

INTRODUCED: September 14, 2020

AN ORDINANCE No. 2020-200

To designate the 900 block of St. James Street in honor of James Russell Stallings, Sr.

Patron – Vice President Hilbert

Approved as to form and legality
by the City Attorney

PUBLIC HEARING: SEP 28 2020 AT 6 P.M.

WHEREAS, the late James Russell Stallings, Sr., was born on November 23, 1927 in North Carolina and was brought as an infant to live at 733 West Leigh Street in Richmond; and

WHEREAS, James Russell Stallings, Sr., was educated in Richmond Public Schools and served in the United States Air Force before embarking on a long career as a leading real estate developer in Richmond's historic Jackson Ward neighborhood; and

WHEREAS, James Russell Stallings, Sr., purchased his first property in Jackson Ward in the 1940s and continued throughout the decades to purchase many old and historic Jackson Ward properties, including the Hippodrome Theater, Maggie Walker's St. Luke building, and Perry's Restaurant, in an attempt to save and revitalize Jackson Ward; and

AYES: 8 NOES: 0 ABSTAIN: _____

ADOPTED: SEP 28 2020 REJECTED: _____ STRICKEN: _____

WHEREAS, James Russell Stallings, Sr., developed certain properties in Jackson Ward to provide affordable, low-income housing with perhaps his greatest legacy being the Clay House Shelter, an old brewery re-adapted to feed and house those citizens in most need; and

WHEREAS, the City desires to memorialize James Russell Stalling's contributions to the Jackson Ward community by designating the 900 block of St. James Street in his honor; and

WHEREAS, because this designation is honorary only, the provisions of sections 8-7 through 8-10 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2015), as amended, do not apply to the designation made hereby or to any signs erected pursuant to this ordinance;

NOW, THEREFORE,

THE CITY OF RICHMOND HEREBY ORDAINS:

§ 1. **Designation of Street Block for Honorary Name.** The 900 block of St. James Street shall be designated in honor of James Russell Stallings, Sr., pursuant to this ordinance.

§ 2. **Effect of Designation.** The designation of the street block made pursuant to this ordinance shall be honorary only, shall not replace the existing name of the street, and shall have no effect on the address of any property with an address on the designated street block. The sole effect of designation pursuant to this ordinance shall be to authorize the placement of commemorative signs in accordance with this ordinance memorializing the designation in honor of the named person.

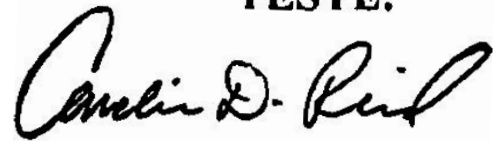
§ 3. **Administration of Ordinance.** The Department of Public Works shall implement this ordinance by installing, as soon as practicable after the adoption of this ordinance, and maintaining commemorative signs in accordance with this section. The commemorative signs shall be clearly distinct from the street signs used to identify the street block in question such that a reasonable person could not conclude that the commemorative signs reflect the actual name of

the street. The commemorative signs shall be affixed to the street sign for the street designated in section 1 of this ordinance located at each end of the street block designated in section 1 of this ordinance and shall bear the name of the person set forth in section 1 of this ordinance.

§ 4. **Effective Date.** This ordinance shall be in force and effect upon adoption.

A TRUE COPY:

TESTE:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Camille D. Reil". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'C'.

City Clerk



Richmond City Council

The Voice of the People

Richmond, Virginia

Office of the Council Chief of Staff

Ordinance/Resolution Request

RECEIVED
By Barbara Pore at 11:48 am, Jul 30, 2020

TO Haskell C. Brown, III, Interim Richmond City Attorney
Richmond Office of the City Attorney

THROUGH Lawrence R. Anderson
Council Chief of Staff

FROM William E. Echelberger, Jr. Council Budget Analyst

COPY Christopher A. Hilbert, 3rd District Representative
Tabrica C. Rentz, Interim Deputy City Attorney
Meghan K. Brown, Deputy Council Chief of Staff
Lisa F. Townes, 3rd District Liaison

DATE July 30, 2020

PAGE/s 1 of 2

TITLE Honorary Street Name - James Russell Stallings, Sr.

