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Corey Jones, who had vision for an ambitious Albany development, dies at age 34

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Corey Jones, whose tough life growing up as a foster child in Albany's South End prompted him to pursue an ambitious plan to build a \$115 million mixed-use development in the neighborhood, has died.

Jones, 34, died on Dec. 5 in northwestern Florida, according to his older brother, Jeremy Horne-Murdock.

Jones' body was retrieved that day from a body of water in Sunny Hills, a community in the city of Chipley, according to the regional medical examiner's office in Florida.

The official cause of death is pending, according to the Florida Fish and Wildlife Conservation Commission.



LEN MORALES JR.

Corey Jones was the CEO and founder of South End Development in Albany. He died this month at age 34.

Horne-Murdock told the Albany Business Review his brother drowned in a pond.

Horne-Murdock, who owns a home there, said his brother had gone fishing and was in a kayak without a life preserver when he suffered a medical event.

"I talked to him like 7 o'clock in the morning," said Horne-Murdock, who was out of town at the time. "He said, 'Brother, I'm going to get that bass that snapped my line [yesterday].' That's the last time I spoke to him."

A funeral will be held Dec. 21 from 6 p.m. to 7 p.m. at SL McLaughlin Funeral Home at 1226 Broadway in Albany. Viewing will be 5 p.m. to 6 p.m.

A celebration of life will be held 7 p.m. to 10 p.m. at Parish Public House at 388 Broadway in Albany.

Jones' life was tragically cut short within weeks after he had received bank commitments for the total amount needed to build The Seventy-Six, according to Len Morales Jr., who serves as executive officer at South End Development, which Jones founded.

The financing included a senior lender and an equity investor, according to Morales, a marketing consultant who lives in Arizona and first met Jones about five years ago.

Horne-Murdock, 36, is a former professional football player. He cared for his brother the past five years as Jones dealt with longstanding health issues, including Type 1 diabetes.

Jones also developed gastroparesis, a debilitating stomach condition, about 2 1/2 years ago after being injured in a car crash, Horne-Murdock said.

"I was nursing him, taking care of him," he said. "My brother is the reason why I bought the property in Florida, maybe six months ago. He's been living down there, fishing every day."

He was at his brother's side as he pursued plans for The Seventy-Six, and is determined to finish it.

"I'm here to let people know I've been a major investor," Horne-Murdock said. "I've mobilized the [development] team. They're all excited to finish this in Corey's honor. This will get done, 100%, without a shadow of doubt."

Growing up, the brothers faced great adversity.

Jones' last name at birth was Horne. His mother was serving time in jail when he was born Feb. 10, 1988. The brothers became wards of the state and lived in foster homes. They were eventually separated from each other as children.

"When he was 7, that's when he became Corey Jones and was raised in Troy," his brother said. "I stayed in Albany in multiple foster homes and group homes."

They went on separate paths, with Horne-Murdock winding up in the NFL where he played two seasons for the Kansas City Chiefs, had a brief stint with the New York Giants and then played in the Canadian Football League.

Jones, meanwhile, became interested in building and construction, learning the trade from mentors at a local company. His vision for The Seventy-Six was to bring modern, affordable housing and services to the neighborhood where he was raised.

"He's a genius," Horne-Murdock said. "To be able to create this and do all these things, to build that community."

The development involves tearing down numerous vacant homes and replacing them with 246 affordable- and market-rate apartments featuring a communal greenhouse, urban farming center, STEM training center and other amenities in a neighborhood that has long struggled with poverty and disinvestment.

The city approved the plans in December 2020, and Jones had been working since then to secure financing. The site consists of 32 parcels on 2.4 acres bordered by Second Avenue, Leonard Street, Krank Street and Seymore Avenue.

The Seventy-Six would be the first "triple net-zero" mixed-use development in the U.S., according to Garrison Architects of New

York City. That means the development will generate all of its energy through renewable sources; treat and reuse all of the wastewater; and recycle or compost all of the generated waste.

The project team includes Turner Construction and other firms, according to a presentation on the website of the New York State Energy Research and Development Authority.

NYSERDA awarded the project a total of \$1.65 million as part of its "Buildings of Excellence" program in 2019 and 2021.

South End Development secured an \$850,000 loan on the parcels in March 2021 from an LLC affiliated with Kennedy Funding Inc. in Englewood Cliffs, New Jersey, according to a mortgage filed in the Albany County clerk's office.

A year ago, the state Environmental Facilities Corp. awarded a \$2.3 million "Green Innovation Grant" to the project.

The Seventy-Six is much bigger than anything Jones had ever done as a builder and developer. There were inevitable obstacles and delays given the size, cost and complexity of what he was trying to accomplish.

Those include a nearly \$400,000 lien that was placed on the South End properties in March by civil engineering firm LaBella Associates of Rochester.

In an interview with the Albany Business Review last May, Jones said the firm had not been paid for all of the site work and he was caught off guard by the lien.

"I'm not an expert in development," Jones said at the time. "I'm just a guy in the community that realized a tremendous need."

Michael DeMasi

Reporter

Albany Business Review



