

The Leimert Renaissance Center

Background

A renaissance movement must be about enlightenment, reflections, revisiting ideas and reshaping creative and promising opportunities. The Leimert Park Renaissance Center (aka 'The Center') is a community-based, non-profit organization incorporated under the State of California Incorporation Codes. Despite declines in public support for programs at local, state, and federal levels, The Center believes that there exist understated bases of social capital, underutilized institutional resources, and important bases of goodwill in Leimert and surrounding communities. It is the intention of The Center to work with existing funded non-profit organizations and programs already funded to maximize creative initiatives already in play or being conceptualized, rather than 'reinvent the wheel'. The Center's primary tasks are to uncover, leverage, and reframe organizational relationships to utilize such resources more efficiently and effectively in the 21st century.

The Nature and Role of the Center

To fully grow and meet the challenges of the 21st century, Leimert Park has to reestablish itself as the anchor of business and cultural interests in surrounding neighborhoods. Residents of Mesa, Baldwin Hills, Windsor Hills, View Park and Crenshaw have to be attracted to social, business and cultural potentials of Leimert Park enterprises and community organizations. The socio-economic environment today and henceforth must be driven by private initiatives where the best outcomes are the products of enlightened Private/Public collaborations. Leimert Park Renaissance Center, headquarter in CZAND Square, is dedicated solely to the rebirth of Leimert Park as a 21st Century Community dedicated to fostering a rich blend of Afro American Cultural and Arts creativity and micro business services. Promoting quality micro business services can provide a neighborhood economic base for job creation and family development. Stability and safe home environments can engender improved self-esteem and aspirations to move forward in what is becoming an entrepreneurial business world of small businesses.

The driving principal of the Leimert Park Renaissance Center shall be personal and self-initiatives to exploit every opportunity:

- to create jobs,
- to promote sustainable micro-business and community organization development,
- to promote family and household development, and
- To enhance and enrich the capacity of government agencies and schools to meet the needs of community residents

The starting point for The Center shall be to facilitate a better understanding of Leimert Park as a socio-economic environment. The Center will work with graduate students, professional volunteers, and community agencies to guide and to promote research and

analysis. Except for public information provided by the US Department of Commerce, US Department of Labor and secondary information generated by Foundations, Research Institutes, and University Centers there is no standing flow of local information to facilitate an analysis of the changing characteristics of Leimert Park. There are “several Leimert Parks” in the minds of residents. At the community level there are viable connections between Leimert Park and surrounding identified neighborhoods. Moreover, there is always the task for gathering data to facilitate useful and critical planning information. Who are the consumers? Are there concentrated clusters of demand for services and products across neighborhoods? Who lives in Leimert Park? What are the cultural characteristics unique to households in Leimert Park? These and a host of information needs are essential to building a rebirth of Leimert Park’s micro business environment.

A second and urgent role for The Center will be to promote and facilitate collaboration among micro businesses and community agencies. Starting with the micro businesses in CZAND Square, The Center will promote marketing collaborations, management training and skills development, business ethics, and understanding the critical role of household and family stability. We will also deal with issues of accessing and creating financial resources for micro businesses.

A third role of The Center will be to help businesses, workers, and community organizations access business opportunities. Leimert Park will be impacted by LAX-Crenshaw Rail Line in two phases. During the Construction phase, micro firms will have an opportunity to be certified by major Primes and MTA to participate as service and product providers. Small but able micro businesses will have an opportunity to qualify as Underutilized Disadvantaged Business Enterprises (UDBE) and team with prime and large subcontractors during the construction phase. In the joint development stage where station development and pedestrian traffic is being planned, local small and disadvantage firms may provide services. Indeed, local non-profit agencies and micro businesses may have a major role to play in joint development planning.

The fourth and more general role will be to work with businesses owners to promote a rededication and commitment to expanding the micro business and service environment. An active program to rehabilitate and retrofit properties would raise the overall sense of long run success and encourage a movement of micro businesses and service agencies into Leimert Park. The Center could provide planning support and facilitate initiatives as a community resource.

The CZAND Square

CZAND Square has been at the center of the socio-economic development of Crenshaw for almost 40 years and provides a model of the socio-economic challenge that reflects the rebirth (or renaissance) of Leimert Park. It is fitting, therefore, that we anchor a renaissance movement there. It served as the planning and research arm of UCLA's Urban Crisis initiatives in the 70's where SEY YES, a community-based gang violence prevention program, was perfected under the leadership of V.G. Guinses. It also provided a research support base for the Los Angeles Urban League and Brotherhood Crusade during the early 70's. Perhaps the crowning contribution was facilitating the creation and formation of Crystal Stairs by Drs. Karen Hill Scott and Alice Duff.

In recent years, CZAND Square has provided space to nurture and assist micro businesses develop. Over a period of twenty years, Dr. C.Z. Wilson has promoted and assisted startups to organize, to market, and provide services to residents of Leimert Park. Well over 20 different businesses, community organizations, and neighborhood groups have operated from 3450 W. 43rd Street over the past five years.

Micro firms in CZAND Square provide a full array of micro Businesses. Attorney Keith Davis provides legal and counseling services for families with children requiring Independent education programs (IEP) and other special educational needs. SIAM, for almost 30 years, has provided personal counseling for adults facing legal challenges in vehicular driving behavior. Carol's Nail Shop has provided services for over 10 years from CZAND Square. Charley's Hair Cuts are famous all over Los Angeles. He is the "One". Niki, the lead service provider in FOUR HANDS, has provided hair care services for over 15 years. Fabio Assis, an international expert, provides a unique and special brand of hair Twists and Dread locks. Jennifer of Chocolate Spice has provided the total range of hair care services for more than a decade. Aswad International Hair Design is a family business that has prevailed and contributed to Leimert Park and surrounding Neighborhoods for almost 20 years.

It should not be surprising that Dr. M.A. Azinge-Obasi, Nigerian American, fluent in Spanish, is the lead occupant of CAZND Square. Dr. Obasi is a family specialist, steep in holistic as well as traditional medical education and training. She demonstrate the tenaciousness and commitment necessary to prevail in changing socio-economic environment with retrenching local, state, and federal government support. Dr. "O", as she is fondly addressed by friends and colleagues, started out with an office of 550 square feet. Today, operating with a staff of 2- fulltime medical assistants, she has an office of 1700 square feet. With a national crisis of having 30% of families without any health insurance, Dr. Obasi faces a long term, uphill battle to serve families in South Los Angeles. We believe that a more supportive and creative micro business environment is essential to the growth of Dr. Obasi's clinic.