This is a request for the drafting of an **Ordinance** **Resolution**

REQUESTING COUNCILMEMBER/PATRON

Christopher A. Hilbert, 3rd District
Representative

SUGGESTED STANDING COMMITTEE

Land Use, Housing, and Transportation

ORDINANCE/RESOLUTION SUMMARY

The Patron requests an ordinance to authorize the honorary naming of the 900 Block of St. James Street in honor of the late James Russell Stallings, Sr.

BACKGROUND

Summary:

- The late James Russell Stallings, Sr. was born on November 23, 1927 in North Carolina, and moved to 733 W. Leigh Street in Richmond, VA at the age of one. He lived in Richmond until his death on December 16, 2000.
- Mr. Stallings was a leading real estate developer in the City of Richmond's historic Jackson Ward neighborhood.
- Mr. Stallings was educated in the Richmond public schools.
- Mr. Stallings served in the United States Air Force.
- Mr. Stallings had a long career in real estate development:
 - He bought his first Jackson Ward property in the 1940s; and

- He purchased many historic properties and landmarks in Jackson Ward including the Hippodrome Theater, the St. Luke building that housed Maggie Walker's first bank, Slaughter's Hotel, and Perry's Restaurant.
- Mr. Stallings played a major role in new Jackson Ward construction, and at one time had 160 tenants in buildings he had bought to provide affordable housing to low-income Richmonders.
- Mr. Stallings most lasting legacy may be the Clay House Shelter, which he created from an old brewery building to house and feed those most in need.
- Mr. Stallings was dedicated to his community of Jackson Ward, spending his entire professional life attempting to save and revitalize that historic Richmond neighborhood.
- The proposed honorary designation is supported by the local community, as indicated by the attached petition.
- This designation is honorary only, the provisions of sections 8-7 through 8-10 of the Code of the City of Richmond (2015), as amended, do not apply to the designation made hereby or to any signs erected pursuant to this ordinance.

FISCAL IMPACT STATEMENT

Fiscal Impact	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Budget Amendment Required	Yes <input type="checkbox"/>	No <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Estimated Cost or Revenue Impact		
<p>No additional funds are required for the requested name designation. The costs associated with signage are normally paid from funds appropriated to the Department of Public Works.</p>		

Attachment/s Yes No

2001 SESSION

ENROLLED

HOUSE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 567

On the death of James Russell Stallings, Sr.

Agreed to by the House of Delegates, January 12, 2001
Agreed to by the Senate, January 19, 2001

WHEREAS, James Russell Stallings, Sr., a leading real estate developer in Richmond's historic Jackson Ward neighborhood, died on December 16, 2000; and

WHEREAS, a native of Richmond, James Stallings was educated in the Richmond public schools and served in the United States Air Force; and

WHEREAS, beginning a career that made him the landlord to thousands of Richmond residents, James Stallings bought his first Jackson Ward property in the 1940s; and

WHEREAS, James Stallings purchased many historic properties and landmarks in Jackson Ward, including the Hippodrome Theater, the St. Luke building that housed Maggie Walker's first bank, Slaughter's Hotel, and Perry's Restaurant; and

WHEREAS, James Stallings played a major role in new Jackson Ward construction, and at one time had 160 tenants in buildings he had bought to provide affordable housing to low-income Richmonders; and

WHEREAS, James Stallings' most lasting legacy may be the Clay House Shelter, which he created from an old brewery building to house and feed those most in need; and

WHEREAS, because of James Stallings' personal generosity, the Clay House Shelter has served more than 30,000 meals, prepared at and delivered from James Stallings' home, and has sheltered more than 2,000 people; and

WHEREAS, James Stallings was dedicated to his community of Jackson Ward, spending his entire professional life attempting to save and revitalize that historic Richmond neighborhood; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the House of Delegates, the Senate concurring, That the General Assembly note with sadness the passing of a fine citizen of Richmond, James Russell Stallings, Sr.; and, be it

