

Creator's Statement: "Hardee Street: Designed for Dignity"

Leidi-Di Salcedo-Ureña

This summer, I had the incredible opportunity of working with the Center for Documentary Studies and DHIC, Inc (an affordable housing developer in the Triangle area) in the making of a web documentary, highlighting one of DHIC's latest developments: Hardee Street Apartments. This web documentary covers Hardee Street at all stages of its development: from what was on the land previously, to its development, and finally, the community that is being created on the property. The full experience is available on the DHIC website under the "About" tab: "Hardee Street: Designed for Dignity."

Why

As we were doing background research, we got a chance to do site visits to Hardee Street, Ashton Place and Willard Street (two other DHIC properties). One thing that definitely stood out was the way DHIC properties were designed to shatter any preconceived notion of what affordable housing looks like; they are intentionally designed to be community-orientated, beautifully designed spaces with full amenities, affirming the dignity of the residents. We wanted this to be at the core of our documentary, not just as a record of all the thought that goes into creating these communities, but also as a resource for anyone who is potentially looking at living in a DHIC property.

How

Early in the process, my team and I decided against a traditional video documentary. While video can definitely be immersive, it would have forced us to narrow down the scope. Hardee Street has a lot to offer and we wanted to show as much as we possibly could. A web documentary also let us combine video, photography, audio, and text so that viewers could move through the story at their own pace. We primarily used video for its emotional resonance, photo galleries with captions for chronology and visual impact, and text to connect the pieces without being too overwhelming.

Our constraints shaped many of our choices. We only had six weeks to research, produce, and edit, so we prioritized interviews that offered perspectives from the project managers (and other collaborators) and the residents. During production, we had to learn to adapt quickly and navigate through any issues, both technical and otherwise. Post-production required careful editing and deciding what belonged where while also keeping the site engaging and ensuring the story continued to flow across all mediums.

Intended Audience Experience

We want audiences to experience affordable housing differently and challenge the assumption that affordable housing = “low-quality.” The documentary itself is designed to be highly polished for this very reason, to reflect the intentionality behind Hardee Street and its design. By exploring the project managers’ interviews about the goals they had with this project and resident stories about culture and home, viewers are encouraged to uncover a more layered understanding of what Hardee Street represents: then, now, and in years to come.

Reflection

Admittedly, while some members of my team had experience with video documentary making, most of us had little to no experience in photography or audio. It was the very first time many of us had done anything like this. What surprised me most was how much the process pushed me into uncomfortable but ultimately rewarding situations. Conducting interviews required me to think carefully about the responsibility of representation; every response was not just content for us to edit but a lived experience we had to honor ethically. I found I learned to listen more actively, to ask questions that opened space for reflection, and to consider how our editing choices could either amplify or diminish the voices of residents and project managers. For me, personally, this completed project symbolizes and commemorates me putting myself out there and trying something completely new for the very first time. This project, much like Hardee Street itself, was collaborative, constrained, and shaped by constant decision-making and pivoting. That being said, the hope is that this finished project is not only a record of Hardee Street and its beautiful community, but also a statement on how collaboration and storytelling can honor spaces and the people that inhabit them.

“Hardee Street: Defined for Dignity” is, at its core, about dignity and belonging, and in telling that story I also came to understand how storytelling can be an act of care. Like I, as an author, had the chance to grow through this process, Hardee Street, and by extension DHIC, will continue to grow in the years ahead, carrying with them the voices and experiences that give that community its meaning.