

MARYLAND



COMMENTARY

Pastor Hudson's big dream starts to come true



Dan Rodricks

These words came to me exactly 55 years from the day I first heard them: "As he said many times, in many parts of this nation, to those he touched and those who sought to touch him: 'Some men see things as they are and say, "Why?" I dream things that never were and say, "Why not?"'"

Those were the last words of Ted Kennedy's elegy for his slain brother Bobby, delivered June 8, 1968, at St. Patrick's Cathedral in New York. Meant to comfort and encourage a mourning nation after another soul-crushing tragedy — the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. also had been assassinated that cruel spring — the words amplified the loss.

Still, like a lot of Americans who remember Robert F. Kennedy's shocking death and his televised funeral, I carried the words with me. I hear the words now and then. Baltimore could use a legion of men and women who embrace the "Why not?" credo.

RFK's words came to me as I set out to provide this update on the Rev. Rodney Hudson's big dream for West Baltimore, his Resurrection Sandtown project.

Here's a Methodist minister who regards the vacant lots near his church and asks, "Why not some new houses? Why not a child care center?"

But the remarkable thing about Hudson's dream: It has grown far beyond his original expectations. It offers about 64,000 square feet of possibilities now — along Baker Street between Pennsylvania Avenue and Carey Street — and it appears that things are about to happen there.

Some background: A few years ago, Hudson, the pastor of Ames United Methodist Church in Sandtown, set out to acquire an asphalt-covered lot at the corner of Baker and Pennsylvania. Its owner was Northeastern Supply, a vendor of plumbing, heating and air conditioning products. The asphalt lot was adjacent to Northeastern's large distribution center in the former Pariser Bakery.

Hudson wanted the corner lot because it would give him a complete, block-long strip of land, an urban prairie, between Carey and Pennsylvania. He wanted his church to build something there — affordable housing maybe, for starters.

"I was going to offer them \$500," Hudson said, when I asked about his approach to the Cook family, owners of Northeastern Supply and the coveted asphalt.



The Rev. Rodney Hudson, pastor of Ames United Methodist Church, has landed a partner nonprofit to help launch his Resurrection Sandtown project in West Baltimore. **BALTIMORE SUN**

But Hudson never made the offer. He didn't have to.

The Cook family gave him the corner lot. Wait, there's more.

After hearing Hudson describe his dreams, the Cooks decided to give Resurrection Sandtown the company's entire building and a warehouse behind it. Hudson and Van Beall, a trustee of Ames United Methodist, were shocked. Hudson started weeping at the scope of the Cooks' generosity.

The company's West Baltimore location had been profitable, but Steve Cook, Northeastern's president and CEO, and his daughter Stephanie decided the donation to Resurrection Sandtown could push the project along in a major way.

"Even though we're making some money there," Steve Cook told me at the time, "I'm at a point in life, our family is, where I can make a much larger difference [with the property donation] than by making a couple of dollars operating one of our stores."

So Northeastern moved out. Hudson and Resurrection Sandtown suddenly owned a whole lot of property.

To make Hudson's dreams come true, the faith-based organization needed to find support and financing to bring services,

stores and jobs to a long-neglected stretch of West Baltimore.

And you'll be pleased to hear that Hudson and Beall have since found that in a partnership with a relatively new Baltimore nonprofit, Dwyer Workforce Development, established in 2021 by business owner and banker Jack Dwyer, his wife Nancy and daughters Emily and Kelsey.

The long-term plan is to create a "health care village," where people who are unemployed or underemployed can train to become much-needed certified nursing assistants or CNAs. In addition to a training center, the plan includes housing for "Dwyer Scholars" as well as a child care center and other support services.

Jack Dwyer, the man behind CFG Bank, has been in the nursing home financing field for years. His family's nonprofit, established with a \$2 million donation from CFG, previously helped the Living Classrooms Foundation open and staff a workforce training center in Fells Point, with emphasis on nursing.

The Dwyer partnership with Resurrection Sandtown came together in the

last year, and Hudson again could not at first believe his good fortune when the nonprofit contacted him. "My jaw dropped," he said, when Barb Clapp, the CEO of Dwyer Workforce Development, agreed to the partnership.

The first phase of the project is the establishment of a resource center where CNA training will take place, and the plan for that comes as another shock to Hudson: It involves the possibility of saving his 19th Century stone church.

