

Gonzales Gardens 'helped me become the person I am,' Corbin says

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Before he made his way to national attention as a basketball player and coach, Tyrone Corbin was just another kid growing up in Gonzales Gardens - Columbia's oldest public housing complex, not far from Providence Hospital.

Corbin will share those memories at a luncheon put on by the Columbia Housing Authority at noon Friday. Though the area has struggled with drug crime and shootings, he said the thing he remembers most is the sense of community.

"People respected and looked out for each other," he said.

Older folks in the area looked out for the young ones, and made sure they didn't get caught up in dangerous activities. "Neighborhood folks looked out for you," he said. "They knew my family was not about drugs and those kinds of things."

Corbin spent about two decades at Gonzales Gardens, moving there when he was 5 and leaving when he was about 25. He says his mother's work ethic rubbed off on him and gave him the grit to get where he is today.

"My mom knew we were in underprivileged, low-income projects, but she didn't let that create a limitation as to what we could be in life," he said.

Every summer, ex-residents of Gonzales Gardens hold a get-together for current residents, aimed at helping young folks there build community ties. Corbin said he was in Columbia during one of the gatherings a few years ago and was able to attend. "It's special," he said. "It's a great thing."

As the housing authority moves forward with plans to tear the complex down, Corbin said he thinks it's good for the community. "I have some very fond memories of it," he said. "I think it helped me become the person I am now. I hate to see it go, but think it's time for a change."

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