

Groundbreaking held for Gerson Park revitalization

Catisha Marsh
Sentinel-Voice

Steve Edwards grew up in Herbert Gerson Projects and plans to return once construction of a new apartment complex on Lake Mead and Martin Luther King boulevards is complete.

And though he's upset that residents haven't been kept abreast of a completion date nor hired to work on the project, he's optimistic about

moving.

Nearly 100 people attended Monday's groundbreaking at Gerson Park during which guests also rapped about the benefits of the renovation. The celebration began with a performance by the Booker Elementary High Flyers tumbling team.

"This is a celebration of the revitalization of one of our neighborhoods; the

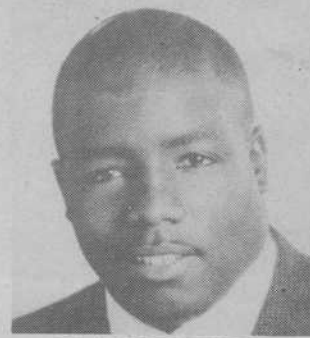
coming together of the public and private sectors," said Kenneth Ladd, president of U.S. Bank, the project's primary financial contributor.

Frank Hawkins, executive director of Community Development Programs Center of Nevada which owns the land, said \$6 million in seed money will kick off the renovation.

Forty-eight units will be constructed during the first

phase they expect to finish the venture by December 2001.

"One person couldn't do this. Everyone—U.S. Bank, Bank of America, HUD, the Housing Authority, the community, staff people who are never mentioned—they made this happen," Hawkins said. "I want to create an environment that encourages people to move up the ladder," he said of his goal to



FRANK HAWKINS attract lower- and middle-income residents.

"This is a wonderful opportunity to show true partnership between the community, investors, businesses and the local government," Clark County Commissioner Yvonne Atkinson Gates said.

Hawkins also donated \$500 and the lights for Booker Elementary to replace some of the damage from a recent burglary at the school.

Leader of National Baptist Convention goes on trial

LARGO, Fla. (AP)—The Rev. Henry J. Lyons was traveling in Africa when his life as a respected preacher and leader of a large black denomination began to come apart.

Back home in Florida, his wife was charged with setting fire to a \$700,000 waterfront home he owned with Bernice Edwards, the public relations director for Lyons' group, the National Baptist Convention USA.

Prosecutors followed the trail of the minister's money and found records of expensive homes, diamond jewelry and luxury cars.

A year and half later, the National Baptist Convention



HENRY LYONS

president is on trial on state charges of racketeering and grand theft, accused of embezzling so that he and Edwards, his alleged mistress, could live in high style. Jury selection began

Monday.

Lyons could get 30 years in prison. He also faces a similar trial on federal charges in the spring.

He has denied being unfaithful or misusing church funds but admitted serious errors in judgment and apologized for unspecified transgressions. "I have sinned," he said in 1997. "And I have displayed human weaknesses and frailties."

He did not comment as he entered court Monday.

Edwards, who was once convicted in Wisconsin of embezzling from a school, is charged with racketeering.

Before this case, Lyons was known as a rousing

preacher whose pleas helped reduce the \$5.4 million debt the National Baptist Convention accrued while building new headquarters.

He wielded political clout as leader of a group that claimed to have 8.5 million members.

President Clinton called Lyons for advice in 1996 when riots left St. Petersburg in flames.

But prosecutors said the membership number was "a complete hoax," vastly inflated as part of Lyons' and Ms. Edwards' scheme to swindle money from corporations that thought they were paying to have their products promoted to

convention members.

Lyons and Ms. Edwards are accused of diverting the money to a secret bank account and using it to buy the waterfront home and a time-share in Lake Tahoe, Nev., a 20-carat diamond and other jewelry, two Mercedes cars and a Rolls-Royce.

The grand theft charge against Lyons involves more than \$200,000 entrusted to him by the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith to help rebuild Southern black churches that had been burned down.

Prosecutors said he stole the money and gave little, if any, to the burned-out churches.

Lyons' wife, Deborah, has denied ever believing her husband had cheated on her and blamed the fires she set at his home in July 1997 on problems with alcohol rather than a jealous rage. She got five years' probation for arson.

Her support and that of other ministers and parishioners helped Lyons survive repeated attempts to oust him as president of the National Baptist Convention.

"I am no monster. I am no devil," he said at one gathering of convention members. "I am a man, and despite whatever you may write, I am still a child of God."

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