

# W. Grove builder sows seed of change

## New office stirs hope, excitement

By **YOLANDA BALIDO**  
Herald Staff Writer

It's just a tiny office building, but for the blighted neighborhood known as the West Grove, it symbolizes the beginning of revitalization.

The 2,000-square-foot office is being built at Grand Avenue and Jefferson Street, in an area unknown to the thousands who flock to the hot entertainment district at the other end of Grand, just a few blocks away. Many motorists whiz through the West Grove, or avoid it altogether, for fear of crime. The few legitimate businesses there barely scrape by.

Will Johnson, a West Grove resident, is one of several community activists who have been trying for years to revitalize the area's moribund business district.

"Business breeds business," he said, "and hopefully this new office will bring more activity to the area."

Lawyer Tucker Gibbs, a community activist who lives and works in the more prosperous end of the Grove, said the construction "is a good first step toward some real economic development and growth in the West Grove. It says a lot about the economic vitality of the



**TIM CHAPMAN / Herald Staff**

**FUTURE TENANTS:** Checking out the construction site at Grand Avenue and Jefferson Street in the West Grove are, from left,

Mark Sardegna, Dana Little, Eric Klingler, Anthea Gianniotis, Developer Andy Parrish, Marilyn Avery and Meg Florian.

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**Developer ANDY PARRISH**

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community that developers have faith in making money there."

Developer Andy Parrish, who is building the office, considers the neighborhood "a jewel," he said. "We really have a chance to make a showcase of the African-American community."

Parrish, owner of Wind & Rain Inc., builds exclusively in the West Grove. He came across the office lot while looking for a place to build another house. The 6,000-square-foot lot was zoned for commercial use, he said, and he decided to build his first office there.

Parrish is completing construction of his ninth home in the area. The three- or four-bedroom single-family houses, ranging from \$80,000 to \$90,000, all have sold to people previously renting homes in the area. The city of Miami subsidized their mortgages and they only pay \$650 to \$750 a month, including taxes and insurance, on fixed-rate, 30-year mortgages, he said.

The office, inspired by a historic Barbados house, will emphasize the neighborhood's roots, he said. Architect Marilyn Avery said it will be two stories tall, with grand 16-foot ceilings.

It will have an eight-foot-deep porch stretching across the front, and four eight-foot-tall french doors.

It will be rented for about \$20,000 a year by architects Mark D. Sardegna and Dana Little — the same folks working on plans to redesign the streetscape of Grand Avenue in the West Grove.

Sardegna, standing in the lot Friday, said: "In five years, this whole neighborhood is going to be completely different. Just give it five years."

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