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BOOKS & AUTHORS



Celestine Sibley began her journalism career at The Atlanta Constitution in the 1940s. AJC FILE

Writer's words, life left imprint

Beloved columnist Celestine Sibley born 100 years ago Friday.

By Jennifer Brett
jbrett@ajc.com

In an age before viral cat videos, long before 140 characters could confer either instant fame or infamy, Celestine Sibley — a columnist for this newspaper for more than a half-century who was born 100 years ago Friday — earned a place in readers' hearts for her masterful chronicling of the world around us.

"It's very hard to walk around downtown Atlanta now," she wrote in a 1989 column lamenting Atlanta's penchant for knocking down its history. "The tearing down and rebuilding must have been an Atlanta trademark since the first returning householder after Sherman's big fire found a few boards and nailed them together. No use to ask for whom the bulldozer growls ... if you live in Atlanta, it growls for thee."

In 1994, she grieved over the trees at her beloved Sweet Apple cabin (where her daughter now lives) whose time had come.

"Only a fool would let herself get mushy-headed and sentimental over a maple tree," she wrote. "I was reluctant to do anything about those trees except walk around under them and urge them to get a grip on themselves."

Sibley died of cancer at age 85 in 1999 after more than five decades of writing not only about homespun pleasures but also keeping an eye on statehouse politicians and cranking out gritty courtroom drama.

Born near Pensacola, Fla., she grew up near Mobile, Ala., and was hired at The Atlan-

Sibley continued on E7

In her own words

» A selection of books by and about Celestine Sibley, E7

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Go to MyAJC.com/sundayliving to read some of Celestine Sibley's columns and to see a gallery of photos of the author and columnist through the years.



Personal Journeys

An award-winning feature that spotlights the lives of extraordinary individuals and the stories that define our region and connect our community.



Jarel Portman, son of world-renowned architect and developer John Portman, has ventured out on his own to start JPX Works development company. Its first project is a \$46 million mixed-use project call Inman Quarter, aka IQ, in Inman Park. CURTIS COMPTON / CCOMPTON@AJC.COM

Building on his father's legacy

Architecture scion Jarel Portman makes his mark on Inman Park.

By Josh Green
For the AJC

Running late, Jarel Portman hustles into Inman Park's Barcelona restaurant and shrugs off the raw March weather outside. He wears a smart blue suit cut by his friend, the haberdasher Sid Mashburn. His broad face and side-swept, blondish hair echo his father, the world-famous architect John Portman — the man who built much of downtown Atlanta and whose landmarks peek over the hill up the street.

The younger Portman's tardiness is understandable. Jarel's first project, the \$46 million multi-use development called Inman Quarter — or "IQ" — is rising from muddy clay across the street. Investors are in town for a tour. The project has been shortlisted for an award, and the banquet is tonight. Jarel is being pulled in opposite directions, and he sighs as he takes a seat for lunch, relinquishing his ubiquitous iPad to the empty space beside him.

At age 52, Jarel is the youngest of six Portman children, born into this world because his parents were striving for a second girl, a playmate for his sister, Jana. Two years ago, he left Los Angeles and moved back to his home turf of Atlan-



Jarel and his father, John Portman, pose for a photograph at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Incheon 151 Tower at Songdo Landmark City, Incheon, South Korea, in 2008. CONTRIBUTED BY FAMILY

ta to found JPX Works, a development company he hopes will capitalize on intown's resurgence.

The company name is an acronym: Jarel's initials plus an X for good measure, inspired by the heroic character in "Speed Racer" cartoons. That his surname is absent is no accident. Jarel doesn't want to ride John Portman's coattails, but he hopes his work, like his father's, will help dramatically transform Atlanta's core.

Standing 6-foot-4 with a slim build, you might say Jarel embodies contradiction. He appears to be a humble de-

veloper, effusive in his praise for everyone else. Combining Southern gentility with California nonchalance, he comes across like a distinguished surfer. Born into privilege, his oldest friends say he was always grounded. A blue-eyed white guy, he loves to sing the blues.

