

# Pleasant City tries to stay in touch with its past

*The Memory Project is preserving stories and photographs.*

By SUSAN MCMILLAN  
Palm Beach Post Staff Writer

WEST PALM BEACH — With redevelopment changing the face of Pleasant City, residents and city officials are working to ensure that the history of West Palm Beach's oldest black neighborhood won't go the way of the old buildings being torn down.

Longtime residents have come together in the past year to share stories and photographs for the Pleasant City Memory Project, an effort to preserve the history of the neighborhood. Plans for the project include a mural, oral histories and mapping sites in Pleasant City.

Gloria Williams, manager of the Pleasant City Multi-Cultural Center, said the Memory Project will help the neighborhood maintain its identity as new housing goes up.

"With MerryPlace, it's bringing people back now, back to the area," she said, referring to the neighborhood's new housing development. "Certainly, the quality of life is changing, and it's for the better. It has grown quite a long ways from where it was, and it

continues to grow."

Los Angeles artist Roberto Delgado is nearly finished with a mural for the Multi-Cultural Center's east facade, according to West Palm Beach public art coordinator Joan Goldberg.

Images were gathered from residents, city archives and other sources, Goldberg said. The design, in the outline of "shadows" from palm fronds, layers the photographs so viewers will pick up gradually on the shots of railroad workers, families at baptisms and girls in prom dresses.

"You know how they say that history is like an onion, pulling the layers back?" Goldberg said. "This mural is doing that visually."

She added that the mural is not intended to reference specific people or events, but to give an impression, "an idea of the people and places of Pleasant City."

The design should be completed sometime in July. Once it is approved, it will take Delgado about nine months to silkscreen and airbrush the images onto ceramic tiles and then install them.

The city's Community Redevelopment Agency hosted a "memory luncheon" at the World Famous Cafe in May to preview the mural's design. It was the start of a process that will continue with a potluck supper and memory



Special to Neighborhood Post

A rendering shows the design of Roberto Delgado's mural, which will cover the east facade of the Pleasant City Multi-Cul-

tural Center. The mural is part of an effort to preserve memories of Pleasant City as the neighborhood is redeveloped.

workshop, where residents will be interviewed and their documents scanned for the Memory Project.

"We want to awaken memories from long ago and begin recording them and take them down," Goldberg said. "When it really starts going is when you show the photos."

One attendee at the luncheon was Carrie Odum, who first moved to Pleasant City as a teenager in 1945. She and her husband later moved to Riviera Beach, but they continued to spend their daytime lives in Pleasant City, where they managed a dry clean-

ing shop and an apartment building.

Odum gave birth to her daughter in a house where Pleasant City Elementary School now stands, and her son was born across the street, in a house adjoining her mother's confectionary and lunch stand.

"At lunch, children used to come over there from the school because they didn't have a cafeteria," Odum said. "I love the change, but it's different. The people that left here and came back, they won't know Pleasant City now."

The Children's Coalition, a youth group in the neigh-

borhood, will interview Pleasant City residents for an intergenerational documentary project, Executive Director Carlton Cartwright said. The children will work with still and digital video photography to create portraits and archival footage, with an additional emphasis on military veterans.

Another Memory Project activity will be a clipping bee to organize and catalog the boxes of photographs, newspaper articles and other materials donated by the family of late resident Preston Tillman. The city also will work to create a map

linking documents with specific locations in Pleasant City. This map will be layered on the geographic information system the city uses to map sewer lines and other infrastructure.

Williams said she can already see the effects that physical improvements and attention to history have had on neighborhood attitudes, in that more people are talking about their experiences, and they have more respect for the area.

"They're beginning to think of it as home, not just as a place," she said.

©susan\_mcmillan@pbpost.com