Ames United Methodist, at Carey and Baker, had been in disrepair for years, with structural challenges bad enough that Hudson had to move the congregation to his other pastorate at a church on West Lanvale Street. Two years ago this month, Hudson spoke as if there was no way (or not enough money) to save Ames. So he could see knocking the old church down, clearing the large corner lot and combining it with two adjoining lots to create enough space for apartments for seniors.

Now it looks like the old church might have a new life and a new purpose. And why not?

Judge orders second driver charged in Beltway crash held without bond

By Cassidy Jensen

The second driver charged in the deaths of six construction workers in a March Baltimore Beltway crash will remain in jail, a Baltimore County District Court judge ruled Thursday.

Judge Kathleen Murphy acknowledged the "horrific circumstances" of the crash before ordering Lisa Adrienne Lea, 54, who turned herself in to Maryland State Police on Wednesday, to be held without bond.

A grand jury on Monday indicted the Randallstown resident on a total of 28 counts, including negligent vehicular manslaughter and driving while impaired by drugs, but state police initially were not able to find her.

Baltimore County Assistant State's Attorney Felise Kelly said Thursday that Maryland State Police troopers saw signs of impairment when Lea was hospitalized at Shock Trauma after the crash.

Kelly said Lea told police she had taken five prescriptions, including oxycodone, as well as marijuana prescribed to her. A blood test taken at the hospital showed the presence of THC, Kelly said. Lea reported having last smoked marijuana at 9 p.m. the previous evening.

Five Concrete General employees and one inspector died in the March 22 crash, which happened at about 12:30 p.m. on Interstate 695 north of Security Boulevard in Woodlawn. Lea, driving a gray Acura, tried to move into the left lane and collided with 20-year-old Melachi Brown's white Volkswagen, police said. Her Acura spun "out of control" in the crash, according to an early report from the National Transportation Safety Board.

Video footage of the crash shows Lea's car entering the work zone through a gap in temporary jersey barriers, where it overturned and hit the six workers. Kelly said the impact threw one of the workers from the median into a lane on the outer loop of the Beltway.

"The damage she caused in this scene is unimaginable," Kelly said.

After Lea was charged, Maryland State Police troopers attempted to serve a bench warrant at her address, where they spoke to her daughter and then visited the home of a second daughter, Kelly said. When a Maryland State Police corporal reached Lea by phone, she told him she was in Las Vegas, Kelly said.

Lea's attorney, Isaac Klein, argued Lea has strong ties to the area and should be released

on home detention.

"She turned herself in voluntarily yesterday; she did not attempt to flee," Klein said.

Lea, who is married, has three children in the Baltimore area and is the caregiver for her mother and her father, Klein told Murphy.

The federal safety board report found both drivers were traveling faster than the speed limit and the flow of traffic at the time of the accident.

Kelly said Tuesday that Brown, whom Murphy ordered released on house arrest, was driving 111 mph when the two cars collided. Surveillance footage and witness accounts indicate both drivers were weaving in and out of traffic before the crash, Kelly said.

Lea was going 108 mph when she hit Brown's Volkswagen and 121 mph "five seconds before the crash," Kelly said Thursday, based on recorded vehicle data obtained by state police.

Lea was treated for serious injuries at Shock Trauma, while Brown was unhurt. Her shoulder was fractured and four of her fingers were amputated, Klein said Thursday.

Lea appeared virtually from the Baltimore County Detention Center wearing orange scrubs.

After the hearing, Klein expressed surprise that Lea was denied bail when the other defendant was released on home detention. He said he did not believe Lea was in Las Vegas and that when she visited his office Wednesday, she was "totally lucid and responsive."

"Just because someone died, some people died — it's very sad, and my client has them in their prayers — it doesn't necessarily mean there's a fault involved," said Klein, adding that Lea was unsure of her speed.

He declined to say where Lea was heading on March 22 but said it was not anywhere "bad or illegitimate." Asked about her alleged impairment, Klein said he had not yet seen a copy of Lea's toxicology report.

Murphy also ordered Lea on Thursday not to contact relatives of the fatally struck workers and noted the "unimaginable devastation" of the crash for those families.

The six victims of the crash died at the scene. Brothers Jose Armando Escobar, 52, and Carlos Orlando Villatoro Escobar, 43, of Frederick were killed, along with Mahlon Simmons III, 31; his father, Mahlon Simmons II, of Union Bridge; Rolando Ruiz, 46, of Laurel; and Sybil Lee Dimaggio, 46, of Glen Burnie.



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