The paradoxes raise questions: Can a big-city developer be successful *and* nice? Can he step outside the long shadow cast by an icon? Does he have to?

Continued on E10

HOW WE GOT THE STORY

Former Inman Park resident Josh Green first became interested in Jarel Portman when his team presented its development plans to the neighborhood two years ago. Green wondered what drove the dapper youngest son of an iconic architect. Earlier this year, Green approached Jarel about doing an in-depth story, and after a series of hilariously tense pre-interviews, he convinced Jarel that being featured in Personal Journeys would not make him an egotist. That humbleness — along with Jarel's humor — came as a surprise, given his pedigree. For this story, Green interviewed Jarel in various settings, toured the project site, hung out with his family and spoke with colleagues, neighborhood officials, Georgia Tech professors and Jarel's old friends. He studied up on John Portman, too, learning about his influence on cities around the world, and especially Atlanta. The elder Portman declined an interview but provided a statement that read, in part, "I'm very proud that Jarel is ... taking a positive community-wide concern for the future of Atlanta."

Suzanne Van Atten
Personal Journeys editor
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Next week: Reporter Craig Schneider seeks answers in the death of his Uncle Al, a WWII soldier.

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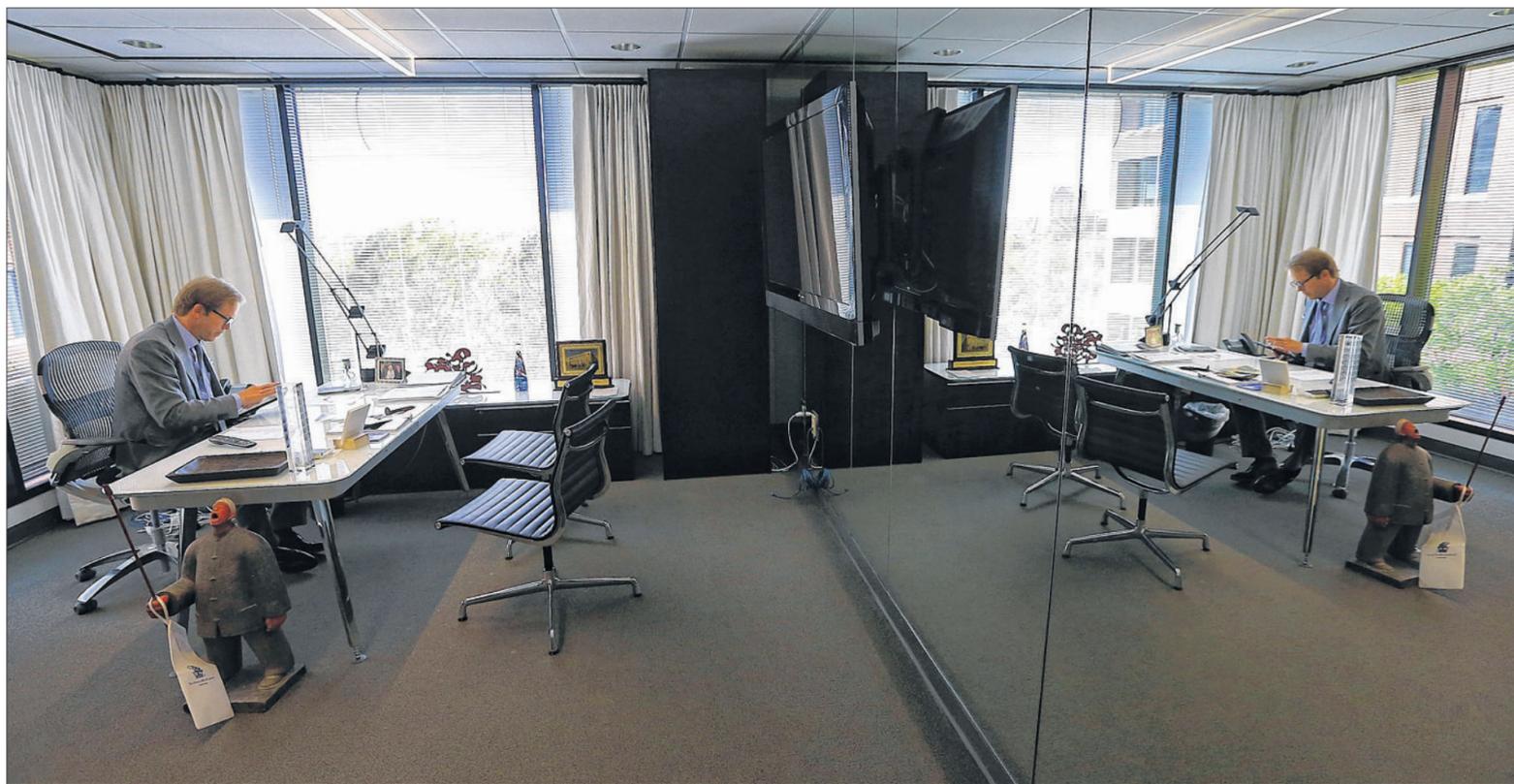
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PERSONAL JOURNEYS

