

# Downtown's Imperial Hotel to be renovated

The historic Imperial Hotel is under new ownership.

A joint venture between Atlanta-based Columbia Residential and Columbus, Ohio-based National Church Residences negotiated an agreement with the state of Georgia and city of Atlanta to buy the building at 355 Peachtree St. downtown and rescue it from full foreclosure.

The new owners plan to completely renovate it, and when the project is completed, the building will have 90 units serving low- to moderate-income residents, many with special needs requiring supportive services.

The Imperial Hotel has been operating as single-room-occupancy units for low-income and formerly homeless residents since 1996. It has been operating with 120 units, but currently it has fewer than 100 residents.



**Khalil**

Columbia Residential

**Noel Khalil**, chairman and CEO of Columbia Residential, said that thanks to the Atlanta Housing Authority, the residents will be provided with housing vouchers and supplemental funds to pay for rent at other locations during the two years

that the Imperial Hotel is undergoing renovation.

"Nobody will be displaced and put in a place where they can't attain supportive services," said Khalil, who is an experienced developer of affordable, multifamily communities. Residents will be given the opportunity to return to the renovated building.

Khalil said the new owners decided to reduce the overall number of units from 120 to 90 because some of them were too small to provide an emotionally healing living environment.

**Thomas Slemmer**, president and CEO of National Church Residences, said his organization is "thrilled" to be able to provide affordable, permanent housing for seniors and people in need of supportive services.

The new owners have applied for a "complex array of funding" to help make the structure sustainable, to replace and upgrade its building systems, amenity areas and security features, as well as making it a LEED-certified energy-efficient building and updating its interiors and operations to a 21st-century standard.

At the same time, Khalil said the new owners are committed to preserving the historic building, which opened in 1910.

The Imperial also has a colorful modern history. Atlanta architect and developer John Portman purchased the building about 1980 and the hotel was closed and sat vacant for a decade.

Then in June 1990, homeless individuals and advocates occupied the abandoned building demanding the city provide residences for the homeless. The occupation lasted for weeks. Then-Atlanta Mayor Maynard Jackson made a commitment that the city would build thousands of new single-room-occupancy units.

In 1996, Progressive Redevelopment Inc. received a \$1 million loan from the city to buy the building and develop it into affordable, supportive housing.

But in 2010, PRI was unable to keep up with the rising costs and declining revenues, and the building was placed in foreclosure and receivership with first mortgage lender Fannie Mae. That opened the door for new owners.



**Maria Saporta**

## HANDS ON ATLANTA.

Hands On Atlanta has received a \$500,000, two-year grant from the Joseph B. Whitehead Foundation to

establish a Civic Leadership Program. The program will be kicked off Saturday, Jan. 14, in time for the Martin Luther King Jr. birthday festivities. The theme of volunteerism and service has become a keystone of the King holiday.

"We want to transform volunteer leaders into civic leaders while also supporting the needs of nonprofits," said **Gina Simpson**, president and CEO of Hands On Atlanta. "Our goal is to develop 200 civic leaders in two years."

The volunteers selected to become part of the Civic Leadership Program will undergo "intensive" quarterly training sessions. They also will have to make an annual commitment to volunteer with a nonprofit at least once a month for a minimum of four or five hours. Volunteers will be expected to lead a particular project with the nonprofits so they can develop their civic leadership skills.

"Our organizational focus for 2012 is to build more volunteer and civic leaders to really strengthen Atlanta's civic infrastructure."

**LITERACY ACTION.** Another leadership transition is under way at Literacy Action Inc.

**James Rodgers** has been named interim CEO of Literacy Action, the largest community-based nonprofit in Georgia that provides free classroom instruction and job-readiness services for adults with low literacy skills.

Rodgers succeeds Karen Webster Parks, who has resigned from her post after only serving in that role since April 2011.

"We are delighted to have Jim lead Literacy Action into its next stage of development," said **David Peterson**, its board chair. Rodgers is a former BellSouth executive with 24 years of experience as a certified management consultant specializing in human capital management. Rodgers has been serving on Literacy Action's board.

## TRANSPORTATION CAMPAIGN.

The metro Atlanta campaign to help pass the one-cent regional transportation sales tax in July is receiving strong corporate and civic support. "We are closing in on \$6 million, which was our initial goal," said **Dave Stockert**, CEO of Post Properties, who is chairing the campaign. "But we have adjusted our sights, and we are going to continue to fundraise. This is a blue moon opportunity."

There is the possibility that the date of the referendum could be postponed from the July 31 primary to the Nov. 6 general election, which would increase the campaign costs by at least a couple of million dollars.

Campaign leaders are preparing for the referendum to be held on either date.

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