

Gang Hangout to Be a Church

Church of God pastor Collin Green said he is not intimidated by the Winter Hill Gang's infamous past



[] Purchased in January from former gang boss Howie Winter, the auto body shop in Somerville, Mass., is best known as a place where James "Whitey" Bulger and Stephen "The Rifleman" Flemmi forged a partnership in the 1970s that led them to the top of Boston's underworld and the center of an FBI scandal.

But the Rev. Collin Green of Somerville Church of God, which is affiliated with the Church of God (Cleveland, Tenn.), said he is not intimidated by the garage's sordid past. "The memories are there, but the people will see there is a transformation," Green, 51, told the *Boston Globe*. He said he purchased the facility because his 50-member congregation needed more space; he learned of the garage's history only recently.

The garage served as a command center for the gang, which from the 1970s until 1994 fixed horse races along the East Coast, corrupted the Boston office of the FBI and provided the basis for the film *The Departed*, which was loosely based on Bulger's role as an FBI informant, the *Somerville News* reported. Bulger has been a fugitive since 1995, wanted for racketeering and 19 killings. Winter was released from prison in 2002, and Flemmi is currently serving a life sentence for 10 murders.

Referring to a trap door thought to be used to dump bodies into the basement, Green told the *News* that he had "already rebuked anything in there in the name of Jesus."

Former gang member John Martorano, a hit man-turned-government witness who confessed to killing 20 people, was amused by the garage's new purpose. "Hallelujah," he told the *Globe*. "I think it's great. I'm all for religion."

But Winter admits the idea of people praying in a building

that once housed the gang's loan sharking and gambling businesses is "kind of odd."

"I was just looking to sell it, and I had no clue who was buying it," said Winter, who sold the property for \$330,000. "I just wish the guy luck, whatever he does."

Green said the church doors are open to any gang members who want to repent. "If they need Jesus, then we're here to present Him to them."