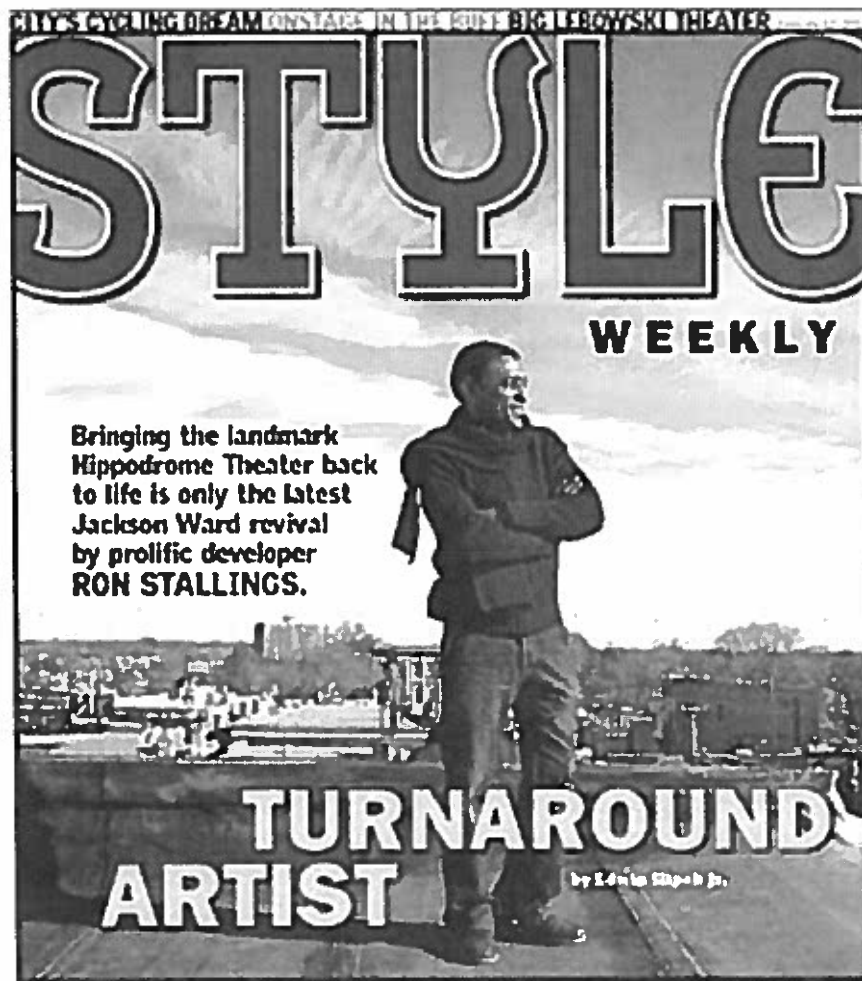
RESOLVED FURTHER, That the Clerk of the House of Delegates prepare a copy of this resolution for presentation to the family of James Russell Stallings, Sr., as an expression of the General Assembly's respect for his memory.

ENROLLED

HJ567ER

Son of Jackson Ward

Since he and his family inherited more than 100 Jackson Ward parcels from his father, developer Ron Stallings has led some \$30 million worth of projects in the historically black residential and business district.



AT DAWN ON a recent snowy weekday, many Richmonders ignore the alarm clock and burrow deeper under the covers.

But over in Jackson Ward, developer Ronald A. Stallings is going full-throttle in his simply furnished office at Walker Row Partnership. With a wool muffler tightly encircling his neck for warmth more than for style, he tries to converse with a visitor but the phone keeps ringing.

Periodically, a head pops in the doorway. "What about the chandeliers?" A few minutes later: "Where are the locks?"

"That's Ernie Shearin," Stallings says, introducing his assistant of 32 years. As teenagers he and Shearin got their start in the business when Stallings' father hired them to demolish an old house in Jackson Ward, supplying them with only a pickup truck and a crowbar. "He's my right hand," Stallings says. "No, he's my left and right hand. Ernie can do anything."

The phone rings again. Taking the call, Stallings cradles the receiver with his chin and swings both arms broadly in the air as if conducting an orchestra.

"It's good my head's attached," he says, laughing.

Developers keep balls in the air — it's what they do — but in December Stallings and a team of contractors, electricians and painters raced the clock to obtain a certificate of occupancy by year's end after an ambitious restoration of the Hippodrome Theater. The structure, located at 528 N. Second St. and just a few doors up from Stallings' office, has been empty for most of 40 years.

