

THE BUSINESS JOURNAL

SERVING JACKSONVILLE AND NORTHEAST FLORIDA

www.bizjournals.com/jacksonville

December 15-21, 2000

2 Sections, 52 Pages \$1.50

DOT-COM PRIDE

Blacksonville.com is aiming to close the digital divide

By Eric Cravey
ecravey@bizjournals.com

When the founders of Blacksonville.com

grew up on Jacksonville's Northside, the thought of one day becoming business partners never crossed their minds.

Jermyn Shannon and Michael Jones, who played basketball together as kids, now work to help small African-American-owned businesses compete on the digital court.

"For African-Americans to function, to compete, to survive even, we will have to possess the knowledge of the times," said Shannon, 27 who holds a bachelors in African Studies from Florida State University.

Blacksonville.com offers low-cost Web site packages and hosting to African-American business owners.

"By providing culture-specific content and resourceful material on the Internet in addition to a personal or commercial presence on the Web at affordable costs, we are providing a key service to our people," said Jones, 28, who holds a bachelors in psychology from the University of North Florida.

'Taking ... to the streets'

Blacksonville.com offers businesses a free listing in its business directory. Web design and hosting packages range from \$9 a month with a \$50 setup fee to \$35 a month with a \$299 setup fee for larger, more detailed Web sites.

The Web site aims to become the leading



PHOTO BY OSCAR SOSA

Michael Jones and Jermyn Shannon are on mission to help African-American small businesses tap into the e-economy.

information point about Jacksonville's African-American community

But Blacksonville.com will not merely function as a Web site. Shannon and Jones plan to run training workshops in some neighborhoods where computer ownership is low.

"Our users are looking for jobs, education, updates about the neighborhood, financial tips, current events..

National sell out

By
SusA.ND

Jacksonville real estate
h Recently, two of the cit
estate investment trusts al
folios to focus on higher-
p Indianapolis-based Dul
DRE) announced plans
lac
its Jacksonville properties
year. And Raleigh-base
(NYSE: H[W] sold its
\$161 folio to Orlando-
based Cal
That leaves Malvern, P
commercial REIT
REIT officials and an
below-average lease rates
reasons for their departure

Pipeline to as long-dist

Tim Murtaugh wants to
1 panes Ride the Pipe a
hot; Germany's Global
As, recently invested \$10

make sure it happens.
The money will hell
Technologies (OTCBB:
PI what Murtaugh hopes
wil lution in telecommun
rolling out nationwide for
calling using technology
for the Internet, but r.
applied in phone system
Protocol.

"We are not the first a

See BLACKSONVILLE. Page 37

BLACKSONVILLE: Firm has big hopes

FROM PAGE 1

About the neighborhood, financial tips, current events and so forth," Jones said. "And, we're taking Blacksonville.com to the streets by planning, networking and sponsoring events that focus on arts and culture, the most vital aspects of any thriving community."

Shannon and Jones came up with the idea for Blacksonville.com in March, after surfing such Web sites as BlackWebPortal.com and Ruzivo.com, two established and respected national information sources.

Follow the leader

"It's a growing trend, but I don't know if there is any leadership to follow," said Robert McFrazier, founder and president of two-year-old Ruzivo.com, an Everett, Wash.-based African-American culture Web search engine. "Now that the newness of the Web is gone, communities are seeking a presence on the Web."

Sites such as Blacksonville.com can be used to educate the community about the necessity of adopting the use of the home computer, McFrazier said.

"Sites like this help African-Americans realize their life can be enhanced by using technology," McFrazier said. "[The digital divide] is like a mind set as a whole – if it doesn't affect my paycheck, I don't need it."

Blacksonville.com has a link to Ruzivo.com on the site. In turn, Ruzivo.com has a link to Shrewsbury, N.J.-based BlackWebPortal.com, co-founded in 1998 by Robert Rucker.

Owning a personal computer is not a priority for low-income people regardless of race, Rucker said.

"It's not the lack of the skills; it's the lack of the want to use it," Rucker said. "You have to want to use it, you have to see how using a computer can benefit your life. I know people who would get cable TV before they would buy a computer."

Blacksonville.com will offer features such as a listing of entertainment events; Southern Toots, a black historical perspective of Jacksonville; and the Black Market, an e-commerce portion of the site.