

Becker's challenge

Sarah Becker, the new president of the Inner City Civic Association, has a job ahead of her.

The Inner City, one of the oldest primarily black neighborhoods in Alexandria, has been a pressure cooker lately, bubbling over with racial tension.

Lines have been drawn between longtime residents and newcomers over issues such as loitering and the sale of single beers and fortified wine. Newcomers are uncomfortable with people milling about their neighborhood streets. Oldtimers aren't bothered.

The civic association, which represents the newcomers, recently tried to have B&E Grocery's ABC license revoked after police caught a clerk selling alcohol to a minor.

The association's actions have angered some Inner City veterans, who claim their friend James

Bailey, the store's owner, is being targeted unfairly.

The pressure has begun taking its toll. Outgoing association President Jesse Jennings says he quit his post because he couldn't take the strain anymore.

In her new role, Becker will need courage to stand up for her beliefs. She also will need a vision of the future. But most of all, she will need to build bridges.

As long as the factions continue to fight, nothing will be resolved. An association of residents that represents only some of the neighborhood isn't truly a neighborhood association.

Becker should sit down with both sides and hammer out a compromise.

It won't be easy. But if she can do that, she will have taken a step in the right direction.