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Despite efforts by the city to **clean up abandoned houses and overgrown lots**, crime persists in some blighted Fayetteville neighborhoods. **An initiative in Atlanta** may provide a model for **the way forward**.



Charles Jones, left, and Buddy Dunn talk around a burn barrel on Progress Street in Massey Hill, one of Fayetteville's struggling neighborhoods. Story, **Page 5A**

## FIGHTING BLIGHT



### SEEKING SAFETY

You can read other reports from the Observer's yearlong project at **fayobserver.com**. Scroll down the home page to the 'Seeking Safety' section of the site.

### INSIDE

■ Fayetteville's mayor and police chief find work to be done on a tour of blighted neighborhoods, **Page 5A**

■ Other cities' efforts can be a model for our city, says executive editor Michael Adams, **Page 11A**

Story by **Greg Barnes**  
Photos by **James Robinson**

**N**ew apartments near downtown Fayetteville are evidence of the city's most significant effort to turn around a troubled neighborhood.

Five years ago, apartment complexes began to rise where

once stood two of the most rundown and crime-infested public housing projects in the city — Campbell Terrace and Delona Gardens.

The last apartments will be finished by June, marking the end of a \$120 million project funded largely through federal Hope VI grants for distressed public housing.

But just beyond those new

townhouses and apartments — in what has long been considered Fayetteville's poorest neighborhood — crime and blight stubbornly remain.

Just a couple of blocks away, outside a house on Nimocks Avenue, young children were playing basketball in the street a few days ago. About 25 feet away, a man exchanged a wad of bills for a small package.

A large group of people congregate outside the house almost every day. Trash and debris fill the vacant lot next door.

"It's real bad," said George Cradle, the neighborhood's former community watch coordinator. "You can go down through that crowd and they don't want to get out of the street. You can't mess

See **BLIGHT**, **Page 4A**

### TRAYVON MARTIN CONFERENCE

## Author challenges young black men

■ Jawanza Kunjufu speaks to more than 200 men and boys at First Baptist Church on Moore Street.

By **Chick Jacobs**  
Staff writer

Jawanza Kunjufu didn't mince his words or mask his emotions.

**INSIDE** ■ NAACP speaker: Make children a priority, **Page 1B**

hanging in the balance. Kunjufu, the keynote speaker Saturday at the



Trayvon Martin Black Men and Boys Conference at First Baptist Church on Moore Street, told a packed sanctuary that their futures would come down to a series of choices.

And at the heart of those choices, only one person would stand responsible.

See **CONFERENCE**, **Page 7A**

### 7 TONIGHT, NBC

## CLOSING AT SOCHI



Russia is expected to put on a spectacle for the Closing Ceremony of the 2014 Winter Olympic Games.

### INSIDE

## FRESH LOCAL

A Homegrown Underground Bistro focuses on food from local growers **Sunday Life** magazine



### SEVEN INJURED

## Soldier killed during training is identified

By **Gregory Phillips**  
Staff writer

Fort Bragg was Pfc. James Groth's first duty station. Having enlisted in 2012,



the Washington state native was assigned to Bragg's Bravo Battery, 3rd Battalion, 321st Field Artillery Regiment out of basic training.

The 22-year-old cannon crew member's first assignment for the Army also would be his last. Groth was killed

### INSIDE

■ Bragg soldier shot down in Vietnam to be buried, **Page 1B**

Friday during a live-fire artillery training exercise that injured seven other soldiers, two of them seriously.

On Saturday, Fort Bragg officials released the identities and conditions of those involved in the incident.

Sgt. Cory Muzzy, 25, of Pecos, N.M., is in critical but stable condition at Duke University Medical Center. Spc. Scott Yeates, 30, of Sanford, See **SOLDIER**, **Page 7A**

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### today's weather

8B

Sunny to partly cloudy and nice.

72  
High

46  
Low



## Blight: Redevelopment plan transformed an Atlanta neighborhood long plagued by crime

From Page 1A

with them. I don't want to get shot."

Researchers have long held that blight contributes to crime. Police call it the broken windows theory. Take away that blight — the abandoned houses, the overgrown lots, the junk cars and litter — and the neighborhood will begin to heal itself, or so the theory goes.

Fayetteville has made some improvements in the neighborhood, which is bounded by Russell Street, Eastern Boulevard, Gillespie Street and Elizabethtown Road.

