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## **A Community Celebrates**

**January 2004 by Eric Lane**

Barely four months ago Southwest Housing, a Dallas-based builder and manager of affordable, high-quality apartment communities for seniors, approached the Monticello Park neighborhood with a proposal to build a retirement community on the vacant Massey property. Many community members were skeptical.

Not too long ago, certain quarters in this city were cursing the Monticello Park Neighborhood Association and the Massey property subcommittee in particular, for putting up very stiff resistance to development on the property. The Massey property, located between Quentin Drive and Fredericksburg Road across from the Tip Top Café, is the last large parcel of vacant property in the area.

“No one will ever build in your neighborhood!” developers screamed after trying to ramrod one terrible proposal after another on the property. But these were business interests primarily guided by dollar signs, while their vision was blind to community interests. And they lacked the sensitivity and sophistication needed to build in the inner city, especially in the historic Monticello Park area.

What many of these developers lacked, beyond the inability to listen, was a sense of history of the area. It wasn't too long ago that Auto World, an auto auction business that harassed neighbors with a vociferous sound system and noxious exhaust fumes, was knocked down.

The neighborhood, particularly those folks living on Quentin, North and Kampmann, were not about to let just anyone move in. This created a source of understandable friction with the Massey's who owned the property.

And so it went for many years, until last fall when Southwest Housing approached the neighborhood. In what could be used as a textbook example of how to present a project for inner-city development,

Brian Potashnik, one of the owners and founders of Southwest Housing, held a community meeting. At that first meeting he explained what his company did and why he wanted to develop a retirement community on the Massey property. He pointed out that Southwest Housing was one of the largest affordable housing developers in the nation but that affordable housing did not mean “housing project.” Southwest Housing, according to Potashnik, had redefined affordable housing with lasting quality, curb appeal and the amenities of luxury-apartment living. He also made very clear that he would only develop this project if he had the full support of the neighborhood.

The following weekend, Cindy Marquez, the local representative for Southwest Housing, led a group of skeptical Montecelites, including myself, to Austin to view two existing developments. By the time we returned, we all pretty well knew this was the project we wanted for our neighborhood.

The new Massey Property Committee, led by David Logan, began to hold numerous open meetings at Jefferson Bank. At those meetings, many

associations were represented by their presidents: Alex Soto of the Woodlawn Lake Association, John Davis of the Los Angeles Heights Association and Justin Rodriguez of the Jefferson Association. Also in attendance were Noel Suniga, executive director of the Community Development Corporation, and Paul Stahl, its present president. From Councilman Castro's office, Jessica Arevalo played an important role in guiding the committee through the political minefield it was about to enter. But high on the list of important committee members were the concerned citizens who showed up at each meeting, neighbors such as Joe Stehle and Jessie Gonzalez. Without their input and support, the Southwest Housing project would never have gotten off the ground.

Southwest Housing made a concerted effort to quickly address the pressing concerns of the community, particularly in the areas of building height limits and flood and traffic control. Their efforts were met with the resounding roar of broad community support. Once Brian Potashnik and Chief Operating Officer, Kent Plemons felt certain the community was solidly behind them, they tackled the political and financial issues facing the project.

Meetings were set up with Mayor Ed Garza who offered his advice and assistance in moving the project forward. From these meetings retail space along Fredericksburg Road was added to the site plan and design ideas were incorporated into how the structures would look. Andrew Cameron, Director of the San Antonio Department of Housing and Community Development played a critical role in finding matching money to help fund the project. It was a community-supported steamroller that gained momentum every day, until finally, on November 13, 2003, City Council voted unanimously to approve the project.

"It's a terrific example of community collaboration and will be a welcome addition that is not simply going to help revitalize the neighborhood, but enliven it as well," stated Councilman Castro.

In an e-mail I received from Kent Plemons on January 12th, he wrote that "actual site work will begin in one week and that they had just finished up the asbestos abatement on the VCT located on the existing slabs and that the demo will commence next week."

The long battle over the Massey property is over. Those who fought in the trenches, I salute you. Those who helped the process to move forward, a heart-felt thank you. And those who will reap the benefits of a new, affordable retirement community in our midst, welcome. Now, let's watch and celebrate the addition of a new chapter to the distinctive history of Monticello Park.

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## **DEVELOPMENTAL FUNDING**

**by Charlotte Kahl**

Southwest Housing uses as many funding tools as possible to develop a higher quality of affordable housing. Primrose of Monticello Park, an affordable

senior living complex, at 2308 Fredericksburg Rd., San Antonio, Texas was built using 4% Housing Tax Credits through the Texas Department of Housing and Community Affairs and Tax Exempt Bonds through Bexar County Housing Finance Corporation. By partnering with Our Casas Resident Council, S. A. Housing was able to benefit from Reprogrammed H. O. M. E. Funds.

Primrose property has an undesignated but historic home on the site. Creative design allowed Southwest Housing to save and restore the building giving them more points on the San Antonio Economic Development Department's Score Card of the Incentive Tool Kit.

Many cities have programs similar to San Antonio Development Agency, San Antonio Finance Corporation and other city bonding entities. States have offices similar to Texas Housing Trust Department. State, city and private preservation grants are also available.