

REMARKS OF DR. ARLENE SIMMONS, 09.21.2022  
CEREMONIAL GROUNDBREAKING

Humanitarian Ambassadors of America Community Development Corporation (HAACDC) is proud to announce the acquisition of this property, aptly named "Gardens of Tranquility."

Securing land like this in Goochland began with an idea formed by children experiencing difficult environmental and community circumstances.

In service to these children, HAACDC heard straight talk about what it was like to survive in complex and frightening situations. They chronicled hardships related to the loss of housing, death of loved ones, health issues, depression, hunger, and other challenges experienced because of the Covid pandemic. In the pain of their grief, these young minds decided it was not only important but necessary to remember loved ones in an honorable and permanent way, no matter what their community status may or may not have been. Through honest, open conversations these children birthed a "Vision for a Wall and Gardens where names of Family and Friends could be imprinted forever".

The memorial element included on this land anticipates remembrance elements, whether a wall, a rock garden, or a design element that is yet to be defined. Our planning and design effort will reveal options that fit the land and the adjacencies. No matter the final design, we foresee various cultivated gardens, including those of flowers, vegetables, native species, and pollinators. These natural features honor those that have transitioned during the height of the pandemic because of illness, crime or other health challenges. The design features will extend to programmatic opportunities geared toward positive youth development processes.

Establishing various memorial locations across the acreage and incorporating sensory and peaceful spaces affords learning experiences leaving positive memories while visiting the place where they see their loved ones' names. We want visitors to Gardens of Tranquility to be a chance to be exposed to something different. Children and adults alike exposed to:

- a new place,
- plants they've never seen before,
- an outdoor activity or sport,
- walking on a trail,
- exploring the woodland to identify trees,
- watching the clouds in their artistic glory float past,
- feeling the warmth of the sun or the shade of an oak tree in a safe place,
- artisans painting the landscape, or
- crafters expressing their art.

No one here is looking down on us; no one is passing judgment. It's the most wonderful chance to change perspective and open minds to positive and constructive outcomes and what people can do individually to make their lives better.

These child advisors and visionaries teach by example for us to respect the value in #1, recognizing that EVERYONE'S LIFE MATTERS, and #2, show LOVE to ALL without prejudice.

Great dynamics are at the hub of the "memorial concept" and "life's perspective," and to capitalize on this unique intersection, we will launch a planning and design initiative to incorporate the meaningful dimensions of Gardens of Tranquility, both physical and programmatic. We want to make the most of this tract of land. Offering unique organized development opportunities that don't impact the natural surroundings, including the conservation efforts already tied with the property, is an important tenet. There are healing places here in the former fairways, and Gardens of Tranquility, where healing begins, ruminates that same sentiment.

The land use and site planning piece of the initiative will consider the site's advantages, current zoning, neighbors, and natural and former unnatural features - essentially taking advantage of what already exists here. We will design the format of youth development programming based on the property, fund sources, community, and stakeholder input, identified needs, and program partners that deliver service. WE in the present are not acting on what WE want for the future, IT IS the FUTURE expressing what they need from the US in the PRESENT.

We invited each of you today because you add to the success of this work, and we will reach out to each of you for input during the planning and design process.

We will make periodic updates available to keep you apprised of the progress of the planning and design initiative.

Humanitarian Ambassadors of America Community Development Corporation is committed to supporting, strengthening, and empowering our youth. Acting on the voice of the future for their future.

Gardens of TRANQUILITY, is a place "where healing begins" whether it's emotional, physical, spiritual, or educational.

There is work to be done, and I don't want to keep you longer than expected, you gave your time and I will honor that, so I leave you with this quote from William Wordsworth:

"Your mind is a garden. Your thoughts are the seeds. The harvest can either be flowers or weeds."

There are many who have helped in the effort to get us to this point, from the transaction to construction, repairs, landscape work, to this morning's final touchpoints. Their names or business entities are listed on the flip side of the program, and I want to ensure they all understand the value they have brought and continue to bring to the table. THANK YOU!

**In Memory of 3 Sisters This Promised Land is to forever remain as a Blessing to Youth & Families who seek Healing & Happiness...**

Mrs. Nancy Simmons Randolph - Allen Simmons, Son Represents

Mrs. Jessie Simmons Collins - Roderic Collins, Son Represents

Mrs. Gertrude Simmons Pleasants - Karen Pleasants, Daughter Represents

## **SPECIAL RECOGNITION**

Chad Blackstock - Blackstock Photography

Ricky Johnson - RJ Entertainment Event Planners & Venues

Wayne Wright - Wright Handyman Service

Sandro - Sandro Contracting

Tyvia Parham - Parham Solutions

Charles Willis - United Communities Against Crime

## **SUPPORTERS**

Allen Simmons

Natasha Frank - MindLax

Chanda Hannah - My Sister's Keeper Empowerment Center

Maretta Batchelor - Bloom Photography

Treasure Frank - Exquisite Essentials

Rod Collins

Karen Pleasants

Mechelle Shelton

Mitzi Lee - KindCollabs

Stephanie Taylor - EXP Realty

Lamont Taylor - Taylored Views

Brad Perkins - Perkins Landscaping

Justin Beights - Turning Point Fund

Dustin Plummer - Standard Roofing

Tracey Hardney-Scott - State NAACP

Randolph Scott - Tsaro Protection Agency

Bishop Samm Fisher - Higher Learning Bible Institute & Seminary

Chief John Dixon - Gateway