The city has slowly been buying properties in the neighborhood and demolishing abandoned homes. Victor Sharpe, the city's director of community development, said the process started in the 1960s and has been invigorated by the Hope VI energy. The city also has built a park, a playground and a community garden.

Habitat for Humanity and Kingdom Community Development have been building houses in the neighborhood, vastly improving the south side.

Although those improvements help, Fayetteville has no formal master plan — no blueprint for the future — that could be used to transform the entirety of the Old Wilmington Road neighborhood in the same way that the city has been resurrecting downtown's Hay Street.

Now that Hope VI is almost done, Sharpe said, the city expects to start working on a master plan later this year.

City leaders might want to take a page from Atlanta, which transformed a neighborhood deep in the grip of crime and violence into a model that is being replicated — in varied forms — by cities across the country.

Leaders of Atlanta's East Lake neighborhood initiative say there are three keys to real transformation: mixing residents who are poor with middle-class families, establishing quality education in the community, and creating effective health and wellness programs.

They say no Hope VI or similar federal housing programs can fully pull a neighborhood out of despair without these other components.

The Observer visited the East Lake neighborhood this month as part of its yearlong "Seeking Safety" series, which examines potential solutions to Fayetteville's crime problems. The Observer also visited Spartanburg, S.C., which is adopting many of the same methods that have worked so well in Atlanta.

■ ■ ■

In 1993, Atlanta developer and philanthropist Tom Cousins paid \$4.5 million for Atlanta's East Lake Golf Club, the home course of the legendary Bobby Jones. The course was in disrepair and bound for receivership when he bought it.

Across the street from the golf course sat East Lake Meadows, a brick and cinder-block fortress of public housing where violent crime was 18 times the national average.

Of the 650 apartments, 40 percent did not meet federal housing standards. About 87 percent of residents were unemployed, and only 5 percent of fifth-graders could pass the state's math test. Fewer than 30 percent of students graduated from high school.

About the same time Cousins bought the golf course, he read a New York Times article that said most of the people in New York's prisons came from only eight neighborhoods.

With a little research, Cousins found that the situation was similar in Georgia. From that moment on, Cousins linked



Staff photos by James Robinson

From left, Amelia Cinson, Jayah Mathis and Chosyn Colbert, students in the all-day prekindergarten program at Charles R. Drew Charter School in Atlanta, read the book 'No David.' The school's success is key to the East Lake neighborhood's revitalization. For a slide show, go to [fayobserver.com](http://fayobserver.com).



A sign in Spartanburg, S.C., announces plans for a neighborhood renewal project modeled in part on Atlanta's success in cleaning up blight in the East Lake community.

the redevelopment of the golf course to the transformation of the East Lake neighborhood.

Cousins began his golf course project by charging corporations \$50,000 for a membership. He asked those corporations to donate \$250,000 to improve the East Lake neighborhood. Almost all of them did.

Carol Naughton was a lawyer for the Atlanta Housing Authority. She remembers meeting with neighborhood residents and dozens of other people engaged in the project for two years to forge a master plan for East Lake.

In 2001, when Cousins established the nonprofit East Lake Foundation to guide his vision, Naughton was named executive director. The foundation became the lead organization, responsible for seeing that the master plan stayed on track.

The first order of business was to demolish the East Lake Meadows housing project. That happened in 1996, using money from the golf course donations.

New apartment complexes took root in the housing project's place and elsewhere on the 175-acre tract. The new housing was funded, in part, through a federal program similar to Hope VI, Naughton said.

As was the case with the Hope VI project in Fayetteville, most of the people who were relocated during construction of the new housing were offered the opportunity to come back provided they were elderly, had a job or were actively seeking one. About 25 percent returned.

Naughton said. The same percentage returned after Hope VI housing was built in Fayetteville.

New housing was just the beginning of the East Lake project.

The centerpiece of the metamorphosis is the Charles R. Drew Charter School, which replaced an old public school on the same site. The charter school now educates students in kindergarten through the ninth grade. Prekindergarten goes to an early learning center inside the school.

Naughton said when the charter school opened in 2000, its students performed worse than those at any of Atlanta's 69 public elementary schools. Today, she said, the charter school outperforms all of Atlanta's public elementary schools and all but two of its middle schools. The school does not have a hand-picked student body: About 700 of the 1,300 students qualify for free or reduced-price lunch, she said.