Now renovated after years of fits and starts, come spring the early-20th-century landmark with its distinctive art deco facade — which once presented such legendary Chittlin' Circuit entertainers as Duke Ellington, Ella Fitzgerald, James Brown and Redd Foxx — will reopen as an elegant nightclub. Next door is one of the largest houses in Jackson Ward, the 26-room, Queen Anne-style former residence of the Rev. W. L. Taylor, founder of the True Reformers Savings Bank. It too has been restored and will add an upscale dining component — called Mansion T — to the entertainment complex.



But Stallings isn't knocking himself out on the complicated \$12 million project (including a \$600,000 grant from the city) only to relive the music hall's glory days. "In addition to name groups we want to attract new groups doing blues, rhythm and blues, jazz and soul," he says. "For those getting started in the business, even young musicians from [Virginia Commonwealth University] and other schools, this'll be one of the spots."

If branded and marketed effectively, Stallings says, the Hippodrome and residual developments will attract bring bigger conventions and more tourists to Richmond and generate jobs.

The Hippodrome's metamorphosis is only the latest and most visible project in a strategic chain of renovations and new construction that Stallings has shepherded in Jackson Ward during the past decade. His path was perhaps determined and certainly bolstered by the impressively large real estate portfolio of more than 100 Jackson Ward parcels that he, his mother, brother and four sisters inherited from his late — and often controversial — businessman father, James Russell Stallings.

The elder Stallings had amassed the trove of properties over five decades. But the legacy was more complicated: In his December 2000 obituary, the *Richmond Times-Dispatch* wrote that in 1997 former city manager Robert C. Bobb had called him "one of the worst landlords in the city, citing various housing, environmental and zoning code violations." While Stallings had often countered that yes, conditions at his properties were sometimes less than ideal, rents were fair and the alternative would have put perhaps hundreds of people on the streets.

Today his son regularly expresses unbridled admiration, even reverence, for his father, citing what he accomplished. To the son, his father was a tireless, compassionate, local real estate tycoon who did the possible in a time of racial segregation. "He gave [our family] a foundation," he says. "Following in his footsteps is hard because there're so big I fall into them." A photographic portrait hangs prominently in the lobby of Walker Row Partnership.

Since his father's death, with laser focus and possessing tremendous energy and charisma, Stallings has charmed, cajoled and sometimes elbowed his way toward reinvigorating the historically black residential and business district of Jackson Ward. Structure by rehabilitated structure, he sees tremendous equity not only in a rich collection of old buildings — particularly Greek revival and Italianate houses — but also what they jointly signify as the birthplace of black entrepreneurship.

"When many people think of Jackson Ward there's always been a benign picture of a village in the city," historian Selden Richardson says when asked about Jackson Ward's place in Richmond's history.

But the neighborhood represents so much more, says Richardson, who also wrote "Built by Blacks: African American Architecture and Neighborhoods in Richmond, Va."

"It's was a crucible — a presser cooker — that was hemmed in by racially restrictive codes and laws which in some ways restricted blacks," he says. "But this mixture of talent, money and a strong sense of society were tempered into a crucible. It is an amazing story."

"Today, Jackson Ward is one of Richmond's most important material resources," Stallings says. "It has proximity to the river, to VCU, to the [Virginia BioTechnology Research Park]. We're close to all of it. We have a pivotal role."

Ronald Stallings is the public face of the family businesses — the Walker Row Partnership and other entities. Only one of his siblings, Wanda Stallings, is also involved in day-to-day operations. "We have different arrangements and different partnerships. It's like 'Yours, Mine and Ours,'" he says, referring the 1968 film starring Lucille Ball and Henry Fonda that was a precursor to "The Brady Bunch."

"We have several companies, while a lot of things I've done on my own, Stallings says. As for the breakdown of duties: "Wanda makes sure all the rents get collected and the tenants are taken care of. My mother's job is to make sure my sister and I get along."



JAMES RUSSELL STALLINGS Sr., who died 10 years ago at age 73, started building his extensive Jackson Ward real estate holdings with the purchase of a house on Jackson Street in the 1940s, before interstates 95 and 64 sliced a trough through the historic neighborhood.

