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Carolyn Davis and Tom Leppert: South Dallas neighborhood's passion for revitalization has paid off

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Sunday, tens of thousands of people from all over the region will make their once-a-year pilgrimage to South Dallas to sample the delights of the State Fair – a nostalgic nod to our agricultural past. Just a few blocks away, residents of one South Dallas neighborhood will gather to stake their claim to an urban future that is safe, productive and prosperous.

They will come together at the corner of Scyene Road and Bertrand Avenue to take part in the demolition of a business that has been a thorn in the side of their community for many, many years. It is a motel now known as the American Inn but once named, with far more candor, the Mi Amor. Its rooms, which rented by the hour, were a haven for drug dealers, prostitutes and other elements that subtracted from, rather than added to, the value of the community. At least one murder took place there. The owners – outsiders who had no roots in the neighborhood – repeatedly evaded court orders to close their doors. They went for years without paying property taxes or obtaining the necessary permit to operate in an area not zoned for businesses such as theirs.

Residents fought back in every way they could. They wrote down license plates. They called the police on dozens of occasions. Sometimes, the police made arrests. A few years ago, the city sued the American Inn as a nuisance, and it closed for a while.

Somehow, though, the drug dealers and the hookers always came back. But the good people never gave up – and there are many good people who can claim victory today. Members of the Bertrand Neighborhood Association refused to accept the blight in their midst. The congregation of True Lee Missionary Baptist Church, which is just next door, spoke boldly against evil and offered a vision for renewal.

Our City Council colleague Dwaine Caraway was among those who gathered the \$1,000 necessary to bring the American Inn before zoning authorities, who ultimately forced it to shut down this spring. Frazier Revitalization Inc., a nonprofit organization created to partner with residents in bringing new housing and reputable businesses to the area, purchased the property, making it possible, finally, to erase the scourge once and for all.

Like man's first steps on the moon, this is a giant leap for this community that has lived so long in the shadows of more prosperous parts of town. It shows those of us who live elsewhere that the people of

South Dallas care passionately about their neighborhoods and are willing to fight to make them wholesome and safe. It proves that change is possible.

If you are planning to go to the State Fair on Sunday, come just a few blocks beyond it and take a look for yourself. You'll be surprised at what you see. All along Scyene Road, just across the street from the American Inn, the new southeast DART rail line is taking shape day by day. It holds fresh promise for this area: new residents, new businesses, new jobs.

Already, the elected officials who represent the area and organizations such as Frazier Revitalization are working with residents to see that the right people benefit from the coming changes: the ones who live here now. They have endured; they have toiled in the vineyards; the fruit is rightly theirs. Today is their day to begin to taste that sweet, sweet fruit.

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