

# Ex-Cowboy star Deion Sanders to build homes in Dallas

By Gordon Jackson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DALLAS (NNPA) - Pulling double duty is nothing new to Deion Sanders. Whether it was playing both NFL football and Major League baseball simultaneously, or playing both offense and defense in helping the Dallas Cowboys win a Super Bowl, he performed in both capacities with equal excellence and excitement. Today, following a baseball cap and football helmet, the next headgear Sanders may be known for wearing will be a construction hard hat.

This comes on the heels of a recent announcement that, under his company, Prime Development Corporation, Sanders will spearhead the building of new affordable homes and retail centers in Dallas' inner city.

"This is not something where I'm just lending my name to," said Sanders during a Monday press conference.

"There's no reason that South Dallas shouldn't look like North Dallas. We will build affordable homes and retail centers that are respectable, honorable, and admirable, as in the North Dallas area."

Prime Development, in partnership with South Fair Community Development Corporation and Higher Level Development Corporation, will build from 200 to 250 single-family homes and two retail shopping centers around the intersection of Malcolm X Boulevard and Grand Avenue. The homes will be valued at between \$108,000 and \$115,000, with some as high as \$160,000.

"If you're going to have developments, you've got to have rooftops," said City Councilman Leo Chaney Jr., in whose district Sanders' project will be located. "You need people to generate additional income."

"We believe that Malcolm X and Grand Avenue is the gateway to Deep Ellum, Farmer's Market and Fair Park," said Hank Lawson, executive director of South Fair CDC. "If we do it right, it just sends a real strong signal to the rebirth of that community."

A moderate-sized sports complex is also within the plans. The planning stages hope to be completed in six to nine months with construction to start in early 2006.

Lawson is in process of establishing the sector as a

Tax Increment Financing (TIF) district, which would make it qualify for public financing to improve the area's infrastructure. Much of South Dallas is already designated as an Enterprise Zone, which makes commercial projects eligible for special tax breaks.

The Prime Development project is a strong addition to Chaney's revitalization plans, which would include an entertainment district that will encompass parts of South Dallas, Fair Park and Deep Ellum and a DART light rail line that's planned to be in place by 2009.

Lawson wants to see the influx of more commercial businesses and retail attract more of the urban middle-class professionals, such as schoolteachers, firemen and police officers, to return to South Dallas.

"To have the kind of growth that we want, we have to have middle-income families move back there," said Lawson.

"So, we have to make it attractive, and Deion saw the need to have a mixed-income community and services those families will need."

Dallas is not the only area where Sanders will build development in inner-city communities. Born and reared in Fort Meyers, Fla., he was pained to see his home neighborhood still underdeveloped. He will also build about 300 affordable homes there. Other development is planned for Tunica, Miss. With Dallas now being his home base, he was forced to ask himself, "Why isn't there the same passion and approach to South Dallas as it is in North Dallas?"

"I hope that Deion's interest in the development of southern Dallas will serve as a catalyst for future investments, not only by athletes who have the financial means, but other investors who can help turn around these historically distressed and disadvantaged communities," said Councilman Chaney.

Sanders was asked if he was conscious of exemplifying successful Black pro athletes being involved in the community.

"In regards to giving back, I've never heard that question proposed to the Caucasian athletes," Sanders said candidly. "But I'm not doing this just to give back. I'm doing this because there's a need."

It was further pointed out

that Sanders is not "giving" anything away.

"This is not a welfare plan," said Chaney. "Deion is here to make money."

Lawson is an ideal partner for Sanders, having already made inroads into revitalizing sections of South Dallas as developer of the Eban Village Apartment complex on Grand Avenue.

He is also in the process of building new condos in the same sector. John Edmonds, president of Higher Level Development Corporation,

and former head of the Foundation for Community Empowerment for eight years, will act as consultants to Prime Development.

"We're concentrating very hard on Dallas to work with the community and the CDC's (Community Development Corporations) so that we can bring in development and bridge the gap of private and public sectors. Also, to carry the vision that the council and city has," said Edmonds.

Sanders will also sponsor

programs that will help educate local residents to make the transition from a renter to a homebuyer. Although now getting ready for another season with the Baltimore Ravens, Sanders said he's proven to have the versatility to continue playing and also oversee all of his business ventures.

"I'm ambidextrous," he said with a smile. "I'm hands-on, I can do two things at once; I think I've proven that."

Through a nine-year ca-

reer in baseball and 13 years in football, Sanders became the only man to have played in a Super Bowl and a World Series.

He earned back-to-back Super Bowl rings, first with the 1994 San Francisco 49ers, then with the 1995 Dallas Cowboys. He holds the NFL record for career returns for touchdowns with 19 (nine on interceptions, six on punts, three on kickoffs and one on a fumble).

Gordon Jackson writes for The Dallas Examiner.

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