

BYRD PROVIDES COMMUNITY LEADERSHIP, BOOTSTRAP AID FOR MINORITIES

MICHIGAN ARCHITECT ACTIVE IN CDC, CHAPTER, AND TECHNICIAN TRAINING

Architect David R. Byrd is a very busy man. He (1) teaches architectural technology at Washtenaw Community College in Ann Arbor, Mich., (2) is vice president and president-elect of the Huron Valley Chapter, AIA, (3) is director of the chapter-sponsored Community Design and Development Center, and (4) conducts his own architectural practice. These only begin to tell the extent of Byrd's efforts in behalf of his profession and of Ann Arbor's minority and low-income citizens.

Two years ago, as a member of the Washtenaw faculty, Byrd initiated a course of study for former minority contractors who had failed because they hadn't understood the techniques of conducting a successful business. During the four-year course devised by Byrd, the men will learn blueprint reading, estimating, surveying, mathematics, business administration, and even remedial reading and other skills that they may be lacking.

Meanwhile, the six persons who have entered the program are taking on contracts under the guidance of Byrd and other faculty members, with the college handling their payroll and accounting work. One of the six is now building a private home, another is completing the remodeling of a large

sorority house, and a third is remodeling a number of abandoned houses which will be sold to low-income families in the city.

The contractor-training program is closely tied in with another program being conducted by Byrd. This one takes the hard-core unemployed and trains them for careers in the construction trades. The idea for the program, says Byrd, grew out of the inadequacies of other training and apprenticeship programs in the area, which require high school diplomas, have age limits, and are aimed at new and large construction projects. Many of the trainees in Byrd's program are high-school dropouts, a number of them are middle-aged, and the kind of work needed most in the city's low-income areas is the rehabilitation of older houses.

To give the men on-the-job training, Byrd designed a house which the trainees built from the ground up. Working under the supervision of Byrd and other faculty members, the house was completely enclosed in 38 days. It is now being used as a model to show the quality of work that can be performed by the trainees, who are now building a second house designed by Byrd.

The construction trainees have also worked on the



conversion of an old lumber warehouse as a multimedia teaching center for Washtenaw Community College and the remodeling of an old barn to create an office for the Community Design and Development Center.

While working on another project, the conversion of an old brewery into low-income apartment units, the trainees uncovered a tunnel running from the basement of the building toward the Huron River. The tunnel is believed by historians to have been a stopping point on the Underground Railway for escaping slaves. Byrd and others are now seeking funds to set aside part of the building as a museum portraying local black history.

These and other programs directed by Byrd are now being conducted under the auspices of the Community Design and Development Center to which the Huron Valley chapter donated \$1,000 earlier this year. The center is currently cooperating with a group of low-income families living in a new cooperative housing development to have a parcel of nearby

public land declared a public park. The land, which is now completely barren of trees and plants, would be landscaped with money provided by a fund held by the city. The center, under Byrd's direction, also developed plans for converting an old tombstone factory into a church for a local Baptist congregation. Most of the remodeling work is being done by members of the congregation itself, under the guidance of the center.

Meanwhile, Byrd is carrying on his own architectural practice. He is currently working on such projects as an 80-unit highrise apartment building for the elderly and a multipurpose neighborhood center in a low-income area of Ann Arbor.