

Hobby Lobby Donates Soft Sheen Property to Chicago Megachurch

Churchgoers attending Sunday worship services at Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church received the good Word and some good news too. Pastor Charles Jenkins announced that the historic church is now the proud owner of a historic property—the former headquarters of the Soft Sheen beauty products company near 87th and the Dan Ryan Expressway.

The irrevocable, landmark multimillion-dollar donation comes from the foundation of Hobby Lobby Stores, Inc., an Oklahoma City-based national arts and crafts chain that has contributed to faith-based initiatives nationwide for many years.

“Signs and wonders follow them who believe (Mark: 16:17),” Pastor Jenkins quoted from Scripture as church deacons carried the 6-foot-long “FOR SALE” sign from the Soft Sheen property into the sanctuary. The site will be the new location of the church and a mixed-use development project, which promises to enhance the social fabric of the community holistically, marking a major milestone in a broad vision for the property at 8522 S. Lafayette Ave.

“The sign is down. We’re the owners,” Pastor Jenkins told stunned and elated parishioners at the 10:45 a.m. Sunday worship service, one of four at the church every weekend. “No mortgage! No debt!”

Churchgoers celebrated for 20 minutes, erupting with shouts and tears of joy after church counsel, LaVon Johns, read from the deed, signed Dec. 31, that the property is “a charitable donation.”

“I offer my sincere gratitude to the Green family for their

unparalleled generosity to Fellowship Missionary Baptist Church and our work in the city” Pastor Jenkins said. “We are excited about this huge step and other amazing friends and partners who are already joining us on this meaningful and impactful journey to serve inner-city Chicago.”

With an average of 4,000 weekend attendees in the Chicago area and some 25,000 online worshippers, Fellowship has outgrown its current facility at 4543 S. Princeton Ave., and has a vision for more than a new church. Four years ago, Fellowship established its economic development arm, the Fellowship Educational and Economic Development Corporation (.), and launched an ambitious expansion and community development initiative called the Legacy Project, setting its sights on the former Soft Sheen headquarters. The site has sat vacant for 11 years.

The mission of the Legacy Project is to build people and community by focusing on personal growth, job creation, education, youth development, health care, economic development and community empowerment.

Plans additionally call for renovation of the nearly 230,000-square-foot office building to include a school, health and wellness center; a center for youth programming; a casual dining restaurant; and construction of up to seven retail stores at an estimated cost of \$26 million. Pastor Jenkins also announced Sunday that church fundraising efforts in 2012 yielded just over \$1 million.

“The church is committed to working toward reducing unemployment, crime and violence, raising resident morale and providing hope to the community overall,” said Pastor Jenkins. “This donation is the first I have heard of in this community and one of many examples of God blessing our effort and dedication to serving Chicago.”

Pastor Jenkins thanked Illinois Gov. Pat Quinn, Chicago Mayor

Rahm Emanuel, former Mayor Richard Daley and Chicago City Councilman Ald. Howard Brookins for their ongoing support.

Next steps include continued fundraising as Fellowship launches the Believe Again campaign (Twitter #believeagain), and identifying friends and partners, minority and women-owned subcontractors, compatible business enterprises and tenants to anchor the site and serve the community.