Building on his father's legacy

Son of a world-reknown architect, Jarel Portman puts his imprint on an Atlanta neighborhood.



Jarel at work in the JPX Works office on Northside Parkway, near the home he shares with wife Traylor, their son Julien and Traylor's son, Sabu. CURTIS COMPTON / CCOMPTON@AJC.COM

continued from E1

2

Growing up Portman

A few weeks later, Jarel is driving his black-on-black Audi A5 through the hills of residential Buckhead. It's 70 degrees and the cherry trees are exploding. He stops the car and points to his home: a white, classical-looking structure cut into a steep hill.

"You think it's kind of a traditional little French chateau," he says, smirking. "Well, wait 'til you go inside."

Exactly 1.8 miles from here is the modernist wonderland where Jarel grew up, and where his parents still live: A home named "Entelechy," for the spark of life and creativity. Like the family's 22,000-square-foot Sea Island beach house, Entelechy II, Jarel's boyhood home is the subject of scholarly books on architecture.

Jarel recalls his young life at Entelechy as being joyous, especially on Sundays, the only day his father didn't go to work. The home occupies 30 wooded acres where Jarel, his brothers and friends would roam on dirt bikes, play tennis and marvel at the decorative stream that snaked through the house.

As the baby of the bunch, Jarel remembers needing plenty of stitches from rock fights with his brothers. He was also the intermediary his siblings would dispatch to get things from John Portman and his wife, Jan, a stay-at-home mom who volunteered at Piedmont Hospital and helped operate the Atlanta Decorative Arts Center.

Standing at one particular wall of glass at Entelechy, looking past a rippling canopy of pines, Jarel could see downtown Atlanta. From that perch he watched his father's constructions — the Hyatt Regency, Peachtree Center, Westin Peachtree Plaza and the Marriott Marquis — climb into the sky, thinking: "My dad did that."

Jarel wasn't alone in his astonishment. In public, people began to point at his father, a Georgia Tech graduate turned architectural maverick. Jarel could see his father's celebrity growing, and he sensed something big was afoot.

John Portman's brushstrokes on the Atlanta skyline began with the massive wholesale trade center Atlanta Merchandise Mart (now AmericasMart) in 1960, but it was the Hyatt's unveiling in 1967 that truly splashed.

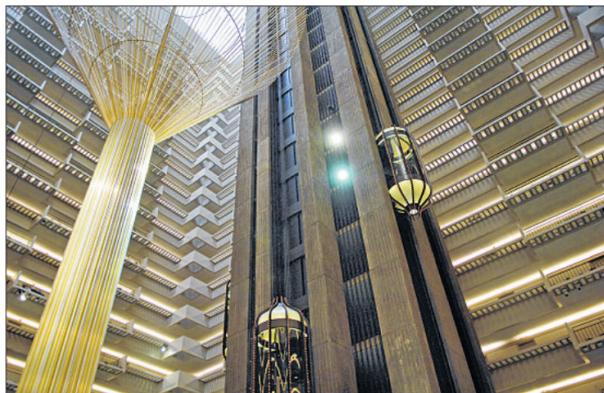
With its soaring, theatrical atrium, abundant fountains and ivy streaming from each floor, the Hyatt revolutionized large urban hotels, thrust Atlanta into a global spotlight and garnered an eclectic fan base.