A large YMCA was built onto the school. A Publix grocery store located on land Cousins donated to the foundation, just across the street from East Lake Villages. A golf course that had gone unused on the property for years was resurrected. The course is now home to First Tee, an organization that teaches young people life skills and leadership through golf.

Kathleen Brownlee, who works with Naughton, said the school is the main reason people from all walks of life want to live in East Lake Villages. Good schools attract good people. The apartments now

have a waiting list of people willing to rent at market value. The foundation stipulates that at least half of the apartments be maintained for low-income residents.

The success of the charter school is so great that a combined middle and high school is being built on the campus. Private funding is largely behind the project.

Brownlee said research found that only 70 percent of students who attended the charter school graduated from high school. That compared favorably with the 62 percent who graduated from Atlanta's public schools, but East Lake leaders found the rate unacceptable.

They believe educating their students from preschool through high school is essential for success. Cradle to college, they call it. They don't want students leaving their charter program and getting lost in a public high school.

The East Lake project didn't just improve residents' housing, education and health. It also significantly reduced crime.

Naughton said violent crime is down 90 percent and all crime is down 70 percent. Brownlee said property values in surrounding neighborhoods have soared.

So successful was the entire neighborhood reclamation effort that Naughton said she found herself unable to effectively direct the East Lake Foundation and also respond to the hundreds of civic leaders who wanted

to know the recipe for success.

So Cousins, along with billionaire philanthropists Warren Buffett and Julian Robertson of North Carolina, formed the nonprofit group Purpose Built Communities in 2009. Naughton is senior vice president of the group. Brownlee is a vice president.

The organization's primary function is as a consultant that offers free expertise to other cities seeking to reclaim a neighborhood.

So far, eight cities have committed to follow the Purpose Built Communities' strategies, including Charlotte and Spartanburg. The organization is meeting with 20 other cities that may join the growing list, Naughton said.

Brownlee said an estimated 1,500 representatives from other cities tour East Lake every year. Representatives from Wilmington went there this month.

■ ■ ■

Rows of Hope VI apartments similar to Fayetteville's occupy a slice of a neighborhood on Spartanburg's south side.

The apartments, built in 1996, are inhabited almost entirely by low-income residents who pay little or no rent, said Mitch Kennedy, Spartanburg's community services director.

The apartments, along with another Hope VI project that was built later, have done little to change the neighborhood.

The reason, he and other city leaders say, is that they failed to combine

the key ingredients that Purpose Built Communities deem essential: mixed incomes, a quality neighborhood school, and a health and wellness component.

Just building homes is not a sustainable way to transform a neighborhood, said Curt McPhail, a leader of a group working to revitalize another Spartanburg neighborhood. Fayetteville's Hope VI housing does not have a range of mixed-income occupants either. Its rate structures are based on a person's ability to pay. Everyone will live for free or at a reduced rate in the city's 642 Hope VI apartments and town homes, a spokeswoman for the housing said.

Spartanburg leaders said they don't plan to make the same mistake in revitalizing the Northside neighborhood. Mixed-income housing will be mandatory, they said.

The Northside initiative began much like Fayetteville's, with a low-key effort to buy vacant and abandoned properties.

Northside is similar to Fayetteville's Massey Hill. Both are mill villages of small, old houses, many of which are occupied by renters and have seen better days. Both neighborhoods are plagued by crime and blight.

Spartanburg police Col. Jennifer Kindall said police fought back in Northside with federal grants for crime reduction and community programs, making a dent in what was considered the city's worst crime area.

But the real catalyst for change was the announcement in 2010 that Edward Via College of Osteopathic Medicine had chosen Spartanburg over Charlotte. The cities are about 75 miles apart.

"A game changer," Kennedy called it.

The college's mission is to train doctors to work in medically underserved and rural areas, so Spartanburg's Northside was a logical fit, said Natalie Brown, a spokeswoman for VCOM, as the college is known.

VCOM built its campus on the former site of Spartan Mills, leaving a giant smokestack in the plant's memory. The college opened in 2011.

While Spartanburg had been eyeing the rehabilitation of Northside for years, VCOM gave it new purpose, direction and assistance. For one thing, the college needs housing for its 350 students, who are now spread out in apartments and rental homes throughout the city.

