

Jeffries towers tumble - Implosion makes way for new housing

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DETROIT -- Four **towers** of the **Jeffries** Housing project were imploded Sunday, each 14-story structure falling in succession like dominoes into a pillar of dust.

The **Jeffries** high-rises were erased from the city skyline as the urban housing plans of the 1950s make way for efforts of 2001.

A \$92-million, 47-acre Woodbridge Estates development of houses, duplexes, rental and resident-owned homes will replace the **Jeffries**, which came to symbolize the failed hopes of urban planners after World War II.

In recent years, the complex was plagued with management problems, crime and illegal drug traffic.

Sunday's demolition comes after years of delay for the project. Mayor Dennis Archer announced a 5-year plan in 1996, saying it marked a "new vision of what public housing ought to be."

Hundreds of onlookers lined Martin Luther King Boulevard and the service drive of the Lodge Freeway Sunday to witness the implosion, part of the \$1.2-million demolition cost. Others watched from Trumbull and more from the MotorCity Casino Parking structure, where members of the housing commission counted down the blast.

Cliff Williams, 81, watched an important chapter of his life vanish. He was one of the first three tenants of the **Jeffries** Projects, moving in the mid-1950s.

After World War II, one of the great migrations in human history began as 3 million Southern blacks moved north to Chicago, Detroit, Cleveland and New York City. This influx of residents came just as whole neighborhoods were being demolished to build the interstate highway system.

Huge public projects like the \$28.7-million **Jeffries** Housing with 2,170 units on 47 acres, were built to ease the housing shortage.

"It was beautiful then," Williams said. "Everybody was trying to get in there, the cream of the crop."

Williams remembers that singer Smokey Robinson's mother lived there, and Motown founder Berry Gordy Jr. visited his aunt at the **Jeffries**.

But problems began in the late 1960s. Residents no longer signed up for waiting lists to get in.

Those who could afford to leave moved out.

"They deteriorated along with the city," Williams said. "The things that were going on in Detroit, the crime and drugs also happened in the **Jeffries** ."

Members of the notorious Young Boys Inc. drug gang came from the **Jeffries** .

The buildings fell into disrepair. Broken furnaces left many apartments without heat for five days in February 1975. Federal officials sited an "unacceptable backlog" of 454 repair requests in January 1992.

Woodbridge Estates illustrates the changes in urban planning from the post-war years. By mixing rental and owned units and low-income to upscale homes, developers hope to create a stable but diverse neighborhood.

"This will be All-American," said Herbert Strather, whose firm heads the development team of Scripps Park Associates. The project is also spearheaded by the Detroit Housing Commission and the **Jeffries** Homes Resident Council.

"There will be all ranges of income, ranges of nationality and lifestyles, white, black elderly family. Everybody can learn from each other by clustering low-income housing with market-rate lofts and town houses. The new model will be the ideal."

Jeffries housing legacy

Name origin: Edward J. **Jeffries** was a former Detroit Recorder's Court judge and father of a mayor.

Groundbreaking: July 1950.

Opening: Eight 14-story buildings opened in 1953 on west side of Lodge.

Expansion: Five other **towers** , plus 415 low-rise units across freeway, opened by October 1955.

Size: 2,170 units on 47 acres.

Cost: More than \$28.7 million.

Demolition: Nine of the high-rises have been demolished. Other **towers** will be converted for re-use.

Former resident: Detroit City Councilman Kenneth Cockrel Jr. was born in the **Jeffries** .

Woodbridge Estates

Cost: \$92 Million.

Includes: Mixed-income homes 297 senior rental units, 100 new homes, 300 rental units and a 20,000-square-foot shopping center. The single-family homes, duplexes and town houses will be from 1,400 to 2,600 square feet. Rental duplexes, triplexes and town houses will be from 750 to 1,300 square feet.

Developers: Scripps Park Associates, headed by Strather and Associates of Detroit and Slavik Co. of Farmington Hills and other firms as well as the Detroit Housing Commission.

Financing: HUD and other housing program funds, tax credits, traditional lenders, state bonds and Detroit infrastructure funds. Public funding makes up less than one-third of total cost.

Caption: Four **towers** of **Jeffries** Housing Project were imploded Sunday. Demolition comes after years of delay. Mayor Dennis Archer announced a 5-year plan in 1996, saying it marked a "new vision of what public housing ought to be." Workers check out of the rubble left after the implosion of the **Jeffries** high-rises which in recent years had been plagued with management problems and crime. Eric Mitchell, left, shows Al Kuschnik footage of the implosion. Hundreds of onlookers lined Martin Luther King Boulevard to witness the event.

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