

Bus tour highlights rich heritage of Augusta's black neighborhoods

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Some of the structures need a fresh coat of paint and woodwork. Others, such as the home of black educator Lucy Craft Laney, have been maintained through preservation efforts.

On Oct. 29, a bus tour will bring awareness to important historical people and places in three black neighborhoods in Augusta. After the Laney-Walker area, participants will hear the stories of nearby communities Bethlehem and Sand Hills.

“African-Americans have made so many contributions to this city,” said Christine Miller-Betts, the executive director of the Lucy Craft Laney Museum of Black History. “People are not aware of the sites. Many people will drive by those sites every day.”

Examining preservation issues and identifying solutions will be the focus of the two-hour tour by historians.

The tour will highlight structures on Historic Augusta’s Endangered Properties List, including the Luvenia Pearson House and the Dr. S.S. Johnson House.

“It continues the dialog because it shares what we know about these sites. It also tells what we’re trying to do to preserve these sites,” Miller-Betts said.

The former Immaculate Conception Church and School on Laney-Walker Boulevard, which has been the recent focus of preservationists, will also be highlighted.

“What’s happening with Immaculate Conception is an example of what can happen with advocates for particular sites,” Miller-Betts said.

Interest in preserving Laney-Walker and other historical neighborhoods has grown in recent years, but many historic structures still need attention, she said.

“When I first came, it was depressing. But then as time passed, things began to happen, positive things,” she said.

People from the neighborhoods and anyone interested in historic preservation will find an opportunity to encounter a rich history on the tour, said Julia Jackson, the programs and marketing director for Historic Augusta, Inc. “Some of these are hidden gems; others are more recognizable,” Jackson said. Registration for the tour includes a lecture on preservation on Oct. 28 by Dr. Richard K. Dozier, the dean of the Robert Taylor School of Architecture and Building Construction Sciences at Tuskegee University,