

pay a 1993 parking ticket.

the court building will be open next Saturday — but not today. "This is it," he

ected more than 200,000 — with some violators paying fines dating back to

Lost revenue may total \$60 million D2

KEEPING BLACK HISTORY ALIVE

Summerhill's fortunes on upturn, but other areas recall better days

By Hollis R. Towns
STAFF WRITER

These days Mattie Jackson has reason to be happy.

Her Summerhill community near Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium and Turner Field is enjoying a resurgence after years of benign neglect and flight by residents. Thanks to the Olympics and years of work by volunteers, new homes are being built, a park has been renovated and middle-class tenants are moving back.

"This was a community where everybody was your mother and everybody cared," said Jackson, 71. "Over the years, things got kind of rough and a lot of people moved away. But there were many of us who stayed who were committed to not letting this community die."

Unlike Summerhill, many of Atlanta's traditionally black neighborhoods have died, while others are critically ill. As Black History Month begins today, for many black Atlantans the occasion gives rise to bittersweet memories of better days in old neighborhoods like Buttermilk Bottom, Sweetmilk Hill, Vine City, Fourth Ward and Reynoldstown.

These were neighborhoods where blacks, including freed slaves, first settled in Atlanta. A combination of factors — urban renewal, crime and desegregation — forever altered life in these communities.

Spend time with longtime residents of these neighborhoods and talk soon turns to things their communities "used to have" or places where prominent buildings "used to be."

"We used to have an ice cream shop right there on Butler Street, and every Sunday we would stop by and get three scoops for a dime," recalls Jethro English, 84, who was born in Buttermilk Bottom, now the area around the Atlan-



Photos by MARLENE KARAS / Staff

Houses on Little Street in Summerhill have the new Turner Field as their backdoor view.

ta Civic Center. "That was some of the best ice cream you could ever put in your mouth."

When English was a young man, his family left Buttermilk Bottom and moved to a house near Auburn Avenue, once known as the Fourth Ward. In those days, the area was bustling with activity as a center for black businesses and social life.

Buttermilk Bottom and Sweetmilk Hill, areas near the Civic Center east of downtown, no longer exist. Both were victims of urban renewal.

Vine City, near the Georgia Dome, and Reynoldstown, which abuts the DeKalb County line, remain. Still, the list of "use to haves" in those neighborhoods has grown in proportion to the number of poor residents. Both have struggled with crime and deteriorating housing.

"When blacks first came to Atlanta, they went to where other blacks settled," said Skip Mason, author of "Going Against The Wind: A Pictorial History of African-Americans in Atlanta." "When those restraints were removed, they forgot those old neighborhoods and moved into the suburbs. What was left were poor people, many of whom could not afford to leave."



"Everybody was your mother," says Mattie Jackson, with great-granddaughter Blaire Chamblee.

In Summerhill, construction of Atlanta-Fulton County Stadium and I-20 disrupted the neighborhood. But Jackson is glad that Summerhill has been able to use the Olympics to aid its continued survival. The area was one of several targeted by the Corporation for Olympic Development in Atlanta for new and rehabilitated housing, new street lights and signage.

"The main thing we did was organize," said Jackson, a board member of the Summerhill Neighborhood Development Corp. "That's how we saved Summerhill."

BLACK HISTORY EVENTS

TODAY:

■ Re-enactors of the 54th Massachusetts Infantry, the first black unit of the Civil War, at Cyclorama, 6000 N. Terminal Parkway, College Park. (9:30 a.m.-4 p.m.).

■ Black Family History Day at Atlanta History Center, 130 West Paces Ferry Road N.W. (1-5 p.m.).

■ Entertainment and an Afrocentric market at Big Bethel AME Church, 220 Auburn Ave. (4 p.m. start).

OTHER ACTIVITIES:

Feb. 13-16: The play "Purle Victorious" at the Rockefeller Fine Arts Building at Spelman College. 8 p.m. \$3 for adults and \$1 for students. 404-681-3643, ext 7557.

Feb. 16: Concert featuring Gospel Choirs from Clark Atlanta University, University of West Georgia and Georgia Tech, 7:30 p.m., Talmadge Room, Emerson Student Center at Oglethorpe University. Free.

Feb. 16: Musical in main sanctuary at New Birth Missionary Baptist Church, 2778 Snapfinger Road, in Decatur, featuring the jazz/gospel group Take 6. 5 p.m. 770-981-5594. Free.