

# Zeroed in on local history

My mission was to finally find Manley Street.

I climbed into residential developer Richard Johnson's Navigator also expecting to discover more about Fourth Ward, one of Raleigh's largest African-American communi-

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ties that bustled with more than 600 homes, families, schools, churches and businesses before it was wiped out under the nationwide Urban Renewal

movement.

Bound by Fayetteville Street, Boylan Heights, Cabarrus Street and Caraleigh Mills – and intersected by Lenoir, South and West streets – most of Fourth Ward was demolished in the mid-1970s and replaced with Heritage Park public housing.

Fewer than 50 near-original houses remain.

I can still see Washington School, a family alma mater. And I can still find family gravesites at neighboring Mount Hope Cemetery. Both are National Historic Districts now.

But Manley Street, home of the nursery school I attended, seems like it never existed.

Johnson tried to help, sharing copies of a 1920s city grid map he'd printed of Fourth Ward with me and Anne Fahim, a Midtown architect from New York who advocates downtown living and historic awareness of the East Raleigh-South Park Historic District.

She'd invited me to tour with Johnson, a developer who embraces new urbanism ideals of developing, redeveloping and revitalizing mix-use urban areas to fuel new waves of investment and activity. Fourth Ward is his focus.

I'm not surprised we never found Manley Street, other than the spot it likely ran off

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Richard Johnson and his wife, Amy Goodale, along with their dog, Jack.

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dismantling an economic boost and critics who deem it a fix-it-and-forget-it control tactic to destroy neighborhoods and history – and push poorer people out to usher in the middle-class.

What did surprise me is how Johnson came to care enough to want to preserve the history and environment of what's left of Fourth Ward.

### In love with the area

In 1994, Johnson, a couple years shy of 30, moved to Raleigh from Florida with his then-pregnant wife, Amy Goodale.

They rented a shotgun house in the 800 block of Hargett Street, next door to their landlord. Johnson eventually started doing his bookkeeping and managing some of his properties and, before long, the landlord's buddies hired Johnson, too.

Johnson and Goodale eventually bought their own house, owned by their landlord, perched hilltop on the corner where Cabarrus and Florence streets meet, on the edge of the Boylan Heights Historic District.

From their front porch the couple fell in love with the

druplex, plagued by drugs and prostitution, and an old house next to it, bought both. They renovated the house. In 2006, the building next door opened as eight condominiums. It is the first multi-family development permitted in the Boylan Heights Historic District.

Later that year, Johnson won a 2006 Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Community Appearance.

### Respecting the history

In 2008, Johnson and Goodale launched the Rosengarten Park of the Fourth Ward Neighborhood Restoration Project to restore the last remaining homes of Fourth Ward. They also formed the Fourth Ward History Project to learn more about the area's legacy. In fact, the neighborhood name honors both Fourth Ward and Aleck Rosengarten, a Russian immigrant who donated land to connect Cabarrus and Boylan Heights.

"I've learned to respect the history and to respect the processes that created this neighborhood," Johnson said. "There was a reason why it was created, there's a reason why it looks like it does and that's why it's charming. We have to find out what they did right, and preserve and replicate it."

struct new houses on lots where homes were lost. Phase III takes on Lenoir Street.

Earlier this month, Rosengarten Park of the Fourth Ward won a Sir Walter Raleigh Award for Community Appearance.

Even so, efforts failed to convince the state Historic Preservation Office to consider the area for listing on the National Register for Historic Districts.

Interestingly, Johnson thought ahead.

"We'd already created our own de factor Historic District," he said, adding homeowners' association rules and deed restrictions that require homeowners doing their own renovations to stick to historic standards. Johnson's adjacent properties will be annexed, with the same rules.

### 'New life'

M.H. Green grew up on Cabarrus Street and Rosengarten Alley, and still owns three houses there.

"He took a lemon and made lemonade," said Green, 85, at first skeptical of Johnson's "wild-haired ideas."

"I'm glad I lived to see it." In January, Johnson will begin to recreate the historic aura of Dorothea Drive by restoring four shotgun houses and a bungalow – and building 23 new houses to historic and

South Street near the N.C. Association of Educators building. No doubt, Fourth Ward, like many other urban, mostly black, areas across the country, is a see-saw story of proponents who considered its

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western edge of South Saunders Street, just down the hill, drawn to its character and its people.

The people there were drawn to them – from Hispanic and elderly, wheelchair-bound neighbors looking for help finding social services to a 5-year-old boy who showed up at their daughter, Allie's, third birthday party.

In 2001, the couple, tired of watching from across the street the demise of a qua-

Resisting the urge to "get a grand idea and make it grand new" has been a pivotal change for Johnson, he said.

"That is one of the things that, being a little developer, I can do...take the time to learn its history, absorb it and figure it out," he said.

Phase I, at Rosengarten Alley between South Saunders and Cabarrus streets where most of the original houses were, is complete with renovations that meet its historic character. Phase II will con-

green architectural design standards.

"We're giving them new life," he said. "We don't know how these houses will be used in the future, but we know we've improved them."

Johnson believes his mission encourages independence, rather than the dependence inherent in early urban renewal efforts.

We're fortunate Johnson zeroed in on our history.

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