The elder Stallings never really knew his parents and was reared during the Great Depression years by his great aunt, Elaney Stallings, who worked as a live-in housekeeper for a white family on Confederate Avenue in Ginter Park. She therefore hired two no-nonsense spinsters, Mabel Morris and Inez Owens (Owens lived to be 100) to look after young James in their home near Battery Park.

But as independent and enterprising as Oliver Twist, Stallings dropped out of the Richmond Public Schools at age 13 years and went to work at a chicken factory. He later served in the U.S. Air Force as a cook.

The woman Stallings married, Margaret Tyler of Goochland, had caught his eye one day while he passed the restaurant where she worked near Belvidere and Marshall streets. They had six children.

Stallings managed a rent-a-car company for 37 years, but because of racial barriers, buying into the operations wasn't an option. So on the side he began buying properties in Jackson Ward. "He always made something out of nothing," the son Ronald says. "Where some people see absolutely nothing, he'd find something."

In the 1940s and early 1950s "the Ward," as it's often called, was the city's largest contiguous black residential and business district. It extended from Broad Street north through as many as 11 blocks to Shockoe Creek and Bacon's Quarter Branch, and included Shockoe and Hebrew cemeteries.

"An appreciation of 'the Ward' depends more on a sense of the picturesque than a knowledge of history," architectural historian Mary Wingfield Scott wrote in her seminal 1950 tome, "Old Richmond Neighborhoods."

"In spite of much shabbiness, dirt and ill-judged repairs, Jackson Ward is a treasure trove of old houses. ... This we fear, will not long be true," she cautioned. Scott predicted the proposed expressway would destroy much of the neighborhood that had been settled by Germans, Jews and free blacks in the early 1800s, and which by the mid-20th century was a bastion of Richmond's black community.



"In the destruction of old houses, this plan will have a more far-reaching effect than any event in the history of Richmond except the Evacuation Fire" in April 1865 at the close of the American Civil War, she wrote.

The Richmond-Petersburg Turnpike (now I-95 and I-64) did damage, but no fatal blows. There were other factors that worked against the neighborhood.

Scott's opinion that Jackson Ward contained little history worth noting reflected the accepted thinking of whites in the pre-Civil Rights era and contributed to considerable architectural losses in this, as well as other historic neighborhoods. But also, modernist planning and architecture were on the ascendancy: It was deemed responsible public policy to eliminate blighted, working class neighborhoods to make room for new housing and public facilities.

This led, in northwestern Jackson Ward, to the establishment of Gilpin Court, the largest public housing project between Washington and Atlanta. Currently, Gilpin Court's proximity to Jackson Ward is seen by many residents, developers and officials as one of the challenges to the neighborhood's redevelopment. But urban removal and replacement with public housing was a widespread strategy of many cities after World War II.

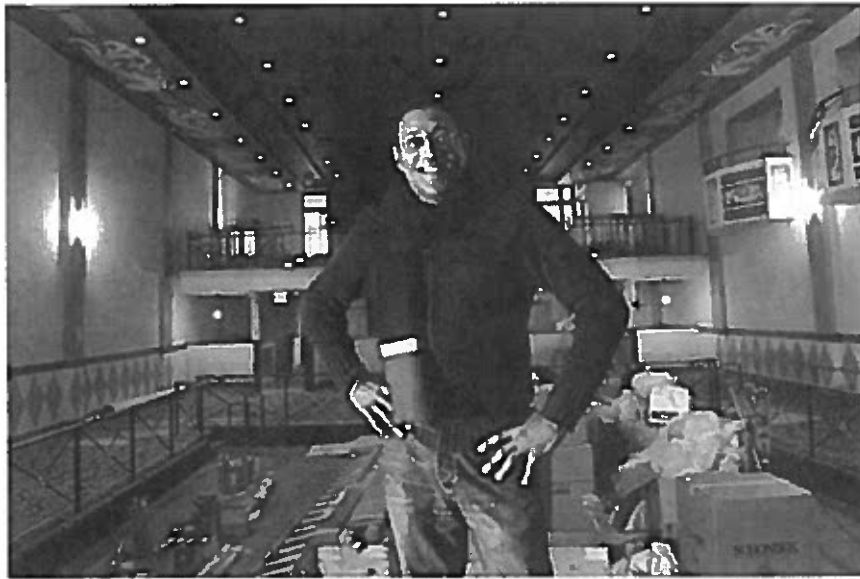
"While preservationists may have scorned modernist housing blocks, they were often just as insensitive to the plight of local residents who got in the way," New York Times architecture critic Nicolai Ouroussoff wrote recently. "Even as [preservationists] worked to restore architectural monuments ... they could be disdainful of the dense urban fabric that surrounded these sites."