"Everybody became a country bumpkin when they walked into the Hyatt," former



Jarel grew up in Entelechy, the modernist home designed by his father. He and his siblings visit his parents there every Sunday.

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When the Hyatt Regency Hotel debuted in 1967, it catapulted the career of architect John Portman. RICH ADDICKS / AJC FILE

Atlanta mayor Andrew Young said in the 2011 documentary, "John Portman: A Life of Building." Jim Morrison of the Doors called the Hyatt's elevators "Victorian rocket ships." A New York Times critic famously regaled the work as "architecture at happy hour."

But as John Portman's prowess grew, so did the criticisms.

Detractors argue that many of his larger works are concrete islands, so inwardly focused they turn their Brutalist backs to pedestrians at street level. British novelist William Boyd parodied the Hyatt as the fictionalized "Monopark 5000 Hotel," calling it equal parts "secular cathedral (and) theme park."

But Robert M. Craig, professor emeritus at Georgia Tech's School of Architecture, says condemnation of Portman's designs can be born of jealousy. "I think there's a good rationale for most of what he's done," Craig says. "The atrium hotel, and then the urban complex of Peachtree Center and like projects, has been influential internationally."

At home, Portman's rise to prominence led a teenage Jarel to wonder about the sincerity of his classmates at Lovett School. He was a gifted basketball and baseball player, played a mean guitar and piano, but still he thought, "Does this girl really like me — or my cool house with a water feature in the living room?"

Childhood friend Clay Will-

coxon says the former was true.

"(Jarel) was very charismatic," says Willcoxon, a commercial real estate broker in Atlanta. "He got along well with everybody. Girls liked him."

Of course, growing up Portman did have its perks.

One time, while Jarel dined at the Sun Dial Restaurant atop his father's tower, the members of Aerosmith came in and heard he was the architect's son — and that he'd lost his tickets to their show. No matter, the band told Jarel. The following night, with his best friends in tow, Jarel watched from the front row as Steven Tyler sang "Sweet Emotion."

Though he idolized his father, becoming an architect was never Jarel's plan.

He graduated from Florida International University in Miami with a bachelor's degree in hotel and restaurant management.

His beginnings as a hotelier were humble. Working for Hyatt in San Francisco in 1985, his starting salary was \$11,000. For extra cash, Jarel picked up piano-playing gigs at a local bar, where he caught the ear of the Grateful Dead's Bob Weir and soon found himself jamming with Jerry Garcia in Weir's home studio.

With a couple of years of hotel experience behind him, Jarel leaped at the opportunity to join his father's company in 1987 and moved to Los An-



Jarel, the youngest of six children, in his 5th-grade class photo from The Lovett School.

CONTRIBUTED BY FAMILY

geles. There his neighbors included a teenage Jason Bateman and, just down the street, a pretty young actress named Traylor Howard, a recent transplant from Florida. One day a smitten Jarel asked her to dinner.

"Sure," she said, "but my fiancée will be here in a couple of weeks."

They would drift apart, to different corners of the world, but Jarel never forgot her. It would take two decades to reunite these native Southerners, and four acres in Inman Park to bring him back home again.

3

The family man

Jarel breezes through his back door, and there's the actress — now Traylor Howard-Portman — cooking couscous, banana bread and hunter-style chicken, the ingredients splayed across white-marble countertops in their huge kitchen. She waves hello while Jarel tries to wrangle their 2-year-old son, Julien, whose blond mane bounces as he scats. In a high-pitched voice, Jarel pleads to no avail, "Hey, buddy, can I have a kiss?"

