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'I'm a lot proud': Ground broken for Allen Apartments

By [Haley Viccaro](#) May 6, 2016

PHOTOGRAPHER: MARC SCHULTZ

Lakeia Allen-Bowman, daughter of late city councilman Joseph Allen, husband Raymond Bowman and 6-year-old son Ray are photographed Thursday during a groundbreaking ceremony for the Joseph L. Allen Apartments in Schenectady's Hamilton Hill neighborhood. The apartments are being built in the 700 block of Albany Street.

Ground was broken Thursday on affordable housing in Hamilton Hill named after late city Councilman Joseph Allen, whose grandson, Ray, described the project as great.

Ray Bowman, 6, was asked to take the podium by Schenectady County Legislature Chairman Tony Jasenski, who pulled up a folding chair for Ray to stand on to reach the microphone. "I want to ask Ray to tell us what grandpa would say," Jasenski said after ditching his prewritten speech. Ray stood there looking at his family in the front row with a beaming smile. "I'm a lot proud," Ray said to booming applause at a crowded groundbreaking ceremony for the Joseph L. Allen Apartments at Albany and Hulett streets.

The \$17.9 million three-story, 52,500-square-foot building at 780 Albany St. will have 51 affordable apartments. It will include studio, one- and two-bedroom units for low-income tenants.

The building is named after Allen, who was Schenectady's first black city councilman. He served on the City Council for 16 years (1996 to 2011) and was an advocate for minorities and underrepresented individuals.

Allen died on April 1 of last year at his home on Strong Street. He was 79 years old and a lifelong resident of Hamilton Hill.

Allen's daughter, Lakeia Allen-Bowman and son-in-law Raymond Bowman were at the ceremony on Thursday along with Allen's sister Earlene Tanner and other family members and church friends.

Lakeia said her father was always helping people and investing in people.

"I think it's awesome," she said after tossing a shovel of dirt and taking photos alongside family, developers and officials. "I think it's a great honor. My father would be very happy, especially with the revitalization that's coming up to the neighborhoods."

Raymond said his father-in-law often talked about development downtown and how he wanted to see revitalization efforts move up State Street.

"He wanted to see the city grow," he said. "It's such a blessing to be able to see this now. He would just be thrilled. He would have loved this."

He said Allen wasn't about the recognition; he just wanted to help people.

"He cared about everybody in the neighborhood," he said. "He wanted to speak for those who couldn't speak up for themselves. He cared about injustice and he cared about Hamilton Hill. He didn't do things to be seen. He tried to do the right thing and for the people."

Construction kicked off on Thursday following the demolition of several blighted buildings. The project, developed by DePaul Properties of Rochester, is expected to be completed next summer.

"It's a long time getting here," said DePaul President Mark Fuller. "It culminates in about five years' worth of work since we first thought about coming to Schenectady. We really think it will be a transformative project."

FITTING NAME

Mayor Gary McCarthy said it's fitting that the affordable housing will bare Allen's name.

"Joe and I were elected to the City Council more than 20 years ago," he said. "He served with distinction for 16 years and was dedicated to Schenectady."

McCarthy said the project in Hamilton Hill is only the beginning of development in the city's neighborhoods.

"We have seen the transformation happening downtown and we're taking that message out into the neighborhoods," he said. "We're doing the demolition of the worst of the worst properties and we're rehabilitating buildings and undertaking projects in a scope and magnitude that this community has not seen in over five decades."

Of the 51 apartment units, 25 one-bedroom units will be permanent housing for single adults in need of supportive services provided by the Schenectady Community Action Program.

The building will cut down on energy usage with Energy Star rated appliances and lighting fixtures, green label carpeting and high efficiency furnaces and units for heating and cooling.

The project is part of the governor's \$10 billion HouseNY 2020 program to create or preserve 100,000 affordable housing units over the next five years. The development also received funding through the governor's Office of Storm Recovery because of damage caused by Tropical Storm Irene.

Allen graduated from Mount Pleasant High School and Kentucky State College and served in the U.S. Army. He later got a master's degree in educational psychology from The College of Saint Rose.

He worked for the state Division for Youth as a youth parole employee and later as assistant director. He then served as the director of the Troy Community Urban Home.

Allen's family joined Duryee AME Memorial Zion Church in the mid-1930s. Allen served as a trustee board member of the church and sang in the chorus.

Allen was president of the Schenectady Chapter of the NAACP, president of the Hamilton Hill Neighborhood Association, chairman of the Youth Advisory Board at Carver Community Center, among other roles.

"I know that the sacrifices he made contributed to me being able to become an elected official here in the city," said Councilwoman Marion Porterfield. "It's bittersweet that the labor is not recognized until after the laborer is gone."



A rendering of the \$17.9 million Joseph L. Allen Apartments is seen at Thursday's groundbreaking ceremony.