James Stallings also didn't hesitate to wipe out the old. During the 1990s he acknowledged demolishing at least 40 houses that he couldn't afford to fix up or that had been condemned.

"He owned more residential than commercial land," Ronald Stallings says. "My dad played Monopoly but he also watched his flanks. He not only bought buildings and properties but space around them."

Importantly, Stallings also acquired buildings that he considered historic, even if the white establishment at the time did not. Those properties included the St. Luke Bank building (which was Maggie L. Walker's first bank), Slaughter's Hotel, Miller's Hotel, Perry's Restaurant and the Hippodrome.

Stallings says his dad knew exactly what he was doing: "My father understood that the buildings in Jackson Ward were minor monuments to those who went before," he says. "Save them, he believed, and you save the history."



BUT JAMES STALLINGS' greatest Jackson Ward legacy may well be his youngest son. Ronald picked up the baton — in the form of a vision for developing and leveraging the 100 properties — and with full family support ran with it. "My father taught us, if nothing else, how to work together and how to work," he says. "We have always worked. We have always been hustlers."

"When we were kids he bought my brother and me a truck equipped with a little sink and we'd park it near Parker Field on Brookland Park Boulevard or different other playgrounds around town selling snow cone [balls]. We could net \$150 a day. Then, later we started selling hot dogs — 'Hot Dogs from the Snow Ball King' was on the truck. What made the hot dogs special was we cooked them in spiced water: That's the deal — we infused the flavor in the hot dog."

Although Stallings attended Longwood College (now university) and majored in biology with an eye toward medical school, he says that immediately after graduation he wanted to make money. Among his entrepreneurial efforts were a used furniture store in Jackson Ward and later a vending machine company.

He says his vision for developing his family's real estate portfolio came as an unexpected epiphany about the time of his father's death. "I was standing in the middle of East Clay Street one day and staring at the newly constructed downtown convention center," Stallings says, conjuring the moment as if it happened yesterday. "It was like a revelation: We're going to take all this stuff, all our property, and leverage it to develop it. We're going to create an entertainment center near the center of downtown so that folks can taste the culture of where they are. Richmond can re-leverage its history."

A honking car horn shook Stallings from his trance and he hopped out of harm's way and onto the sidewalk. "The guy almost ran me over," he says.

Stallings established a master plan, the Jackson Ward New Urbanism Plan, and the family was on board.

"Jackson Ward is 40 square blocks, more or less, comprising the largest collection of African-American history in the world," Stallings says. "African-American history didn't start until after emancipation and this neighborhood is the history of free blacks working together to get through the American apartheid. That effort created Jackson Ward. This neighborhood is an example of self-sufficiency for young people. It tells the story after the Civil War."

Stallings says that to not just tell the story of black entrepreneurship, but foster it, he plans to renovate of the St. Luke's Building to house what he calls the First Step Demonstration Project. He says it will provide a tool kit by offering programs and services dealing with education, health care and job training. He maintains that the post-emancipation story is the history that should be stressed. "Although there is a big push for a slavery museum, Jackson Ward is the story of doctors, lawyers, Indians and Indian chiefs who all worked together."

But Stallings started by revitalizing a number residential properties using federal and state tax credits and other development incentives.



"For Jackson Ward to succeed it must be multiethnic, mixed-use and mixed-income," says developer Robin Miller, an experienced hand in rehabbing Richmond's old residential and once-industrial neighborhoods who's worked on a number of projects with Stallings. "The best use for most of the buildings is for them to remain in private hands. I'm a firm believer in the market. What has happened in Richmond is because developers have come in and taken advantage of historic tax credits."

Stallings acknowledges that the last 10 years have been a learning curve, and that he's become more sophisticated. Asking to go unnamed, one longtime Jackson Ward resident and keen observer of the neighborhood's redevelopment, and the Stallings family role in it, agrees: "Ron's had to change some of his ways, such as interacting better, as the neighborhood has come up. He's capable of doing good work, and as the neighborhood has come up his standards have improved. I want to give credit where credit is due."

