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Detroit's Paradise Valley to be resurrected

By COREY WILLIAMS
The Associated Press

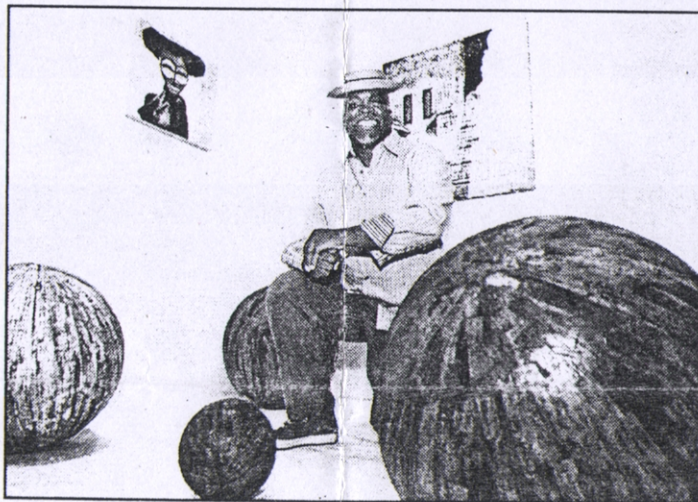
DETROIT — Hastings Street was the place to be on steamy summer nights.

Blues and jazz pulsed from establishments like the Cotton Club and Club 666 as black doctors, clerks and assembly line workers shared crowded sidewalks.

It was the heart of Detroit's Paradise Valley, an area that defined the city's black culture, arts and music until many of the businesses and homes were demolished beginning in the 1950s in the name of economic development.

In an effort to recapture the excitement and thriving business climate of the old district, a small enclave of shops and buildings in a northeast corner of downtown will be designated the new Paradise Valley. City leaders hope to attract music clubs, galleries and other vendors tapping into Detroit's black art and cultural heritage.

Art dealer George N'Namdi, who showcases black art at his temporary gallery in the area, predicts it will be a magnet for



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ART SHOW: Gallery president George R. N'Namdi of Detroit and New York poses with artwork Aug. 14 from Detroit artists Shonna Pryor and Christine Hagedorn at the G.R. N'Namdi Gallery in Detroit.

tourists of all colors.

"Having an area where African American culture is happening doesn't mean it has to cater solely to African American people," N'Namdi said.

"There is the jazz, techno, Motown, and people have been collecting art here for a number of years."

Designers of the new Paradise

nightlife and the businesses were owned by blacks."

The new Paradise Valley will share an area with Harmonie Park, itself a celebration of Detroit's German culture with old-world style restaurants, art galleries and coffee shops. Designers tout the area's "walkability."

Footsteps from the Fox, State and Gem theaters, the Opera House and Music Hall, Harmonie Park also attracts visitors before and after sporting events at Comerica Park, where the Detroit Tigers play, and at Ford Field, home to the Detroit Lions.

Designers from the University of Detroit-Mercy, which was brought into the project by the Detroit Economic Growth Corp., envision something intimate for Paradise Valley, but still appealing enough to be a popular draw.

"We're talking smaller galleries, clubs and restaurants. The focus will be entertainment," said Dan Pitera, executive director of the Detroit Collaborative Design Center at the University of Detroit Mercy, who expects a final design by the end of October.

Valley can take a page from the original, which saw greats including Charlie Parker, Lionel Hampton and B.B. King all perform there.

"All classes of people were attracted to Paradise Valley," said 73-year-old Jimmy Crawford, who played drums under the name 'Jim Due' in several clubs. "Hastings carried all kinds of