corner of 47th Street.

Ald. Toni Preckwinkle (4th) said that residents in the area have complained about the neighborhood being gray and dirty. She also said that she is looking at creating residential developments between 47th and 48th streets from Cottage Grove to Evans avenues. "So we have some land that's in public hands that can kind of kick start development," she said.

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Historic

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storefront that most recently served as an auto repair garage.

Tim Samuelson, cultural historian for the City of Chicago, has extensively researched Pickford and said the site is unique because of its historical layers. First a trailblazing movie theater/music venue, then an acting center and lastly a garage, he said the Pickford is important for its architecture, its history and its role near the former State Street entertainment district dubbed "The Stroll."

"It was built to serve the fairly newly established African-American community in that area," said Samuelson. "And that area is known internationally as one of the creative incubators of Blues and Jazz in the early 20th century and many of the bands that gave it that identity are bands that played in the theater."

He said the 94-year-old Pickford is the last of 18 similar movie houses that predate the large, elaborate theaters that would characterize the golden age of the silver screen. Aside from the famous musicians who played there — including "Jelly Roll" Morton and Bronzeville's own Captain Walter Dyett — the Pickford drew attention for premiering the films of

Oscar Micheaux. This African-American novelist-turned-director became known for his graphic depictions of racism that included scenes of lynching, rape and other violence against blacks. Samuelson said Micheaux's most controversial film debuted at the

Pickford just month's after Chicago's notorious race riots of 1919. As a response to D.W. Griffith's popular "Birth of a Nation," a possible portrait of the Ku Klux Klan, Micheaux created "Within Our Gates," which included brutal scenes of racial injustice and mob violence. Samuelson said riot-weary city officials threatened to censor the film for fear it would revive unrest, but the Pickford showed it anyway to outraged but civil audiences.

In 1941, the theater was remodeled and renamed the Louis, after Bronzeville resident and prizefighter Joe Louis. It continued to show movies until the late 1950s when it closed. Its screen, bordered by a proscenium arch, is still intact and plastered in place.

In 1967, the acclaimed playwright Theodore Ward gave the building a new purpose, said Samuelson. Ward, who once worked with figures like Langston Hughes and Paul Robeson, opened the South Side Center for the Performing Arts at the site. Until his death in 1983, Ward led this workshop for actors, dramatists and set-builders, said Samuelson.

Once the theatrical center closed, the building reopened as a garage until this enterprise pulled out and left it under the control of the city, which issued a Request for Proposals in 2002, said Tuffy.

She said the nearby De La Salle Institute has expressed a desire to level the building and expand its campus, which contributed to its endangered listing. "It's a completely adaptable space that could be used for a number of purposes,"

said Tuffy. "It's not restricted at all and even if De La Salle were to incorporate this building into its larger plan, that has been done countless times. We wanted to put that out there as they move forward."

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Owen M. Lawson, III

Rev. Leon Finney Jr. was honored by the Hyde Park Historical Society recently for his work restoring the Metropolitan church building.

Ryan

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rate among African Americans in the country at 8.9 percent in January. The 1st Congressional District is 68 percent African American.

Jackson hit a little closer to home when he accused Rush of not being more outspoken about the less than 5 percent of Dan Ryan Expressway reconstruction jobs set aside for those living in the 1st Congressional District. In an interview with the Herald last week, Rush explained that a U.S. Department of Transportation regulation forbids hiring workers locally as a means of reducing patronage. He said he has fought to overturn this regulation.

"We get all the dust, all the delay and none of the dough," Rush said of the \$600 million project, now about half over.

The congressman opposed the decision last spring by the Illinois Department of Transportation to disband a Dan Ryan task force made up of South Side community leaders.

Still, Jackson said that a congressman overseeing a major road construction project in his district should be more proactive about creating jobs.

Rush called on his record to demonstrate his commitment to job growth and access to jobs, citing the rehabilitation and opening of Metra stations on the South Side and a franchise business conference he hosted in 2004 at the University of Chicago. He secured \$10 million for welfare-to-work programs, assisting Bronzeville's Abraham Lincoln Centre to help parents in need of job training and entry level opportunities.

Job center

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Newly transplanted Henry Moore had a different approach when he arrived at the CWF.

"I walked through the door with a lot of skepticism in my mind, not about the program, but about the staff," Moore said. Within a week, he said his doubt about the staff was gone.

"They had done things for me I never imagined they would do to prepare me," he said. The staff guided Moore towards employment and "in some instances knocked on the door," he said. The center provided transportation in terms of transit cards and even assisted him with personal grooming.

Moore moved to Chicago from St. Louis to take care of family. In St. Louis, he spent 26 years as a special education teacher in the public school system. CWF will help Moore

become certified to teach for Chicago Public Schools. "What's really neat about this program is that once you get the job, you can come back," said Zirl Smith, Abraham Lincoln Centre president.

CWF also provides free tax preparation services Mondays, Wednesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays through April 15 for families that make less than \$38,000 and single households that make less than \$14,000. With 22 sites across the city, the Abraham Lincoln Centre offers employment assistance including resume preparation, licensing, certification and training opportunities, job placement assistance, executive search services and career advancement coaching. The center also offers GED classes.

CWF is funded by the Partnership for New Communities, the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, LISCC/Chicago and the Illinois Department of Commerce and Economic Opportunity. For more information call 773-285-1390 or visit abelink.org.

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