

Passion for setting things right

Port City resident raises funds for African Burying Ground memorial

BY JEANNÉ MCCARTIN
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PORTSMOUTH — George Carlisle gave an impassioned speech regarding Portsmouth's African Burying Ground at a casual gathering in his home on Wednesday. He told the

60-plus guests he was looking for their financial support, but, more importantly, he hoped they would gain a better understanding of the project set in his native Portsmouth, and then spread the word.

"I think this is the most

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POPOVERS HELPS OUT

The downtown cafe is celebrating its fifth anniversary by holding a benefit for the city's efforts to honor memory of slaves, A2



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George Carlisle hosted a party Wednesday at his home to raise funds for the African Burying Ground Memorial Park.

MEMORIAL: Parties raise money for park



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A model showing the proposed design of the Portsmouth African Burying Ground Memorial Park was set in the kitchen at the home of George Carlisle during the house party he hosted Wednesday.

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significant community effort — historically, artistically, culturally and spiritually,” said Carlisle, owner of Olde Port Properties.

The Burying Ground is located on Chestnut Street, under which 13 graves were discovered in 2003. An examination by state archaeologists identified eight as being of African descent, likely Portsmouth slaves. Later, more graves were uncovered.

Carlisle introduced key figures in bringing the Portsmouth African Burying Ground Memorial Park to the site: Mary Bailey and Vernis Jackson of the African Burying Ground Trust Fund and Mayor’s Blue Ribbon Committee on the African Burying Ground and Stephanie Seacord of Exeter-based Leading Edge Marketing, a burying ground Trust Fund volunteer.

A “Negro Burying” yard or grounds was listed in records from 1760 and 1859. Over time, the area was paved over, built on and its historical significance forgotten.

The speakers noted that when it was rediscovered, Portsmouth defined itself through its respectful treatment of the interred. That, said Carlisle, should continue. The site is the only archaeologically verified African Burying Ground of its era in New England and the resting ground of forgotten, wronged human beings, he said.

The memorial park would identify the grounds as a sacred place with West African cultural roots dignified with a title, “We Stand in Honor of Those Forgotten.”

“We can’t go back 300 years and undo what was done. But we can make a decision as to whether or not it stops or continues,” Carlisle said. “I think the memorial park is the right thing to do.”

Carlisle spoke of the forced division of families, harsh treatment and the humanity of the slaves buried on Chestnut Street, facts brought into focus at a meeting he had with former Portsmouth fourth-grade teacher Vernis Jackson.

“Once Susan (my wife) and I really understood, it touched

our hearts,” Carlisle said.

The Carlises held the event in hopes others would also hold fund-raising house parties and spread the word. People need to know the history, he said. This project has national significance, but is important to Portsmouth’s own sense of self, he added.

“This cause speaks more about who we are today than 300 years ago. ... We didn’t do it. But do we leave them there or give them their dignity?” Carlisle said. “It’s important that the community has the opportunity to support this as opposed to a few major donors.”

The proposed memorial will cost \$1.2 million. To date, the committee has received commitments of \$400,000 in cash and in-kind services toward the memorial, said Seacord. This includes a \$100,000 federal grant that the City Council has committed.

She said Thursday more than 50 pledge cards were handed out at the Carlises’ house party.

By evening’s end, four people had signed on to hold meetings in their homes.

“These people were forgotten. Today, we have the opportunity, each of us, to decide who we are — the opportunity to leave them or stand beside them,” Carlisle said. “A city is defined by how it treats its people.”

Popovers to aid in effort to honor burial ground

BY DEBORAH MCDERMOTT
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PORTSMOUTH — Those in need of a cup of java and who also want to help a good cause may want to head to Popover’s on the Square on Wednesday, Aug. 10.

Popover’s will celebrate its fifth anniversary that day, and as part of the festivities the eatery will donate 50 percent of the sale of all coffee drinks to the African Burying Ground Trust.

In addition, owner John Tinios will match that amount as a personal donation.

“My family members were immigrants, and they were discriminated against when they first arrived in America — nowhere near to the extent as slaves were, but I understand,” he said. “It’s great to remember where we came from and how far we’ve come.”

The African Burying Ground Trust is working to raise more than \$1 million to fund a memorial park on the site of the burying ground on Chestnut Street. Tinios said that effort is in keeping with the character of Portsmouth.

“There is so much energy in Portsmouth and so much diversity, and it all seems to funnel through Market Square,” he said. “I’ve been overwhelmed by the support Portsmouth has given us right from the beginning.”

He said the city has an innate sense of community, saying “people are active in bettering Portsmouth, and it’s a nice thing to see.” The effort for a burying ground memorial is emblematic of that. “It touches on history, culture, arts, the whole works, which are at the heart of Portsmouth.”

Tinios said there will also be other events on Aug. 10, including live entertainment from noon to 9 p.m.

THURSDAY LOTTERIES

Tri-State Daily: Day: 5-7-5 / 9-4-4-4
Evening: 9-6-6 / 3-3-9-7

Mass Daily: 5-9-5-9
Cash Winfall: Unavailable by press time.