They call the boy "Ju Ju," and Jarel softens in his presence. The JPX Works offices are just down the street, five

When Jarel walked in the room, Regina Brewer all but rolled her eyes. She recognized his last name and the familiar-looking face, and she expected the swagger of a high-rolling developer.

minutes away, so Jarel can easily slip home for moments like this.

Designed by Jarel and his niece, Alissa Portman Beard, the house is an arctic palette of white-oak floors and limestone, the walls hung with paintings Jarel has collected around the world — an oil from Russia, a Chinese abstract, a huge Radcliffe Bailey piece. Elsewhere, the property is dotted with John Portman sculptures; he gives each child one for Christmas every year.

The home helped convince Traylor to begrudgingly leave Los Angeles for Atlanta. But the city's attributes — the nearby Chattahoochee, the yes-ma'am manners, the four distinct seasons — have grown on her. The family, which includes Traylor's 7-year-old son from another relationship, Sabu, attends Ebenezer Baptist Church every Sunday. That Jarel would attend the historic African-American church may come as a surprise, but his father was friends with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. and often met with him and Andrew Young for lunch to talk about ways to best move the city forward.

After a home tour, Jarel and his wife settle in the living room and recount how they became reacquainted. Traylor had been working on the television show "Monk" for years, playing the lead character's witty counterpart, Natalie Teeger. Jarel, meanwhile, followed The Portman Company overseas in the 1990s. A real estate collapse and piling debt had spurred Portman to penetrate booming Asian markets, especially Shanghai. Jarel joined a team that helped secure land deals and design contracts for half a dozen iconic hotel towers over the years. The work was invigorating but tiring; Jarel rarely had a day off when he was "in country," which was about 18 days per month.

After a marriage that produced two children (daughter, Penn, and son, Miles, both college students now) ended in divorce, Jarel was single again. Six years ago, he bought and renovated his Buckhead home but often found himself in Los Angeles for layovers or scouting the city for real estate deals. On a whim he asked a friend for Traylor's number. When he called and asked her to dinner in 2004, she accepted, and soon they became friends. Seven years later they were married in a tree house overlooking the misty cliffs of Big Sur in a simple ceremony with just them and the priest.

The newlyweds set up house in Venice Beach, but soon the long trips to China away from his family began to wear on Jarel. Plus, he itched to start his own company. "Monk" was ending its seven-year run, and Traylor yearned to be closer to her parents in Florida. But Jarel needed a reason — a project — before he would uproot his family. For

PERSONAL JOURNEYS



Jarel gives a site tour of the IQ project in Inman Park between North Highland Avenue, Elizabeth Street and Lake Avenue. The project will include 200 apartments, retail space and several restaurants, including one from restaurateur Ford Fry. PHOTOS BY CURTIS COMPTON / COMPTON@AJC.COM

ABOUT THE REPORTER AND PHOTOGRAPHER

Josh Green is a freelance journalist and fiction writer who lives in Atlanta with his wife and daughters. An Indiana native, Green's newspaper journalism has won top awards in the Hoosier state and in Georgia, where he relocated to work for the Gwinnett Daily Post in 2007. His debut book, "Dirtyville Rhapsodies," a short story collection set mostly in Atlanta, was published last May to critical praise. This is his third Personal Journey for the AJC.



Curtis Compton joined the AJC as a photo editor in 1993 before returning to the field as a staff photographer. Previously he worked for the Gwinnett Daily News, United Press International and the Marietta Daily Journal. He has a bachelor's degree from the University of Georgia and won a World Hunger Award for his coverage of the famine in Sudan.



a year, he scoured Atlanta for the perfect site to develop. He would find it in a hodgepodge of old buildings in Inman Park, home to tenants beloved by the neighborhood, including Dad's Garage Theatre and Victory Sandwich Bar.

Jarel, Traylor and Sabu moved to Atlanta in early 2012. A couple of months later, Julien was born at Piedmont Hospital – in the Jan and John Portman Newborn Nursery.

