

## **Building a Center for the Future**

**By Doug Shipman**

Questions arise from time to time about the selected location of the National Center for Civil and Human Rights, a prime swath of land in Downtown Atlanta on Pemberton Place. The site is steps from Centennial Olympic Park, adjacent to the World of Coca-Cola and the Georgia Aquarium. The land was donated by The Coca-Cola Company in 2008, and is one of thousands of gestures of support we have received since Ambassador Andrew Young, Evelyn Lowery and The Honorable Shirley Franklin began leading the effort to bring the long-held vision of the Center to life.

From 2006-2008 a dedicated groups of staff and volunteers assessed the Center's feasibility, exploring locations, design needs and exhibition content. The potential sites were evaluated by John Grant (100 Black Men of Atlanta), Egbert Perry (Integral Group), Frank Catroppa (King National Historic Site, retired) and Herman Russell (HJ Russell & Company), among other community members. Dozens of locations were considered, but based on the merits of the site including land quality, transportation accessibility, zoning issues, support for the Center's long-term sustainability and construction logistics—the site at Pemberton Place was recommended and accepted.

It was and is vital for the Center to work closely with all of Atlanta's historical sites and neighborhoods. One of the most exciting aspects of our location is that we will bookend some of Atlanta's most hallowed grounds, from Centennial Olympic Park where the world gathered, to the Auburn Ave corridor to the King Center for Non-Violent Social Change, to King's birth place. For this reason, the Board and staff of NCCHR strongly supports the construction of a streetcar linking Centennial Park and the King Historic District as proposed by the Mayor's office. We applaud Mayor Reed's efforts to bring this vital public transportation element to residents and visitors alike.

The Center needs to be centrally located and promoted as one of our most important institutions. It is critical that it be easy to find and accessible from public transit and the most common points of interest. Situated on Pemberton Place, the Center will attract visitors who may not otherwise engage civil and human rights content, spreading knowledge and inspiration to the widest possible audience.

The Center is a forward-looking institution. It is not, as some have said, a civil rights museum. It will tell the story of the Civil Rights Movement, which has special local relevance to Atlanta, as one example of how people have joined together to claim their rights and expand a society's recognition of their humanity and dignity. Beyond that, the Center will be dedicated space where the conversation is always about rights-how they have been or are being violated, but more importantly, the steps we can take to create a sustainable world where people's basic rights are secure.

All those involved beginning in 2005 wanted to achieve a place where contemporary human rights challenges could be understood and acted upon, a center where shared history was used to support and inspire future leaders, and where Atlanta could claim its role as a key city for non-violent social change. When the National Center for Civil and Human Rights had a chance to build within sight of Centennial Olympic Park, literally in heart of the city, we proudly took it and are confident that it is the best location

to appeal to hundreds of thousands of visitors per year. The Center will only succeed when a large and diverse audience experiences our exhibitions, events and performances and are inspired to explore the array of cultural assets across the city, specifically the Auburn Avenue area. The best way to do that is to build a world class institution and locate it in the most central location possible. We are excited to be coming to Pemberton Place and extending the civil rights and Olympic legacies into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, to the benefit of Auburn Ave, Centennial Park and the entire Atlanta region.