

Issue Date: 11/15/2007, Posted On: 11/15/2007

Rutland Sq. building renovated by YouthBuild Boston

Units will have emphasis on affordability

by Lou Manzo

Inside 20 Rutland Sq., 12 YouthBuild apprentices, most of them recent graduates of Madison Park High School, measure two by fours for their next cut. Outside 20 Rutland Sq., Kenneth Smith, the executive director of YouthBuild Boston, a nonprofit that apprentices young people in the construction trades, delights in the progress of the building.

"It's a perfect fit," Smith said.

It's clear, though, he's not talking about the wood drilled into the last frame. Smith is talking about a partnership among Boston developers. This South End renovation will stand out not for its multi-million dollar apartments or concierge service, but as a testament to the memory of longtime, and now deceased, South End residents James and Joyce Reed, advocates of accessible housing.

After James Reed, who owned the building, died nearly eight years ago, 20 Rutland Sq. sat vacant and run down. In his trust, he dictated that the building be renovated with the goal of creating affordable housing. Now hammers and electric saws break the early morning silence. At Rutland Square, 12 apprentices, along with two instructors, and a foreman hope to complete the brownstone's renovation by next May. The building will have two apartments, one occupying the basement and first floor and one occupying the top three. The top apartment, designed with artists in mind, has private bedrooms but a communal penthouse kitchen and workspace. While final details are worked out, both units will have an emphasis on "affordability."

"We're going to see how the units come out and how the bottom line costs come out," said Mel King, director of the South End Technology Center and executor of the Reed Trust, adding that he hopes both apartments will be affordable. "Right now we're working to make sure they're accessible physically and economically. His [James Reed] concerns were [about getting] access for people who had difficulty getting housing. I'm sure Mr. Reed would be smiling but I think the issue will always be how is it going to be affordable."

That's where Smith sees the importance of his organization.

"We can do it as a non profit at a lower cost which means it can be affordable," Smith said.

YouthBuild expects construction costs will be approximately \$500,000. The building was mostly gutted and only the banister, parts of the staircase and outside windows remain

from the original structure. A month passed before demolition could even begin as YouthBuild apprentices removed furniture and chairs.

Now the structure is taking shape. Joan and Josh Wood, a mother and son architectural team on Rutland Square, drew up the plans for the renovation. They designed the project with Reed's wishes, and the mission of YouthBuild, in mind.

"They are a non-profit so it is different working with them in a few ways," said Josh Wood. "One of main elements is the educational aspect. We put technology and design [in the building] so they could train their kids on it."

The Woods designed the building to be energy efficient. A skylight will light the inner hallways to reduce energy costs and a green-planted roof will cool the building in the summer, which the apprentices will help to install.

As the building moves closer to completion, King said he will decide how the tenants are chosen. In the meantime, officials with YouthBuild are proud as they watch their apprentices work.

"It is nice for the young people," Smith said. "They have some visual evidence of their skills. This helps young people grow, build their skills, and get self sufficient."

Shanice Thomas, a recent graduate of Madison Park High School, said she is looking forward to installing the plumbing, which she studied in her high school's vocational education program.

"I chose plumbing because carpentry you see everywhere but a female doing plumbing, you don't see that as much," she said.

Thomas is one of 12 apprentices working on the Rutland Square building. After a year working with Youth Build, most will join a technical union.

"I'm going to take a lot of pictures and put them in my portfolio to use as references," said Michael Jones-Cole, a Youth Build apprentice and recent Madison Park alumni.

Jones-Cole explained that at the beginning of the project not everyone understood the importance of showing up to work on time. The project, in its fifth month, runs like clockwork now, though.

"We got to know each other and we're all family now," said Thomas.

Jones-Cole hopes to continue building the Rutland Square relationships after the project is complete.

"Carpentry and plumbing is a good combination," said Jones-Cole as he looked at Thomas. "Maybe in the future we'll go into business together and make a lot of money."