

Remarks from the Groundbreaking Re-enactment Ceremony on the occasion of Lafayette Park's 50th Anniversary, 16 October 2006:

"Fifty years ago, over 500 people gathered here on this spot. A shovel overturned a bit of dirt, and a great experiment was initiated. Today, we know that experiment worked. Lafayette Park is a model of urban development, and it is, by any measure of human achievement, a story of success.

One of the driving forces behind this success was Walter P. Reuther, president of the United Automobile Workers of America. Reuther was an extraordinary union leader, one who believed that the labor movement in America was a social movement; that beyond bargaining for their members, unions should strive to improve the lives and welfare of all citizens. In this respect, Reuther was keenly interested and involved in civic affairs; in particular, urban housing.

Reuther stated at the groundbreaking for Lafayette Park that: "The real significance of this occasion is the fact that Detroit is pioneering a new, basic concept...a concept of building a new kind of integrated neighborhood that will end decay in the core of our city." Indeed, his words predicted, in a large sense, the New Urbanism that began in the late 20th century. More than that, however, Reuther and his colleagues devoted themselves to making Lafayette Park an example for the world that, regardless of income, race or creed, people can live together and prosper.

Today, Lafayette Park is indeed a successful example of urban development, a beautiful, stunning physical setting where a diverse group of neighbors do get along, and do continuously work toward a brighter future. Walter Reuther would have been satisfied with the work that followed the groundbreaking fifty years ago. Lafayette Park is a shining example to all of us, in Detroit and around the nation. Thank you."

Mr. Michael Smith
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