



IN FOCUS



Photography by Danny Doyle

theRevitalization

urban pioneers bring new
life to the heart of the city

BY DALTON DOYLE

The City definitely has a vision for downtown Montgomery. The 5 Points area metamorphosing into a village-type atmosphere seems to play a large part of that vision. The roundabout at 5 Points, a city demonstration area, is one of the catalyst projects for Mayor Bobby Bright's downtown plan, and it will incorporate many of the same attributes that we see around the fountain downtown. They have already begun planting the street trees for the area and more will follow this spring. There will be decorative pavement as well as pedestrian crossings. Jim Downes, the Mayor's Chief of Staff, says that the City will begin work on the roundabout within the next month and Downes expects completion four to six months after the start date. Instead of outsourcing the work, the City plans on using its own crews for the job, which will allow them to move quickly and save money. The plans include cleaning up the Mobile Street area to freshen up the view from the interstate. There will be a green space adjacent to the roundabout that will be surrounded by trees that would be great for family picnics or for playing a game of softball. There is even speculation of a neighborhood pizza place. What they hope to accomplish is to bring back the life of the area. Downes said, "5 Points is one Montgomery asset that cannot be recreated, but it can be restored. You won't find this in suburbia." By revitalizing 5 Points they will not only be adding to the economic development of downtown, but it will also make a good transition piece from the commercial to residential areas in hopes that this will encourage more residential living downtown.

Two of the people who share this vision are Fred and Dianne Bush. The Bushes got started in the "neighborhood business" in 1979 by obtaining signatures that would help to establish the Garden District. Now they have taken that same passion to Cottage Hill at 5 Points. The Bushes have acquired 20 properties in the area and are currently in the process of multiple renovations. Perhaps the largest undertaking for the Bushes currently is the Tyson House on Mildred Street. Built in the 1830's, the Tyson House is one of the only remaining true Greek revival houses in the city. As if that wasn't rare enough, the Tyson House sits on a 2-acre lot in downtown Montgomery and the view from upstairs looks straight down Goldwaithe Street onto the roundabout. They have stripped the house down to the bones and added the modern amenities we love: central heat and air, recessed lighting, and a beautiful kitchen. Meanwhile, they have also taken every step to keep the house looking like a nearly exact replica of its beginning from antique fixtures and original heart pine floors, right down to the wisteria growing on the porch. Dianne always gives the homes they renovate her own special touch, and has equipped every window in the Tyson House with antique glass. It is wavy and beautiful and could not be more perfect. Standing on the front porch Dianne states, "This neighborhood will come into the new age in spite of itself." That is true with the help of people like the Bushes.

Two others who have plunged their hearts, souls, (and wallets) into the area are Craig Dresher and Kim Henderson. Craig Dresher, a Major in the United States Air Force, has put all of his free time into his dream home, Winter Place. If you are a native Montgomerian your parents might have driven you by a castle called Winter Place as a child. Your siblings may have even told you ghost stories about it. Dresher wants to make Winter Place his home. Built in 1855 by Colonel Samuel Joseph Winter and



his wife,

Mary Elizabeth, Winter Place was an overgrown dilapidated mess when Major Drescher stumbled upon it. He has spent the past few years working to restore Winter Place to her original glory. Spending his own time and money, along with help from locals and the Alabama Historical Commission, Major Drescher has put out a call for help. The call is not just for help remodeling his dream, but also help for the 5 Points area. He has urged good citizens to buy property along Mildred Street, or anywhere in the area. He expects to move into Winter Place this year. Kim Henderson is a native Montgomerian with a vision to bring something new to Montgomery. Mr. Henderson is the man behind the GrandView at Cottage Hill, and he is bringing upscale condo living to downtown Montgomery. Mr. Henderson is another man financing his own vision. He is contracting the renovation work himself, which affords him the opportunity to ensure his vision is carried out in every way possible. The GrandView will have 20 – 30 condominiums ranging from 1500 – 5000 square feet with all of the luxuries imaginable. The views will be either “city-front” or “city-view.” The GrandView will include modern Brazilian kitchens and baths, a workout facility, a multi-purpose suite and even its own private theater. The most impressive attribute is the safety. A stylish brick & wrought iron fence will surround the entire parking area. When the residents use their passkeys to enter the parking lot, security will be alerted and they will be able to watch the residents on the many security cameras as they walk from the parking lot to the door. There will be a concierge available to help with groceries, gifts, (or the large stack of books you purchased up at New South). The levels will all be passkey protected with your key only allowing you to go to your own floor. Should someone be in the stairwell, they can only get to the downstairs main lobby where security will be at all times. Mr. Henderson wants to ensure the residents feel as safe as they feel comfortable. Callie Hincey, a Cottage Hill resident since 2004, loves the area. Hincey moved back to Montgomery from California and was turned on to Montgomery’s oldest historic neighborhood by her current neighbor. She was looking for an investment, but was unsure of renovating an older home by herself. With encouragement from the neighbors, she took a chance and now enjoys her home with her husband. Mrs. Hincey noted there are many families with young children in the neighborhood, as well as young professionals – doctors, lawyers, police officers, etc. So, what do you say? Are you willing to join the downtown revolution and be a part of recreating one of Montgomery’s oldest assets? For more information and news about the people and places in this article, check out these websites: montgomery-city-guide.com cottagehillmontgomery.com historicwinterplace.com grandviewatcottagehill.com To download the entire Montgomery Downtown Master Plan, adopted in 2007, go to doverkohl.com. Click on the Portfolio link, then choose Revitalizing Downtowns & Historic Places.