

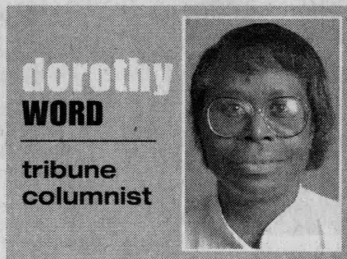
The slow genesis of the Carver Center

On Saturday, Jan. 18, 2003, big snowflakes blown by a blustery wind quickly blanketed the ground, the street and the cars and vans parked at Carver Community Center. But inside the center there was a warm welcome for the guests from Indianapolis.

The most honored guest was Henry A. Perry Jr. on this happy occasion of his 81st birthday. A time for good food, a birthday cake with lots of candles and a "taste" of oral history; living history in the person of Mr. Perry. This birthday celebration was also a homecoming.

Friends and family members listened with rapt attention as Perry reminisced about his younger days in Kokomo and his father's concern and dedication to the black children and youth in the community. Perry's father, the late Rev. Henry A. Perry Sr., was the founder of Carver Community Center. He was also a minister at Wayman Chapel AME and the principal at Douglas School.

The year 1929 was the year Martin Luther King was born. And that



was the year Rev. Henry A. Perry Sr. "had a dream," a dream to rise above Kokomo's segregation practices. He dreamed of having a place where black children and youth could go for recreation because Kokomo's parks, swimming pool and the YMCA were off-limits to them.

Ten years later, the "dream deferred" began to take shape. Land became available and the long, hard struggle of fund-raising began. It was a community-wide effort. Children, youth, the teachers of Douglas School and people in the neighborhood all took part. The young Perry sisters accompanied their father on many fund-raising trips.

There were white people too

who contributed to the fund-raising efforts. Perry Jr. especially remembered Max Gerber and Hobart Barnes. Later on, the city gave important financial assistance.

The Perry Family and scientist George Washington Carver were close friends long "before he was famous." Rev. Perry Sr., his wife, and Perry Jr. were graduates of Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Ala., where Carver taught and did his research. Rev. Perry Sr. got permission to place Carver's name on the Center. Carver died in 1943 before the Center was built.

The dream was deferred again due to World War II. All activities concerning the Center stopped. Then, in 1946, the fund-raising resumed and the construction of the Center began in 1947. On June 15, 1947, the Carver Community Center was dedicated.

If the late Rev. Perry Sr. were alive today I'm sure he'd be pleased with today's Carver Community Center – the improvements, the additions and the healthy transition from segregation to intergration.

About 26 years ago, Millard Fuller "had a dream" of building decent, affordable houses for people wherever substandard housing existed. And thus, Habitat for Humanity was born. Since 1976, Habitat has built or renovated 125,000 houses around the world.

Last June, Mindy Rosengarten of New York City traveled with the Jimmy Carter Work Project 2002 to Durban, South Africa to build Habitat Houses No. 901 to 1,000. Mindy was a chaplain at the morgue at Ground Zero in the aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001. She had a piece of molten glass from Ground Zero which she packed and took with her on that trip.

To Mindy, House No. 911 at the Habitat building site in Durban seemed the perfect place for that molten piece of glass. It would symbolize "building something back up." The African home owner agreed. The molten glass was embedded in the stone placed in the wall by the front door underneath shiny new brass house numbers: 911.

The African home owner said,

"The reason behind the stone is so important, to remember those people who died. The stone will be here in my house forever. It is my job to protect the stone and its message."

Habitat for Humanity started in Kokomo in 1990 and Bob Whitehead was involved from its beginning. There are over 20 Kokomo Habitat Homes, says Bob. And one of those Habitat families is especially happy right now because they just paid off their mortgage last month!

Habitat helps people like that family. Hard-working people who can't finance a home through the banks because they don't make enough money to be eligible for a bank loan. Habitat arranges house payments at levels these people can afford.

Clearly, Rev. Perry Sr. and Millard Fuller are two men who had a lot in common: A great love for people and a deep desire to make a difference.

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