4

Tough project

Established in 1890 and listed on the National Register of Historic Places, Inman Park is billed as Atlanta's first planned community. Regina Brewer, president of the Inman Park Neighborhood Association in 2012, was the ultimate arbiter of proposed changes to a neighborhood famous for Victorian mansions and hip business districts. Brewer was known in development circles as a no-nonsense expert of submarket politics who, like her board, demanded strict control of the neighborhood's development.

Brewer and the neighborhood association took pride in being well versed in city zoning and building processes. After all, the neighborhood was loaded with attorneys, builders, architects and community preservationists who could deftly make a case for what they wanted. They'd sent plenty of developers packing over the course of 30 years, and they played a major role in thwarting former U.S. President Jimmy Carter's plans to build a "Presidential Parkway" through intown neighborhoods in the early 1990s. They had a large legal fund and weren't afraid to use it.

So Brewer was cautious when Jarel and his JPX Works partner Bruce Fernald, a networking whiz with a background in finance, approached with plans that would forever change the neighborhood's dynamics.

The partners had bought a cluster of aging (but fully leased) buildings in the commercial heart of Inman Park, with hopes of demolishing them and erecting a project with 200 upscale apartments, rooftop and poolside clubrooms, 40,000 square feet of retail space and a 570-space parking deck. It would front Elizabeth Street, and be bounded by North Highland and Lake avenues to the north and south, with the Inman Park Village project to the west. It aimed to be Inman Park's town center, its beating heart.

From the outset, the developers knew they faced a gauntlet.

When Jarel walked in the room, Brewer all but rolled her eyes. She recognized his last name and the familiar-looking face, and she expected the swagger of a high-rolling developer surrounded by a cadre of well-paid attorneys.

But Jarel was different. He had clearly done his homework. He'd formed a joint venture with Mark Randall of South City Partners, who was on good terms with the neighborhood association after transforming the derelict Mead Paper Co. site into the Inman Park Village project. He'd hired Smith Dalia, an architecture firm Brewer considered among the best in Atlanta.

And she found Jarel's man-



Jarel (left) and his business partner Bruce Fernald have reason to be happy. Their project is on schedule, and in addition to Fry's restaurant, they've signed leases with restaurants MF Sushi and Bartaco, a sister concept to nearby Barcelona.



Jarel and his wife Traylor Howard-Portman, an actress who appeared regularly on the TV show "Monk," live in an art-filled house in Buckhead near the JPX Works office.

ner refreshing.

"He is so genuine and thoughtful, and he doesn't ever come to a decision or make a remark casually," Brewer says. "He really takes it all so personally and seriously – maybe to his detriment, but to my benefit."

After the initial meeting, Brewer urged anyone who'd listen to embrace the chance to work with Jarel's "dream team."

Still, not everyone was won over.

To garner support, Jarel and his cohorts opened the floor to Inman Park residents. During a series of Saturday meetings, they offered an array of architectural styles and let neighbors vote on which they preferred.

The challenge was soon obvious: No one was willing to accept a rudimentary project, no staid apartment block. They wanted bountiful restaurants with outdoor seating. A green corridor that would add a new dimension to the neighborhood. And an 18-foot-wide waterfall.

Beyond that, from an aesthetic standpoint, they wanted an eye-pleasing urban patchwork of architectural styles that paid homage to

the neighborhood's historical charm while offering the modernity that Millennials crave. What's more, the project would have to be designed to shield its six-story parking garage from public view.

The residents' demands left Jarel feeling overwhelmed and bogged down by uncertainty. He and Fernald would often look at each other after the meetings and ask: "Is this worth it?"

"Every time, we'd conclude, 'Uh huh, it is,'" Fernald says. "Gotta keep going."

Besides, Jarel was too financially committed to walk away.

After more than 24 meetings that spanned a year and a half, Jarel and his partners took their plans to the neighborhood association for a vote. Although a few at-large members of the board objected to the project's size, the full board voted in favor. The developers breathed a sigh of relief.

But the hurdles kept coming.

For starters, the market was sizzling. Their 200 apartments would have to beat a groundswell of competing projects to the punch. Roughly 8,000 new apartments are currently under construction in Atlan-

ta, with another 8,000 in the pipeline.