"Ron has put blood, sweat and his soul into restoring Jackson Ward," developer Miller says. "He's an excellent partner, a good businessman and an extremely hard worker."

Stallings isn't the only major developer who's seen opportunities in Jackson Ward. Alex Alexander was among the first with his company's renovation and expansion of the Richmond Dairy Building, and Kelvin Hanson has done major work, including the recent rehabilitation of the old Booker T. Washington School at East Clay and North First streets. Miller has projects in the area too. But Stallings' projects clearly have Aclan. His architect for most of these projects, including the Hippodrome, has been Burt Pinnock of BAM Architects, but his own design ideas are a major part of the mix.

On East Clay Street he converted a midcentury modern structure that once housed an insurance company into condominiums, the 2C Condos. He turned a neoclassical office building at 212 E. Clay St. into condos. Simultaneously he worked on individual properties such as moving the historic Tucker Cottage from North Third to a location on Chamberlayne Parkway. New construction projects have included four attached townhouses, Jackson Commons (a project with Miller), overlooking the Bill "Bojangles" Robinson monument, and Studio 516, a modern apartment building on Second Street.

Along with Jackson Commons and other projects, Miller and Stallings are rehabilitating a house at 29 W. Jackson St. and building a new, three-story, 41-unit apartment building, 701 St. James. "It will be very energy efficient," Miller says. "We wanted it to be comparable with the neighborhood but be a modern building and not copy the architecture of the neighborhood."

Not including the Hippodrome, to date Stallings has overseen some \$30 million in Jackson Ward development projects.

"We've been pleased with the work he's been doing," says Charles W. Finley, president of the Historic Jackson Ward Association. "He's rescued a number of homes in the neighborhood and gotten more people living here. Any time we can increase residential activity, particularly owner-occupied, it's something we're excited about."



IT'S NEW YEAR'S Day and the Hippodrome has received a certificate of occupancy. The marquee is yet to be completed, but the pastel-colored terrazzo floor of the vestibule is being swept and two workers are down on their knees installing colorful, patterned wall-to-wall carpet. Deeper inside the building, the formerly sloped auditorium flooring has been reconfigured into a series of shallow terraces with metal railings. One story up is a deep mezzanine with similar terraced risers. Smaller balconies extend from VIP rooms. The main space will hold 450 patrons at tables and chairs with 700 standing.

The Hippodrome entertainment will be managed by the same operation that operates B.B. King's and the Blue Note jazz club in New York City.

Beneath the freshly painted, warm-hued walls, cardboard boxes of electrical equipment and yards of wiring are sprawled about while out-of-town technicians install the complex's sound and lighting systems.

A few friends and associates trickle in to take a glimpse of the ugly-duckling-turned-prince and offer congratulations. Ernie Shearin, nonchalantly, proudly offers tours of public spaces and support areas — dressing rooms and restrooms. He guides people through a recently cut connecting passage into the Taylor house, where workman are installing kitchen equipment, and where the deep brown, flocked wallpaper has been hung on the walls of Mansion T restaurant's dining rooms.

An elevator and stairwell lead upstairs to 29 new apartments both inside the mansion and in adjacent new construction. "I was told no 32 times over a period of six years before I got somebody to lend us the money," Stallings says. "The housing component was key to making this work. Nobody wants to finance nightclubs, restaurants or hotels."

Stallings credits First Market Bank: "They absolutely got it done. They'd been dealing with me for 20 years. But if my father taught me anything it was: Always pay the bank, always pay the bank, always pay the bank."

"The Hippodrome wouldn't have happened without Ron," Miller says. "Any other developer would have given up five years ago. He had the passion, brains and bucks. Yes, he got that \$600,000 from the city, but it takes a private sector guy who has his own money at work. I told him he was crazy, but he kept pounding, kept pounding, kept pounding. I think the Hippodrome will be the spark that gets Second Street going."

"It'll bring new and more life to the neighborhood," community leader Finley says.

And Stallings himself seems to just be warming up, saying: "If anyone wants to come in and play, this is not a kingdom. This is an opportunity."

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