

Harmony On The Hill

Mission Hill in Harmony, 20th Anniversary

Kennedy funeral, anniversary of murder inspire community program – The Mission Hill Gazette

October 16, 2009 | The Mission Hill Gazette
By Sandra Storey
Gazette Staff

Harmony on the Hill, a new program of Mission Hill community events envisioned for the next 12 months, will be unveiled on Oct. 23 at the Tobin Community Center gym at 6 p.m. The program, born in response to US Sen. Edward Kennedy's funeral here on Aug. 29, will take place 20 years after the Carol DiMaiti Stuart tragedy in Mission Hill. [See related article.]

In 1989, Stuart shot and killed his pregnant wife as they drove home through Mission Hill. He then shot and wounded himself and claimed an African-American male had robbed and shot the couple. Before that claim unraveled, and Stuart killed himself, black men in and around the Hill bore the brunt of a campaign of police round-ups, strip searches and other harassment. Mission Hill was in the news often in this negative context.

Now, 20 years late, the year of events will culminate in a September 2010 concert on the anniversary of the memorable 1990 Mission Hill in Harmony event held at Mission Church 10 years ago.

After the announcement on Oct. 23, the A&E documentary "Betrayal in Beantown" will be shown, followed by a new video clip of interviews with Mission Hill residents whose lives were affected by the murder, and then a panel discussion. Other community members will be invited to get involved in the Harmony project.

Well-known local activist Ron Bell, on leave from the staff of Gov. Deval Patrick, will introduce the program. In an interview this week, he said, "We can use this as an opportunity to keep the good spirit of the Kennedy funeral. We can use this opportunity to bring the community together."

Local residents Jim Farrow and Marta Rivera are co-hosting the kickoff and have been involved in the planning of Harmony on the Hill with Bell and others for the past month. Bell said this week when he saw cameras on Tremont Street several days before the funeral, he didn't know why they were there. When he heard Kennedy's funeral would be at Mission Church, he said he "couldn't believe it" and stayed there for most of the next three days, pointing things out to officials that needed to be fixed.

At the funeral, for which he acted as an escort for VIPs like Jack Nicholson and Congressman Jim Lewis, Bell said he was amazed that he had stood at the same podium 20 years earlier pleading for positive action. "Now President Barack Obama, the governor, former President Clinton were in the same church," he said with emotion.

"Kennedy chose Mission Hill not for nothing," Bell, former director of Mission Hill Community Centers and founder of the acclaimed Dunk the Vote effort, said. "Mission Church's history makes it a landmark for healing. Now, let's get it right—let's join together for forgiveness and reconciliation. Let's start the healing."

"I remember the years people looked down on us," Bell said, referring to the aftermath of Charles Stuart's blaming an unidentified black man in Mission Hill for a murder he

Harmony On The Hill

Mission Hill in Harmony, 20th Anniversary

committed. “I remember when strip searches of young black men were routine. It put a mark on our community. Now I say, thank you, Ted Kennedy, for choosing Mission Hill.”

It was a similar conversation Bell and Farrow had just after the funeral that first got the plans for Harmony on the Hill off the ground. They reminisced about how moving and important the Mission Hill in Harmony concert was 10 years ago.

Farrow, who co-chaired that event, said this week he told Bell it was “probably the nicest, most positive thing I was ever involved in.”

The two had an official meeting within a week on the topic of “moving Mission Hill forward,” he said. “We came up with the idea of doing a series of events looking at ourselves, celebrating ourselves—who we are—and looking at how we can do better. It’s wonderful trying to do something. I’m proud to be a resident of Mission Hill instead of Beacon Hill.”

Rivera, who went on to win a Carol DiMaiti Scholarship—named in the murder victim’s honor and given by her family only to Mission Hill residents—was a senior at Boston Latin School living in the Mission Main development at the time of the murder.

“I remember the time very vividly,” she said this week, “the raids, strip searches. It was a very intense time. The community was in the spotlight and under so much pressure. It was very embarrassing, and it was community-wide.”

She also remembers the concert 10 years later, she said, because she spoke at the program. “Now, 20 years later, I take pride in Mission Hill,” she said. “We talk about the Carol DiMaiti Stuart case in a different light.”

Five years after the Stuart case, Rivera said, she was in South Carolina working for City Year when Susan Smith claimed an unidentified black man kidnapped her children. Smith was later convicted of drowning them.

Rivera said she felt her experience in Mission Hill helped her understand what was happening and enabled her to talk to others and help them cope with the repercussions of that case.

Posted with permission from The Mission Hill Gazette