And just as JPX Works was lining up equity partners from Boston who were bullish on Atlanta again, and just as they gained approval from the city and toed the starting line for construction, four homeowners filed a lawsuit that brought the project to a halt. At question were three variances granted by the Atlanta Urban Design Commission and whether they were in line with the Inman Park Historic Overlay District Ordinance.

For the partners, the litigation was deflating.

"We really felt like we'd achieved something," Fernald recalls, "and so to have a citizen step up who believed it was his obligation to know better – it was very disconcerting."

Jarel was sitting in his office when he learned of the lawsuit. He immediately called the company's lawyers, and the stress that had preceded the neighborhood association vote crept back in.

"We felt we were right," he says. "We were told by all our experts that we were right – I mean, the city of Atlanta said we were right."

The suit was eventually dismissed, but it cost the team three months of work and jeopardized their construction timelines.

5

Circle complete

One pristine day in April, reddish dust clings to Jarel's designer boots, while nail guns thwack and cherry pickers hoist plywood. He is wearing a hard hat and touring the skeletal floors of IQ, where he envisions renting a two-bedroom apartment with Traylor and the boys – a pied-à-terre for the weekends, and a means to satisfy his own appetite for a walkable lifestyle.

"I got to tell you," he says, "it's like a kid with an Erector set, being on site. My Dad used to take us to his projects. It never gets old."

Fernald joins the tour. They point to concrete husks that will house five restaurants and an array of boutique shops. IQ will incorporate five different styles to reflect its surroundings, with aesthetics varying from chic warehouse to Brooklyn brownstone.

Together, the partners are clearly pleased with the progress. They tease each other like brothers, and as Jarel poses for a photo, Fernald pinches his butt as a prank. Everyone laughs.

Given recent leasing successes, their giddiness is probably warranted. Celebrated restaurateur Ford Fry has signed a 20-year lease for a prominent corner space at IQ; Barcelona's sister concept, Bartaco, and former Buckhead stalwart MF Sushi have also inked long leases. Fry's restaurant and some apartments are expected to open in September, and the whole development should be completed in January if all goes as planned.

As of early May, John Portman had visited the IQ site only once. That day, Jarel led his father into a construction trailer, and together they pored over blueprints, contemplating the layout of apartments. The meeting was brief, but Jarel says his father was impressed with the size of the site and expressed happiness for the company. His father's approval "means the world,"

ON MYAJC.COM

To see more photos of Jarel Portman, go to MyAJC.com/personaljournies.

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Jarel says.

Jarel's dream scenario plays out in his mind like this: When the project fully opens in January, 90 percent of the apartments and retail spaces will be leased and neighborhood folks will cheer the project and shake his hand, not unlike the admirers of John Portman who recognized him on downtown's streets decades ago, with his youngest son in tow.

IQ bears the fingerprints of the Inman Park Neighborhood Association and JPX's "dream team," but aspects of it reflect Jarel's personal history, too. The rooftop vegetation and grassy retail corridor are reminiscent of the Hyatt's long, leafy vines. The wall of water that will rush and swirl behind Fry's restaurant evokes Entelechy's creek. These are echoes of Jarel's father – his ultimate mentor, his hero.

It's hard to say whether Jarel's career as a developer will have as much impact on Atlanta as his father has had. Even if it was a friendly competition, Jarel's modesty would preclude him from admitting it.

By the time John Portman was 52, the Hyatt Regency was already a decade old. IQ may not be as flashy and revolutionary as that iconic hotel's design, but it speaks to a new sensibility in urban development – one that encourages pedestrian traffic and incorporates more green space, a return to Main Street. Regardless of what he does next, for the residents of Inman Park and those who flock to its commercial district to shop and dine, Jarel Portman will have made his mark.

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COMING NEXT WEEK

Staff writer Craig Schneider never knew his Uncle Al. So he set out to discover what he could about the death of the WWII soldier who met his fate in a plane crash.