

# The Washington Post

Article | 09/03/2009

## Helping Make Foster Boys a Home : With Perseverance and Help, Aunt Hattie's Place Takes...

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## **Helping Make Foster Boys a Home**

With Perseverance and Help, Aunt Hattie's Place Takes Shape in Sandy Spring

By Melissa J. Brachfeld  
Gazette Staff Writer  
Thursday, September 3, 2009

As he looked at the foundation of Aunt Hattie's Place taking shape, Mark O'Flynn, president of the Sandy Spring Civic Association, said he was thrilled to have the home for foster boys in his neighborhood.

"We're pretty happy to have Hattie making progress," he said of Hattie Washington, president and founder of Aunt Hattie's Place, whose third group home is being built on Norwood Road. "She's been persevering in her attempts to get this place built, and that's model behavior: Don't ever give up."

O'Flynn, elected officials, residents and other supporters gathered last Thursday to celebrate the construction of the home's foundation and even hammer in a nail or two.

Aunt Hattie's Place is being built onto what was once the home of Robert H. Hill, president and founder of a Sandy Spring construction company and a former Negro leagues baseball player. The facility will provide a long-term home for eight boys, ages 12 through 19, who are in foster care or group homes. It is slated to open in December.

Hill, a philanthropist who died in November 2002, left the property to Washington, who founded two similar homes for at-risk youths in Baltimore and Baltimore County.

Although the project faced opposition from some neighbors, Del. Karen S. Montgomery (D-Montgomery) of Brookeville said Washington knew how to change their minds.

"Sandy Spring is tough, Sandy Spring is difficult and Sandy Spring wants to have a say," Montgomery said. "And from what I know about Aunt Hattie and this project, she knew how to work the people in Sandy Spring so they became supportive."

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Aunt Hattie's Place is being built by GRC Construction, which is based in Zullinger, Pa.

Greg Dillon, founder and principal of Dillon Development Partners, the Frederick company overseeing the project, said that about 3,600 square feet of the house on the property will remain, and that 11,000 square feet will be added.

GRC Construction is moving forward with its work despite a shortfall of about \$1 million in Washington's budget for the project, said Jim Rock, the company's president and founder.

A state bond bill provided \$550,000 toward the project, and the County Council has allocated \$900,000 over fiscal 2006, 2007, 2009 and 2010 budgets, said Chris Gillis, an aide to County Council member George L. Leventhal (D-At Large) of Takoma Park.

Gillis said Aunt Hattie's Place had raised \$680,000 toward the project, which is expected to cost about \$3 million.

Washington thanked the community and said she is sure the home's residents will thank them, too.

"Somebody helped us one day, and the only thing these kids need is a chance," she said. "And if you met my young men who were here earlier today, you would see that these kids are just appreciative, and they're appreciative for a good home. And we, as leaders in the community and people who have been blessed, they're waiting on us to make a decision to help them."