

Beating Gentrification: Myrtle Beach, SC Swansgate Community Shows a Path Forward

Historic Black community comes alive again for Seniors with refurbishment, thanks to City, developers

MYRTLE BEACH, SC, USA, September 5, 2023 /EINPresswire.com/ -- Before it was a senior community, it was a place of learning, at a time when African American students were educated in churches, not in "white" schools.

A product of segregated times, the six-room wood-frame Myrtle Beach Colored School opened in 1932. The school became a source of pride for the African American population of its day. For decades, the school nurtured young Black students, stimulating minds and hearts to embrace education.



Swansgate III welcomes residents home

In 1953, the old schoolhouse was replaced by Carver Training School, built a stone's throw away. Carver became the community's new center of education until full integration of schools arrived in 1978.

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*Holly Douglas, Co-Developer,
Douglas Development*

“That area was tight knit, lots of families and seniors living there,” said Annie B. Futrell, who taught at Carver School and whose husband James was the first Black City Council member of Myrtle Beach. “The school was a centerpiece of the neighborhood; people looked out for each other and their neighbors.”

As Carver flourished, the Myrtle Beach Colored School sat unused and fell into disrepair. Yet as the building

languished, untended and unpainted, its heartbeat remained strong – loved for the change it signified in the heart of a community it had helped nurture.

Today, the Historic Myrtle Beach Colored School Museum sits nearby on Dunbar Street. Built in 2006, it reinforces the Myrtle Beach Colored School and Carver School legacy of learning, loving and living, notes Mike Chestnut, Mayor Pro Tem of the City of Myrtle Beach.

"After integration, the schools were used for a few years, then sat empty into the early 1990's, adding to the downturn of the neighborhood," said Mr. Chestnut. "It took vision and courage from leaders like James Futrell, David Douglas of Douglas Development, and the City of Myrtle Beach to identify the need to redevelop the space – and act."

Months of meetings, planning and strategizing followed as the group worked to bring residential development to the area, focusing on high quality affordable housing targeting seniors. Ground was broken for the community in February 1994; three months later, James Futrell passed.

"That was hard, because he was a leader of our effort, he had a vision that senior housing was the way to go," said Mr. Chestnut. "He was a friend, a mentor and a supporter, and helped convince us it was the right way to go."

By 1995, the first 58 units of senior-focused apartment community [Swansgate](#) opened. By 2000, all 122 units were completed. Seniors quickly absorbed all units, located within the boundaries of today's Central City Master Plan, giving a needed shot in the arm to City revitalization. City leaders and residents today credit Swansgate with stimulating needed improvements



Ceiling fans, airy kitchens and eat-in dining offer convenience at Swansgate



Holly Douglas, developer in charge of Swansgate rejuvenation

throughout the area.

Fast forward two decades. Passionate about keeping the community affordable and high quality, the City of Myrtle Beach supported Schaumber Development and Douglas Development – now led by David Douglas' daughter Holly – in a comprehensive redevelopment and freshening of Swansgate. Where once lessons were taught and community cultivated, the redeveloped homes of Swansgate III and sister property Villas at Swansgate now beckon senior citizens home.

“The area always had a strong sense of community,” said [Holly Douglas](#), principal of the development team. “Residents here have always taken tremendous pride in living in and maintaining a quality home to host friends or family. We wanted to preserve that with this refresh of Swansgate.”

Now completed, Swansgate III and The Villas at Swansgate's 122 apartments constitute a significant senior housing cluster serving a booming 55+ population. With fewer than 50 new affordable senior housing apartments built since 2019 and demand soaring, the city and developers worked together to facilitate the important refurbishment.

“We have a passion to address the critical need for high-quality, affordable senior housing that faces Myrtle Beach and the entire state,” said co-developer Drew Schaumber. “This project lets us provide residents with today's high-quality appliances, improved energy efficiency, contemporary finishes, new flooring, and technologies to make their lives better and more enjoyable. Swansgate has served this community well for two decades; now, we want it to be even better for the next twenty years.”

Housing at Swansgate, offering 1- and 2-bedroom floor plans, is reserved for 55+ senior households making at or below 60% of area median income (AMI), or around \$34,740 for a two-person household. Leaders in the region have estimated that their communities need thousands more units of affordable housing than exists currently.

Swansgate's appeal is enhanced by its proximity to retail, healthcare, shopping, dining, a library, and senior and recreational centers, all located within minutes of the property. It also adjoins Futrell Park and is convenient to a bus route.

Ranging from 650 - 840 square feet, units offer hardwood-style flooring and carpeting, walk-in closets, quality cabinets, high-quality laminate countertops and energy efficient appliances. Windows are energy efficient as are HVAC systems, with lighting, ceiling fans and prewiring for cable and internet included. Common space amenities include a large community room with kitchen and ample seating, TV/Reading Room, Computer Lab, coin-operated laundry and gathering spaces throughout the complex. For leasing details call 843.946.7023 or e-mail swansgateapts@intermarkmgt.com.

“The City of Myrtle Beach is working hard to encourage quality solutions for high-quality

affordable development,” Ms. Douglas said. “We are grateful to be part of the solution at Swansgate.”

Learning, loving and living is alive and well. And somewhere, James Futrell is smiling.

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