

HOME COURT ADVANTAGE NBA PLAYER WILL OPEN FAMILY STORE IN COLUMBIA

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NBA veteran Tyrone Corbin loved his Gonzales Gardens neighborhood as a child.

He still does.

He has transferred that love of the community to an effort to turn an abandoned building at Lyon and Washington streets into a store and laundry catering to area residents.

Corbin calls it giving a "channel of light" to his former neighborhood.

The building, across from Gonzales Gardens where Corbin grew up, once housed a store and living quarters, but has been vacant and dilapidated for years.

Corbin, 32, a member of the NBA's Sacramento Kings, says rebuilding the store is his way of giving back to his community.

"The community has gone through some changes. Some good, some bad," Corbin said. "The thing about this community that stays consistent is the good people who live here with the best that they have."

The store is expected to open in a few weeks and will be managed by Corbin's family.

Looking recently out the building's glass front, Corbin seemed to go back in time.

"I'm a kid who grew up looking at this building," Corbin said. "This is me. I left for Chicago and college, but Columbia and this neighborhood never left me. I feel comfortable here."

These days, the corner of Lyon and Washington streets is alive with the buzz of power saws and the thump of hammers and equipment, evidence that the building is coming to life again.

"It was an eyesore," said James Jones, a Gonzales Gardens resident. "This new building will improve the neighborhood a lot. People are talking about it."

People won't have to travel over town to wash clothes anymore, Jones added.

Corbin's mother, Mary Corbin, who lived in Gonzales Gardens for 22 years, said, "It's a good chance to come back home."

"It's a good feeling for me," said Mary Corbin, who will have a hand in operating the business with another son and a daughter. "I can see the little kids running to the store. Just like my kids did."

She said that after the store was abandoned, she always had a desire to reopen it. "I used to pass here and say one of these days if we get anything, I would like to come back and straighten it out."

Her son is making it possible.

It was his idea to add the laundry center. He remembers as a child having to walk several blocks to the nearest laundry.

Corbin is hoping the business will not only provide conveniences, but also a few jobs for residents.

By opening the business, Corbin said he hopes, too, to send a message to the community's young people.

``That it doesn't matter where you come from. That you are from this neighborhood," Corbin said. ``You have to trust that you can do better. I am giving kids here a chance to see that they can make a difference."

Making it requires staying in school and out of trouble, he added.

Corbin lives in northeast Columbia with his wife, Dante, and two children, Tyrell, 3, and TyJha, 8.

He graduated from A.C. Flora High School in Richland 1 and DePaul University with a degree in computer science. After graduating from college in 1985, he ended up in the NBA.

He is preparing to play his first season with the Kings. He previously played for the Atlanta Hawks and a few other teams in the league over his 10-year NBA career.

Corbin said he honed basketball skills learned on Gonzales Gardens' playground and the courts at A.C. Flora at DePaul, where he received a scholarship to play basketball.

As a youngster, basketball was his choice of organized sports, he recalled. ``We didn't need much equipment, and any ball qualified as a basketball," he said.

Good work ethics on the court have kept Corbin in the game, he said. He's hoping that the same work ethics will help to make his business venture a success.

``My mother taught me to have a belief in God, and everything you do will have to amount to something," he said. `` ``Remember, someone is watching you. Don't disappoint me,' she always said."

Caption: PHOTOS, bw1.Tyrone Corbin, right, and his brother Larry discuss construction details at the site of the new neighborhood store in Gonzales Gardens. 2. At left, the veteran NBA player dismantles a work sink in the store. BOYZELL HOSEY/THE STATE

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