

# Stax Museum adds soul to historic Memphis scene

By Hal Lamar

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ATLANTA (NNPA)—Deanie Parker's heart broke into a million pieces when she watched bulldozers and a wrecking ball make splinters of the Stax Recording studios and offices on McLemore Avenue and College Street in Memphis, Tenn., in 1989.

The company had closed its doors in 1975, a victim of bankruptcy filings that brought an end to 15 years of 300 albums and 865 45s (remember them?). The recordings of gritty, down-home, foot-stomping soul music sung, was played and screamed by the likes of Rufus and Carla Thomas, James Carr, the Mad Lads, Isaac Hayes, Sam and Dave, Mable John, Johnny Taylor, Jean "Ms Big Stuff" Knight, Frederick Knight, the Newcomers, the Dramatics, Booker T and the MGs, Otis Redding and many others.

Parker had been part of the operation almost since inception as the Satellite Record Shop started in the last half of the 1950s by a White sister-brother team, Estelle Axton (the AX in Stax) and Jim Stewart (the ST).

"I wrote some songs, did a little administration, some marketing and retailing, too," Parker told the Atlanta Voice from her Memphis office recently. "The Stax building should never have been torn down."

Days after the bulldozers vacated what became a big empty lot in a decaying Black Memphis neighborhood, Parker got busy with plans to resurrect Stax with designs on taking it one step beyond. Her hard work and the diligence and patience akin to the biblical prophet Job paid off. Memphis is now home to its newest attraction, the Stax Museum of American Soul Music.

"I decided that we needed to pay homage not just to Stax Records and their artists, but also those of Philadelphia International, the Philly Groove, which featured the Delphonics, Intruders, Billy Paul and Harold Melvin and the Blue Notes, Chess, T-Neck, Isley Brothers and of course Motown. We also allow the legends to tell the story through an audio exhibit," she said.

Visitors first see a 17-minute video documenting the Stax story, which Parker assures is "hardly boring."

The Stax museum includes a 27,000-square-foot



The Stax Museum is a staple of black history in Memphis.

music academy that opened in July 2002. Parker says they have more than 250 kids learning music and using that as a way of improving their overall academics and leadership skills.

"This is a very poor community and 50 percent of the kids in this academy are from single parent homes," noted Parker. "We want the academy to be for today's kids what Stax Records meant to us. The company was our music academy."

The Academy is also credited with encouraging funding for the museum itself. Through public and private donations, \$5 million in seed money was raised with \$1 million of that earmarked for the academy.

"That then allowed us to leverage more money through the Memphis city and county governments and challenge grants from philanthropies like the Plow Foundation," said Parker. "We are also offering opportunities for membership which can range from \$5 to \$50,000. Being a not-for-profit, we are probably always going to need money."

Getting artifacts to outfit the museum, however, made raising money seem easy. Many of the Stax artists and former employees contacted had long since lost track of sheet music, gold records and instruments. But Parker issued a clarion call through some media exposure and many of the items that were either lost, pawned or auctioned during Stax's financial crisis began to surface.

Some of the treasured items in the museum include bluesist Albert King's guitar Lucy, Isaac Hayes Cadillac El Dorado and the famous wah-wah peddle used by guitarist Charles "Skip" Pitts for the movie soundtrack, "Shaft."

"Getting these things was tough," said Parker, stopping to catch her breath. "It was

excruciating. A lot of people we approached had heard it all before about a museum and all that and they were skeptical. Only after we showed them the plans did they began to come around and see that this time it was for real. I had a hard time giving up some precious mementos of mine when the time came. But eventually, we began to get the material in, some from as far away as Amsterdam. And they didn't rape us with pricing either."

Parker said since they

opened the museum in the middle of the year, they low-balled projected visitation numbers, but said they believe that no less than 30,000 will pass through the facility before the end of the year. Organizers hope a surge in Memphis tourism will boost museum attendance. Visitors to the city already can enjoy a civil rights museum that opened last year at the infamous Lorraine Motel where Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. was murdered; Graceland, home of Elvis Presley; and

the ever-popular Beale Street. In fact, the attractions have organized a bus shuttle service, which will drive visitors from one site to the next to overcome the city's poor taxi service.

At the time of our call, Parker was in the midst of e-mailing many former Stax artists to ask their input into the museum.

"Many of the artists already contacted have embraced this project and especially the academy. David (See Museum, Page 9)



## A healthy start for a healthy school year!

Nevada law requires all students be immunized. This year children entering the school system for the first time are required to have the chicken pox vaccination.

**Back-to-school immunization clinic hours:**  
**Ravenholt Public Health Center, 625 Shadow Lane**  
**Monday-Friday, Aug. 11-Sept. 12, 8 a.m.-6 p.m.**

Immunizations are available at all Clark County Health District locations. An administrative fee of \$15 per patient will be charged.

**For clinic locations, hours and dates**  
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