

# Doyletown leaders wouldn't take a 'no'

Lobbying in community, political pressure forces city's hand, sparks whole Target project.

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If you blink while traveling east on Route 44, you'll miss it, but even with your eyes wide open you might not notice the Doyletown neighborhood nestled to your right as you approach the Lynnhaven exit.

As though seeking refuge from life in the fast lane, the small neighborhood targeted for city redevelopment 20 years ago lies wedged into the southwestern corner formed by the Virginia Beach-Norfolk Expressway and Lynnhaven Parkway.

Serving as Doyletown's southern boundary is Lynnhaven Road, and, beyond, across an expanse of open land, stand three imposing and glitzy new brick-and-glass office buildings, seeming to eye voraciously the tiny nest of 100-or-so houses set neatly along criss-crossing streets.

You won't see any signs to let you know you've entered Doyletown, but two large wooden ones seem to shout "suburbia," marking off the more charismatically named Lynnhaven Woods development with its newer homes on the western edge of Doyletown proper.

Each of the neighborhood's several northbound streets culminate in dead ends near Route 44, and it takes only a few passes through the community to know it like the back of one's hand.

But the diminutive size and slower pace of this quarter belie the progress it's made as one of the 12 communities the city has helped re-charge during the last two decades using \$50 million in federal grants and city funds.

Until the late 1980s, amenities enjoyed by residents of surrounding neighborhoods — city water and sewers, paved streets, sidewalks and street lights — were glaringly absent in this formerly all-black section.

It's with a glow of pride that Nathaniel Tucker looks out the window of his comfortable Doyle Way home to admire his adopted neighborhood, for it was he and other leaders of Seatack — another former pocket of poverty — who were instrumental in getting help for the black communities scattered throughout the city.

Tucker, 65, remembers how, in the late 1950s, he became incensed when he learned from a newspaper story that the city was sending money earmarked for the poor back to the federal government.

"They were saying there were no poor people in Virginia Beach," said Tucker, who then presided over Seatack's civic league.

"I talked to my cousin's husband, and said, 'You see this? Let's do something.'"

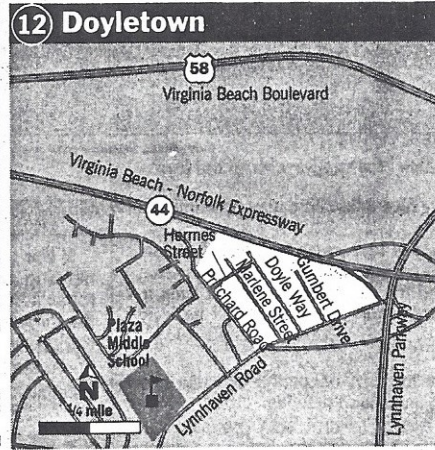


Staff photo by STEVE EARLEY

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- 1 Burton Station
- 2 Newsome Farm
- 3 Lake Smith
- 4 Reedtown
- 5 Atlantic Park
- 6 Seatack
- 7 Queen City
- 8 Newlight
- 9 Gracetown
- 10 Mill Dam
- 11 Beechwood
- 12 Doyletown



**About Doyletown**

- Houses at start: 50
- Occupied houses deemed uninhabitable: 1
- Population at start: 160
- Percentage of land undeveloped: 26%
- Work completed: Water, sewer, streets, drainage, housing work completed.
- Public money invested: \$1 million



This is the eighth of 10 profiles on city's Target Neighborhoods. Next: A look at Queen City in Friday's Beacon.

Tucker and his kin took the issue to religious leaders of the community who "started a political thing" and consulted with their counter-

parts in the other poor neighborhoods.

"The people were a little complacent," Tucker said, recalling how

he spoke with residents of Burton Station and Newlight, spurring them on to take action on behalf of their individual neighborhoods.

"There was no money for black people then," he said. "The city had the attitude that we don't matter."

"I got disgusted a couple of times," Tucker recalled of the repeated efforts he and other leaders made to persuade blacks to follow them in pushing for action. "They thought they would lose the land, had 'the good massa gave me this land' mentality. I told them, 'The Lord is making a way. What do you think this is?'"

