

WESTERN BIRMINGHAM

Plans on the move for gospel music center

By ANNE RUISI
News staff writer

A concept design to renovate the sanctuary and west wing of the former McCoy United Methodist Church near Birmingham-Southern College for a gospel music center is under way.

The design is being drawn for the Alabama Gospel Music Cultural Arts Center, said Constance Hudson Moore, the center's president.

The goal is to create a world-class gospel music performance and training center with a museum, reception facility and recording studio, she said. Performance areas, museum exhibition space, a cafe and bookstore also will be among the elements.

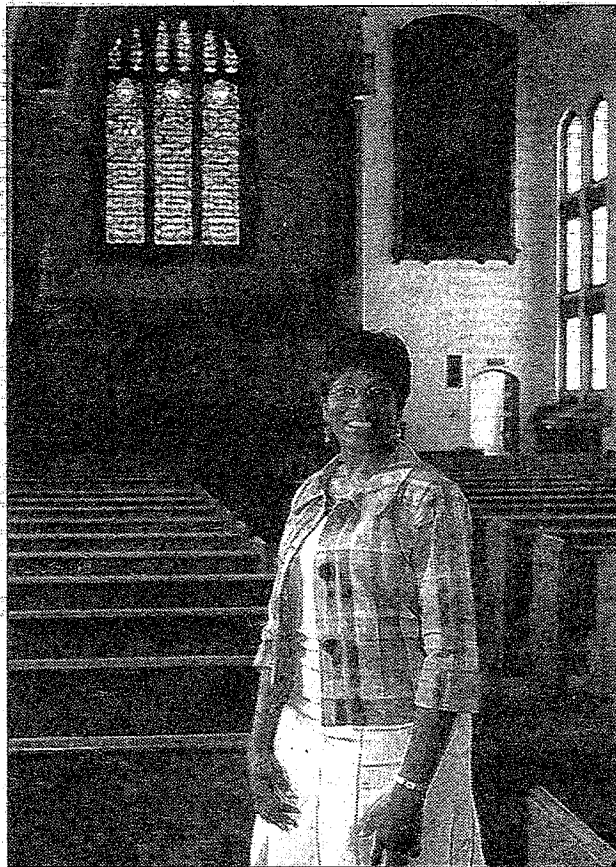
"There's a lot to be packed into 28,000 square

feet," Moore said.

Alabama and Birmingham have a rich gospel music heritage, Moore said. Among the best known groups are the Birmingham Sunlights and the internationally renowned, Grammy Award-winning group, The Blind Boys of Alabama.

The plans are being prepared thanks to a \$40,000 grant from the Alabama Council on the Arts and matching grants totaling \$40,000 from the Alabama Civil Justice Foundation, the Community Foundation of Greater Birmingham, the Daniel Foundation, the Hill Crest Foundation, Sixth Avenue Baptist Church and the Bush Hills Neighborhood Association, Moore

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NEWS FILE/BEVERLY TAYLOR

Conceptual designs to renovate the former McCoy United Methodist Church sanctuary and west wing, near Birmingham-Southern College, are being prepared for the Alabama Gospel Music Cultural Arts Center. Constance Hudson Moore, here at the former church campus, is the center's president.

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settlement agreement filed in Jefferson County Circuit Court.

Premiere will continue to lease several hangars at the airport, according to the agreement. The authority will assume the lease of the Hangar Restaurant at the airport.

"There have been no breaks in service," said Lorraine Pringle, an authority board member. "For now, the operation of the airport will be handled in-house."

Porter Vardaman, a pilot

number of planes parked at the Bessemer airport.

But Vardaman noted a positive change last week when fuel prices at the airport dropped. He said in the past, fuel prices at the Bessemer Airport were nearly \$2 higher than fuel at the nearby Shelby County Airport. Now, he said, the cost of fuel is in line with Shelby County's rates.

A gallon of fuel at the Bessemer Airport was around \$3.85 last week for full service, compared to \$3.86 a gallon self-service at the Shelby County Airport, according

of Shelby County, Vardaman said. Pringle said one of the Airport Authority's charges will be to bring more planes. One of the casualties of Premiere's departure is the company's flight school that had been operating at the airport. The company allowed students the use of its planes for instruction.

Pringle said there are no plans to reopen the flight school any time soon. "No one has approached us about that yet," she said.

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GOSPEL: Renovation in phases

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said.

Hoskins Architecture of Birmingham is the lead architect for the this phase. Skolnick Architecture+Design Partnership, a New York firm, will serve as interpretive and exhibition de-

signers. Initial designs and cost estimates are expected by early October, Moore said.

Renovation will be done in phases, with the sanctuary, which will be used for performances, first. Moore said the budget is expected to be more than \$1 million.

The church campus is home to the McCoy Center for Community Service, which houses several social service agencies.

Over the next year, the center will apply for more grants, which will be needed to pay for the next, more detailed design phase, Moore

said.

And this semester, students at the University of Alabama will be redesigning the center's website: www.alabamagospelcenter.org.

The Alabama Association of Nonprofits and the university's Center for Ethics and Social Responsibility chose several nonprofits for the redesign, Moore said. The present website is basic and needs to be "beefed up," she said. Students are expected to finish the project by the end of the semester.

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