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## Blight

From Page 4A

Working with Purpose Built Communities, Spartanburg formed the nonprofit Northside Development Corp. to serve as the lead agency in its revitalization plans. The city named its former mayor, Bill Barnett, as chairman and McPhail as project manager.

For 18 months, Northside residents and others involved in the project worked to define the goals and strategies that will be used to transform the neighborhood, McPhail said.

The city and Northside Development Corp. started buying neighborhood properties at a frenzied pace — about 160 to date — almost all foreclosed or abandoned houses or empty lots. No one has been forced to move, McPhail said.

Crime in Northside has been greatly reduced because of the stepped-up police presence and because there are fewer places for the criminals to live or hide, said Kindall, the police spokeswoman.

"This is all about dispersing poverty," Barnett said. "If you want to reduce crime, you have to disperse poverty."

But it takes money. Spartanburg is fortunate to have generous corporations, residents and foundations, its leaders say.

Northside Development Corp. has used local and federal money to hire architects, buy properties and develop a master plan. The next big step is to apply for a \$30 million federal neighborhood assistance grant that would be used to build housing.

Although still in draft form, the master plan defines Northside's future pretty well — a thriving, diverse community with residents across the income scale, a grocery store and other retailers, and continued improvements at the neighborhood elementary school.

Northside already has begun to change.

Multifamily housing is being built on one street, and ground has been broken for a food hub — a farmers market, a culinary arts training program, and a community cafe and garden all in one spot.

Officials increased the number of school days at Cleveland Elementary School from 180 to 225. They added hours, as well, all in an effort to give the children a better start.



Staff photos by James Robinson

The Senior Academy is under construction at Charles R. Drew Charter School in the East Lake neighborhood of Atlanta.

Leaders of the Northside initiative say full redevelopment of the neighborhood may take a decade or more. It cannot be done quickly or easily, they say.

But Kennedy, the city's community services director, said he knows where he will be 10 years from now.

Kennedy said he will be living in a three-story town house in a neighborhood that has a broad mix of housing that accommodates all types of people. He said he'll walk to nice stores and shops and get his hair cut by the neighborhood barber.

The neighborhood "will be filled with very healthy, vibrant people who flock there," he said.

■ ■ ■

Fayetteville does not have anything comparable to Atlanta's East Lake Golf Club or Spartanburg's new medical college — nothing that could be considered "a game changer" in its efforts to revitalize the Old Wilmington Road neighborhood.

But it does have a vision, one spelled out in its 2030 Downtown Renaissance Plan.

The plan's vision is similar to what Kennedy sees for Spartanburg's Northside. In part, it calls for a "fully featured

neighborhood center in the Old Wilmington Road neighborhood."

The plan calls for a vibrant, safe community. "Expanding the vitality of the core into surrounding neighborhoods is key," according to the plan.

Some changes to the Old Wilmington Road neighborhood already are evident, including turning Walker-Spivey — once an alternative school for troubled students — back into a community elementary school.

Schools Superintendent Frank Till Jr., who was hired after the Hope VI project began, helped lead the changes at Walker-Spivey. He said he is now heading a committee of state school superintendents who are exploring best practices used by other cities to educate children living in poverty.

Changing a neighborhood is hard work, Till said. It takes leadership.

He thinks back to when he worked in San Diego. The downtown never changed until a dynamic leader led the way, he said.

"I tell people all the time, the real key is not sit around and talk about it but to do something," Till said. "It takes action. Somebody has got to step up."

It also takes vision and

collaboration. Kennedy said he was skeptical when he began working on Spartanburg's Northside initiative.

But then he toured the East Lake neighborhood and was "blown away."

While Fayetteville may not have a game changer, Naughton said Charlotte and Indianapolis did not have one either when they borrowed from the East Lake model to reclaim neighborhoods.

The East Lake model has not worked everywhere, and it hasn't been replicated in other Atlanta neighborhoods. Often, Naughton said, initiatives don't gain traction because of a lack of civic and business leadership or a political reluctance to change.

But Purpose Built Communities is convinced that its formula works in communities that fully embrace it.

"We are really looking for places that can be successful," Naughton said. "We are looking for places where people think that we are a good fit for them and we think they are a good fit for us."

