

US visitors come to 'see how we did it'

KGATI SATHEKGE, Staff Reporter

THE profound changes in South Africa over the past few years continue to attract foreigners interested in social change in their own communities who want to learn how "South Africans did it".

Two such visitors in the country are neighbours from Richmond, Virginia in the US, Robert Corcoran, co-ordinator of the "Hope in the Cities" coalition, and Collie Burton, retired rector of staff development and training in the New York City Department of Corrections, who are in Pretoria as guests of Mamelodi resident Sam Pono.

Mr Corcoran visited South Africa in 1977, while this is the first visit for Mr Burton, who is an African-American.

"On my walks about I am struck by the visible lack of policemen in the streets, which was a characteristic feature of the country during my last visit," said Mr Corcoran.

"I am impressed by the friendliness and openness of the people, especially during our visit to the Stanza Bopape squatter settlement, where one of the hawkers selling peanuts

insisted on giving us peanuts free," said Mr Burton.

The two men were here to develop partnerships with groups and individuals on issues like community development, the development of leadership of integrity at grassroots level and how to tackle racial problems as South Africa had a lot to teach at that level of reconciliation, they said.

Mr Corcoran said a few years ago in Richmond they started a network, which has now become national, called "Hope in the Cities", with the aim of creating a forum where people could talk.

He said the reality of race and how deeply it impacted on the entire fabric of society was important and it was vital to deal with concepts like reconciliation, forgiveness and repentance.

Mr Pono said the two visitors would meet a broad spectrum of community activists and leaders.

They have already met some leaders of the Mamelodi Civic Association with whom they held "fruitful" discussions on political empower-

ment, economic development, housing, delivery of health care and other services.

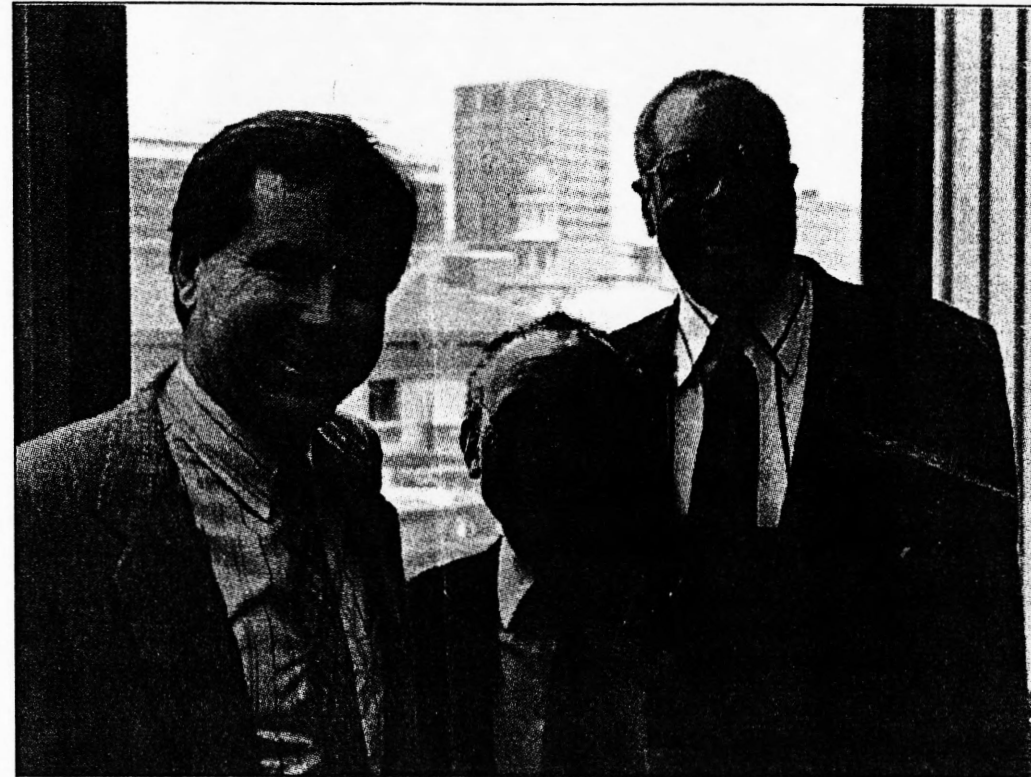
Their message to the Mamelodi leadership was that any group attempting to deliver change should model themselves in terms of moral and unselfish leadership as well as integrity.

Mr Pono said he saw the situation in South Africa as a challenge and opportunity to build something new which can serve as a model for the rest of the continent of Africa.

He said SA should remember it was under apartheid for a long time and should not expect to achieve its objectives of a new society overnight.

Mr Burton said the profound changes needed at ground level had to be effected by a local government leadership still to be elected in the forthcoming local government elections.

Mr Pono said for the new South Africa to succeed would take dedication, discipline and sacrifice from all the people and the leadership, both local and national.



PICTURE: FANI MAHU

Brotherhood: Mamelodi resident Sam Pono (centre) with his two American visitors Robert Corcoran (left) who is co-ordinator of "Hope in the Cities" in Richmond, Virginia and Collie Burton, retired rector of staff development and training in the New York City Department of Corrections.