Leaders of the black communities persevered and even took their case to Washington. It took a lot of political pressure, but finally the city took action, naming the target areas.

Pointing out that the Bible says that the first shall be last and the last shall be first, Tucker noted with a chuckle the irony in the fact that Doyletown, the last neighborhood to be targeted for help, was the first to reap the benefits of the political pressure blacks throughout the city had applied. And Seatack, first to be so designated, was last to undergo revitalization.

About five years ago, Tucker, who was a warehouseman at the Norfolk Naval Base during his working years, moved to Doyletown and took up residence with his wife in the house his uncle had bought in the 1970s. His roots were easily transplanted into the new community.

Humor Roulhac's roots are now

Please see following page



## SPECIAL REPORT: TARGET NEIGHBORHOODS

*Continued from previous page*

so deep in Doyletown soil that he no longer considers returning to his native Florida.

Roulhac, 71, a former Army man stationed at Fort Story, bought a small house at the end of Marlene Street in 1961. He added onto it to accommodate his wife and seven children and has watched his adopted community double in size since its upgrading.

"It was all woods, then," Roulhac said, gesturing down the street. "I could have bought all the land from my house to the next corner for \$12,500."

Now, a house stands on every lot on the street. In fact, a new one is under construction not far from Roulhac's house.

"It's nicer now," he said, pondering the changes. "It's grown."

Roulhac didn't take advantage of government funds to upgrade and enlarge his home, though many other Doyletown residents did.

Improvements to the neighborhood led to integration. Today, there are as many whites as blacks living there.

The diversity fostered by upgrading the neighborhood is evidenced by the First Chinese Baptist Church on Pritchard Road, which offers services in both Chinese and English.

Though he is grateful for the improvements to the formerly all-black neighborhoods, Tucker harbors some resentment over what it took to see it happen.



*Staff photo by STEVE EARLEY*

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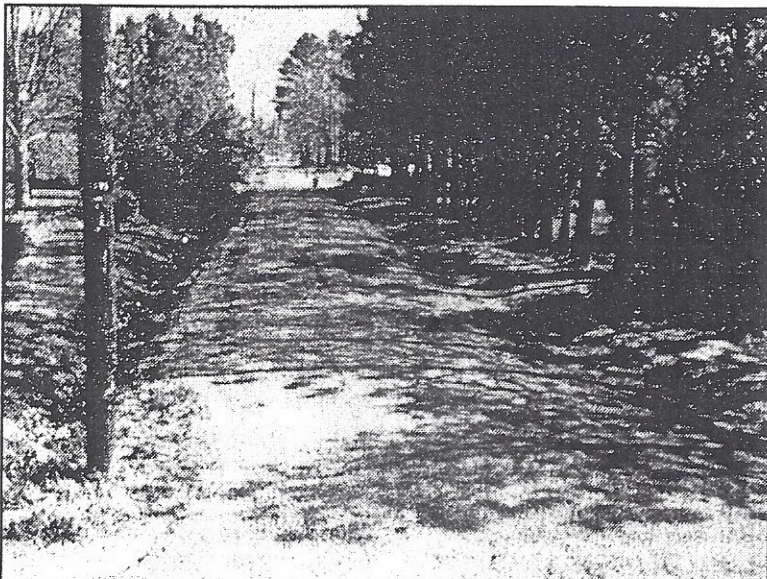
"I'll never forget the way the city was and still is, the way the system works," he said. "They know they have to give up, can't keep the status quo, have to do something for black people. But it's not the color blind society they say. There's the mentality to keep blacks down. Don't keep stomping me when you see I'm doing the best I can. There are people still out there keeping these things going."

One must blink twice driving out of the wooded Doyletown onto Lynnhaven Road, not so much for the return into bright sunlight as

for the vehicles zipping past.

They seem to be traveling much faster than before, and the pulse quickens as rush hour, bumper-to-bumper traffic forces one to think and act quickly.

Back in Doyletown, one thinks wistfully, there's still no great hurry.



*Photos courtesy of CITY OF VIRGINIA BEACH*

**City water, sewers, pavement, sidewalks and streetlights were added to Doyletown, whose northbound streets dead end near Route 44.**