Headline: NEIGHBOR SPOTLIGHT: Ronnie Jones of Fitzgerald

Subheadline: Making a safe landscape for kids, residents is part of his mission

Byline: Aaron Foley

Ronnie Jones had to wear a suit for the occasion. After all, the neighborhood where he’s lived for a little over a decade is finally getting some much-needed attention.

“I was out here bad,” Jones told a crowd of visitors to the Fitzgerald neighborhood Wednesday afternoon. “*Real* bad.”

Jones didn’t elaborate, but there’s no need to. The streets know well enough what “out here” conveys. But it’s how Jones was able to pull himself together, and put on a suit for Wednesday, that makes him proud.

The Greening of Detroit, which plants thousands of trees across vacant lots in the city, trained Jones as part of its workforce development plan, helping residents gain skills in landscaping, forestry and urban agriculture. With the nonprofit, Jones helped clean up several of the vacant lots in Fitzgerald.

“Years ago, the neighborhood wasn’t like it was now,” he says. “The grass and fields weren’t cut – grass everywhere. When Greening of Detroit came in, we cleaned up.”

You’d have to forgive Jones for sounding like a Greening of Detroit pitchman, but he can’t help it. “It was drug houses and everything (in this neighborhood), and it seems like when we came and cleaned it up, the drug dealers left.”

White suited up for an announcement in the Fitzgerald neighborhood that Century Partners and The Platform, two development groups, were partnering to rehabilitate more than 100 dilapidated homes in the area as well as turning more than 100 vacant lots into green spaces – building off the work White has already done.

“I’m so proud of what we did, to see these kids come and play here. Before, they wouldn’t come out and play here. They come out and, and that makes me feel good,” he says.

“When I walk to the store, that makes me feel good. It feels good to day, I cleaned these field up, I cleaned these streets up, I boarded these houses up. That makes me feel good inside.”