

# O N T H E FRONT PORCH



*Neighborly news and views from Uptown Memphis*

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## Uptown Square Breaks Famous Ground

A celebration fit for a “king” was held in November to commemorate the rehabilitation of an historic Memphis public housing development into a modern, mixed-income apartment community.



*Jack Soden, President and CEO of Elvis Presley Enterprises, presents a commemorative plaque for Uptown Square ceremonies as dignitaries watch on.*

Uptown Square, formerly Lauderdale Courts and childhood home to Elvis Presley, is part of the Uptown Memphis revitalization initiative. The event was hosted by the Memphis Housing Authority, The Uptown Partnership—a Belz-Turley Community Development Company, and Elvis Presley Enterprises.

The spirit of Elvis abounded. A choir from Humes Middle School, where Presley attended, sang “I Can’t Help Falling in Love with You,” the tune Elvis used to close his concerts.

Vernon, Gladys, and Elvis Presley lived at “The Courts” from 1949 to 1953.

A plaque presented by Elvis Presley Enterprises President and CEO Jack Soden notes, “It was here in the basement laundry room that future superstar Elvis Presley practiced his

singing and guitar playing. In the communal courtyard he gained stage confidence by performing for his neighbors.”

The historical significance goes beyond Elvis. Built under the post-depression Works Progress Administration, a bronze plaque from 1938 reveals that the best Memphis architects of the era conceived the plans.

“We are pleased that this outstanding example of good community design and craftsmanship is being rehabilitated,” said Robert Lipscomb, Executive Director of Memphis Housing Authority, and Director, Division of Housing and Community Development. “By refurbishing Lauderdale Courts, we are ensuring that this piece of

history will be preserved.”

When complete in April 2004, Uptown Square will offer 347 apartments. The first phase will be ready by Fall 2003.

While all other Lauderdale Courts apartments are being enlarged, the original configuration of Presley’s apartment is being preserved.

### Uptown Living Means:

- Easy shuttle or walk to games and concerts
- Leisurely stroll to St. Jude Children’s Research Hospital
- Convenient to new public and private schools
- Quality neighborhood design
- Comfortable living, close-knit community

## UPTOWN VIEWS

### Uptown From Way Up

This aerial view reveals the massive area of Uptown Memphis.



## CHARACTER & CULTURE

Uptown is a new name for a historically-rich community. In this section we will reveal a treasure chest of stories buried deep in the heart of Memphis' oldest "suburb."

### Joe Light: Uptown's Artistic Son

Joe Louis Light, who made Uptown his home for over 25 years, is a living creative gem. For Joe is one of Memphis' internationally known "outsider" or American folk artists. His work first appeared on his house and later on sidewalks, viaducts and objects in the neighborhood. Now they are in the collections of movies stars, museums, galleries, and folk art patrons. One such patron has been Tommy Lee Jones, who visited Light in Uptown to purchase his work.

Light and his work is featured in the Museum of American Folk Art Encyclopedia of Twentieth-Century American Folk Art and Artists (New York: Abbeville, 1990).

Born to a farming family in Dyersburg, Tennessee in 1934, Joe has a life full of eye-opening experiences

that include his travels throughout the Southeast, military time, life as a sign painter and barber and jail time. After a religious conversion in the late 1960's,



Joe Light's nationally acclaimed folk art is part of Uptown's heritage

Mr. Light turned his life and perspective around. Light married Rosie Lee, fellow folk artist. Together, he and his wife, who died this year, raised ten children.

His work which ranges from moral edicts, fish and bird sculptures and paintings all have a purpose to promulgate old testament messages about God and how men should relate to one another. With mainly cardboard canvases, Joe uses bold colors, thick black outlines and in-your-face moral instruction. Even though the images are cartoon-inspired, there has been nothing light about Light's art. For it reflects man's search for truth and meaning.

## UPTOWN BIZ REVIEW

### The Uptown Partnership

The adage "Everything that's old is new again," applies directly to the Uptown community redevelopment being undertaken by the project's master developer, the Uptown Partnership.

The companies that form the partnership, Belz Enterprises and Henry Turley Company, have collaborated for years to help revitalize Downtown Memphis. Their work includes the reintroduction of thriving traditional style communities—places with diverse types of housing, and special touches such as front porches and little parks where neighbors get to know their



(MHA), and The Uptown Partnership, a Belz-Turley Community Development Company.

neighbors on their evening walks. Similarly, it is many of the same timeless community planning and design principles that were used when the Uptown area was established as Memphis' historic first "suburb" that will be brought out once again in the redevelopment of Uptown Memphis.

Uptown Memphis Revitalization will be accomplished through a public/private partnership among City of Memphis, Memphis Housing Authority

## COMMUNITY WORKS

### BRIDGES Connect With Uptown

One of Uptown's newest neighbors will be BRIDGES, the non-profit organization that helps youth and adults reach their potential through education, leadership, diversity and workforce development.

A new 53,000-square-foot BRIDGES Program Center is being constructed in the Greenlaw neighborhood on Auction between Fourth and Fifth, just north of St. Jude Children's Research Hospital. The center will be an anchor for the \$150 million Uptown



The new BRIDGES Program Center

Revitalization initiative underway in the community. BRIDGES officials, headquartered at 314 South Goodlett since the late 1970's, said the center would give them enough space to increase programs and gather hundreds of program participants under

one roof. "We anticipate almost doubling the number of young people we help," said Jim Boyd, President of BRIDES USA, Inc. "Right now we serve 5,100 youth and adults. We expect to help around 9,000 young people when we move into our new building. The extra will be an incredible help in fulfilling our mission." BRIDGES' new facility will house administrative offices, education and training classrooms, art facilities, computer and technical labs, studios, meeting spaces for the community, and a large gathering area.

BRIDGES serves about 1,000 young people through the Bridge Builders Diversity Program and Bridges Quantum, a counseling program for at-risk high school students. BRIDGES also offers the Reading Bridge in which 200 volunteers read to over 1,200 preschoolers throughout the community and Future Builders, a summer camp program for middle-school students.

Boyd goes on to say, "It's in an extraordinary expansion for our ability to serve the young people of Memphis. Most of the new space will be dedicated to working with young people."

On The Front Porch is published quarterly by the Uptown Communications Committee.

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*“On the Porch”, the official logo for the Uptown Project, received a Silver Addy Award from the Memphis Advertising Federation this February.*

**FOR MORE INFORMATION ON UPTOWN, CALL THE FOLLOWING:**

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