We are here today to celebrate Fairfax County’s recognition of Randall Estates as a Historic District.

* We received this recognition, first and foremost, because this land that we are standing on—at least these two lots right here on the corner of Shiver Drive and Rollins Drive—have been owned by African Americans for nearly 150 years. Ever since descendants of George Mason the IV, one of the founding fathers of this country, sold 10 acres of their land to Griffin Johnson, the Mason’s long serving coachman in 1874. And by the way, Mr. Griffin, also has a street named after him near here, called Griffin Drive. After Griffin’s death, his daughter, Cordilia eventually got control of her father’s land and married William Randall, after whom this subdivision is named. After Cordilia’s death in 1955, Mr. Randall inherited his wife’s 10 acres.
* Fairfax County’s recognition is also based, in part, on this District’s distinctive masonry housing construction including an unusual deed restriction that specified that Randall Estates property owners could only build “a detached dwelling home” valued no less than $18,000. That figure was nearly double the $10,800 median home value in Virginia in 1960, according to the U.S. Census. That kind of spending by black homeowners was so unusual the Washington Daily News deemed this a neighborhood of “Swank Negro Homes”.
* And finally, this community received recognition because it is one of only a handful of suburban communities built by a Black developer, my father, Jube Shiver, Sr., for middle class African American families who, at the time, faced difficulty finding decent housing because of racial discrimination.

~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~

But I shouldn’t be me standing before you.

Instead, it should be William and Natalie Vaughn, who live in that house over there with their daughter Judy—raise your hand Judy. To meet that $18,000 construction target in their deed, the Vaughns insisted on having a two-car garage even though they had one car when they moved in and there were very few homes with two-car garages around this area in the early 1960s;

Or it should be Georgianna and James Redd, who owned a barber shop in Old Town Alexandria and who, before they moved into Randall Estates, held meetings in their Alexandria townhome where future Randall Estates residents, like my mom and dad would meet to discuss their dream homes. My mom would always bring her purse with neatly folded pages from Good Housekeeping and American Home magazines, and take them out to show everyone the kind of house she wanted my father to build her.

But most of all, standing here, should be my father and Coach Price and Mr. Randall. It was Mr. Price a one-time pro football player, who introduced my father to William Randall, a Fairfax County farmer, whom this community is named after. Mr. Randall’s house used to be right behind my parent’s house on this corner. My sister and I use to call Mr. Randall’s white clapboard house the “space ship” because he had so many lightening arrestors on his rooftop.

It was no walk in the park building this community in the early 1960s during Jim Crow. One of our guests today, Sen. Surovell, spearheaded an effort to get an historic marker erected a few hundred yards from here to recognize a bitterly fought Supreme Court case that led to the desegregation of the Bucknell Manor swimming pool as well as other neighborhood clubs across the United States. Yet even after that court decision, one of our former neighbors in Randall Estates, James Lewis, the first head coach of the Washington Mystics women’s basketball team, was asked the leave the Bucknell Manor tennis court right next to the swimming pool after a white friend had invited him to come play tennis there. Even more poignantly, one of Randall Estate’s original home owners, William Carr, could not legally occupy the house he had built in 1965 for his kids and German-born wife, because of Virginia’s miscegenation laws. Those laws were eventually struck down by the U.S. Supreme Court in 1967 and dramatized in the 2016 Hollywood film “Loving”.

So after all those meetings in the Alexandria home of barber James Redd, my father, the onetime school teacher and country boy from South Carolina, became a building contractor and hired legendary brick mason Littleton Gee of Arlington, lured the carpenter Ed Thompson from NC and eventually put 40 other men and women on his payroll to build nearly three dozen custom homes here in Randall Estates as well as homes in Maryland and North Carolina.

In a book published in 2001, the former newscaster Tom Brokaw called men and women of my father’s generation—the people that fought in World War II and later bought homes with the help of the GI bill—the nation’s “Greatest Generation.” These were hopeful and determined people. As my neighbor Billy Thomas said to me once, the people that put their faith in each other and helped realize Randall Estates had “vision.” And because of them, we have a beautiful community that has attracted new home owners and a new spirit that is helping to keep that vision alive.