

## JD, ON THE WATERFRONT

# 'Near Southeast' Revitalization, Archived and Digitized

BY JOSHUA GRAY

In 1995, Jacqueline Dupree and now-husband Bill Walsh bought their house at Third Street and North Carolina Avenue SE. Just a block north of the freeway, it's proven to be an excellent vantage point from which to observe big changes in the landscape, as well as a fair bit of controversy.

Ten years later, witness to these changes, Dupree is the curator of both a comprehensive photolog of urban redevelopment, as well as a steadfast booster of the once-belaugured neighborhood's continued evolution.

Jacqueline Dupree majored in history at the University of Florida, and it shows in her website, [www.jlband.com/nc/](http://www.jlband.com/nc/). The site, as its subtitle line announces, chronicles "what happens when someone armed with a digital camera gets way too interested in goings-on around the neighborhood."

Composed with an historian's sensibility, the site is a thoughtful snapshot of the Southeast waterfront's revitalization, and a timely reflection of the city's mutable face.

A DC native—born on the Hill—Dupree's documentation of the city's changing landscape started modestly in 2000, with a handful of photographs taken "when the first buildings along M Street were being built and I knew something was going on." Her "official" chronicle of Near Southeast started in January 2003, when she assembled a larger collection of photographs into a webpage.

Although she started the page as a personal project, "it just kept going," she says. Around the same time, she started another page, which charted the spread of loft-style condominiums in old downtown. With burgeoning interest in the city's growth, Google picked up on the site, and soon it was getting 1,000 hits a day. Overwhelmed with maintaining both sites, Dupree decided to focus closer to home, and put all of her energy into Near Southeast.

Today, her site devoted to Near Southeast DC Redevelopment sees a staggering amount of traffic, driven

largely by Google searches and word-of-mouth. Although her job running *The Washington Post's* intranet operation should leave her well prepared for the potency of online communication, Dupree nevertheless sounds a bit overwhelmed by the site's popularity.

"One people find it, I think they tend to bookmark it and keep coming back," she says. Some might see her as "the weird lady running around the neighborhood with a camera," but many more have come to rely on her as a clearinghouse for information, as well as a touchstone in a developing neighborhood.

## Source of Information

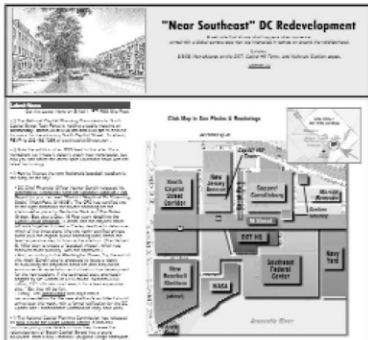
As waterfront development is a bit of a political hot potato, one might expect Dupree's site to be overly opinionated, but, for the most part, it's steadfastly issue neutral, and that's by design. Again, Dupree's training as an historian comes to the fore:

"What I really see for the site is information, there's a lot of people on the Hill who come off the freeway and they see what's going on at the 6th Street exit and they have no idea what is coming...there's so much going on, I think a lot of people, even if they know what's going on, couldn't keep track.

"Once things get things finished, it'll be more of an historical look back at what things did look like," she continues. "There'll be an awful lot of people moving into the neighborhood who won't have any idea of what it looked like just a few years before."

She's not without convictions, however, and, if asked, she's willing to share them. "I try not to be too opinionated one way or the other, except when I get frustrated with the voting on the baseball stadium, which I do definitely want...Whether you think that it's good or bad, the baseline reality is that it's going to be a huge change for the neighborhood. For an area so close to the US Capitol it's really amazing."

On gentrification and revitalization in general, Dupree is reflective:



"[This] poor little neighborhood needs some help. Not necessarily everything that's going to happen is going to be 100 percent wonderful...I'm sure in the '50s people thought that everything that was going to happen in Southwest was going to be wonderful." Hindsight, of course, has shown the flaws of that ambitious rehab, and, since then, she feels, "lessons have been learned."

Ultimately, Dupree's convictions are moderate, carefully balanced. She's supporting revitalization, she says, not necessarily gentrification. "It's clear that in the District, and especially in this neighborhood that is so close in...DC and/or the federal government has to put aside units—as they have—for low income and even moderate income [families]. [There's] clearly enough space to allow market rate housing as well...Warehousing of people who need low income housing has been shown not to work. Perhaps mixed income isn't necessarily going to work, but it's got to be better than what we've tried up to now."

## Boosting Change

Given her comprehensive overview of the neighborhood, it's no surprise that Dupree has been contacted by numerous developers looking for feedback, or even a little inside information. Dupree's rent packing.

Again, Dupree's outlook is complex—more than anything, she's boosting change. "While I'm not in the pocket of the developers, [and] I

know that people are certainly being displaced, I know that sometimes in the rush to battle plans and projects, things end up staying the same."

The strength of Dupree's social and political convictions notwithstanding, the historian background allows. Although she relishes charting Near Southeast's progress, she sees her site's mission in a longer term.

"I didn't want to be any sort of lightning rod. My real project from the beginning was letting people know what's happening, being able to see the changes. Already, if someone moves to the Hill today and comes off the freeway and sees rubble between 4th and 5th streets[,] they don't know how many apartment buildings were there."

Although it's still early days in SE redevelopment—and, presumably, for Dupree's chart of the progress, she's gratified that some already find historical value in her work. "I get emails from people who grew up in those buildings, saying 'Thank you very much. We lived there for 20 years...and I was so excited to be able to show my kids these pictures, and to know that there will always be pictures of this place that means so much to us, that's no longer there.' That means more to me than being seen some person saying, 'Yeah, we gotta get these houses in here, and we gotta get businesses in here,' because, that's for other people to fight."

*DC resident and freelance writer Joshua Gray's work appears frequently in this newspaper.*