"What we are talking about is a 10-year relationship."

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Former Spartanburg, S.C., Mayor Bill Barnett chairs the Northside Development Corp., a nonprofit group that pulls together dozens of partners to raise money for redevelopment of the city's Northside neighborhood.

### COMMUNITY SOLUTION

# Memphis reforms improve cleanup process

■ A coordinated approach to reducing neighborhood blight cleared a backlog of complaints and led to revitalization.

By Greg Barnes  
Staff writer

**MEMPHIS, Tenn.** — The strategy seems so simple and effective: Instead of responding to individual complaints of blight, why not attack entire areas at one time?

That's exactly what Memphis did, starting in 2011, after Onzie Horne became the city's deputy director of community enhancement.

For years, Horne said, code enforcement inspectors responded to individual complaints of abandoned homes and vehicles, trash and overgrown properties.

The complaints came from residents, elected officials, service agencies and elsewhere, Horne said. The complaints were put into a hopper and doled out to inspectors by type and level of priority.

"It was a rather complicated mess," Horne said.



Staff photo by James Robinson

Jessica Grafenred, an officer with the Memphis Police Department, answers calls on the Crimestoppers tip line and monitors the cameras.

The department was so inefficient back then, he said, that he ordered an investigation in hopes of weeding out wrongdoing.

The investigation did not reveal any crimes, he said, just a lack of a systematic approach for inspectors to respond to complaints. As a result, the city faced a backlog exceeding 25,000 code enforcement cases and 40,000 complaints about overgrown lots, Horne said.

Horne and other city officials put their heads together and came up with a

blight-reduction initiative that became known as 25 Square Blocks.

Inspectors started by canvassing a single 25-square-block area, documenting violations along the way. They notified property owners that they had five days to clean up the mess. After the five days, the city moved in and took care of any violations, then billed the property owners for the work.

The city didn't stop there. Other departments inspected the area for broken

sidewalks and street lights, potholes and utility leaks. Any problems found were promptly fixed, Horne said.

Under the new approach, inspectors did not have to zig-zag all over town responding to a single complaint, and debris could be hauled away at the project's completion, saving time and money.

Memphis also saves money by contracting with vendors who hire convicted felons to mow yards and haul off rubbish. Not only can a lot be cleaned for substantially less money, Horne said, jobs also are provided to ex-convicts who have few other employment opportunities.

In the old days, Horne said, the city responded to about 6,800 complaints a year. At the end of this fiscal year, he said, the city expects to have cleaned up 30,000 lots. Horne said his department's budget has remained unchanged.

Memphis Mayor A C Wharton is a cheerleader of 25 Square Blocks, saying it is much more efficient and effective than the old way of doing things.

"Sure, you can run in there with track hoes or whatever and take down a

vacant house that trees have grown through," Wharton said. "We can do that in an hour and then go. But guess what: Five days later, somebody is calling about a house three doors down from that one."

"So what do you do? You turn around and you are back out there again or you don't go back because you say we have just been out there. We can't come. And of course, the neighborhood becomes alienated."

Horne said 25 Square Blocks has rejuvenated not just neighborhoods but the people who live there.

"We have citizens that come out when they see our crews in the area and say, 'We didn't think the city cared. We have never seen anything like this. What are you guys doing?'"

"When we communicate what the program is all about, people change their attitudes about their own properties. They come out and start repairing their fences and repairing the stoop."

Horne says 25 Square Blocks is the best initiative to relieve blight.

"The reason is really simple," he said. "This city, no city will ever have the

resources to be able to address all these issues on their own. What we can do is we can change the pathology of neighborhoods, give hope to property owners that changes will occur so that they reinvest and have some responsibility for their own properties."

Scott Shuford, Fayetteville's development services director, takes pride in the fact that about 75 percent of reported violations in this city come from his own inspectors. In most cities, he said, residents report the majority of violations.

Shuford also credits Bart Swanson, his division manager of housing and code enforcement, with overhauling the code enforcement office. When Swanson was hired, Shuford said, the office could respond to only about 5,000 complaints a year. Now, he said, inspectors respond to about 13,000 violations annually.

But Shuford acknowledged that Fayetteville's approach remains reactive rather than proactive. He said he sees merit in the 25 Square Blocks concept and intends to look into it further.