

JOKES ASIDE, BRONZEVILLE BUSINESS IS SERIOUS MATTER

By Richard Muhammad

Comedian Ron Baker, Jr.'s jokes flew fast and furious at the July 11 "Bank Forum in Bronzeville," but the crowd came to engage in serious business—the opportunity to network with one another, connect with banks and learn about other agencies that could help small business owners in Bronzeville.

Co-sponsored by Quad Communities Development Corp. and the Bronzeville Chamber of Commerce, the event drew more than 40 business owners plus representatives from Chase Bank, Citibank, South Shore Bank and Bank Financial, as well as the Women's Business Development Center and Acción Chicago, which loans money to businesses that may not qualify for bank loans. It was QCDC's second annual banking forum and was held at the Chicago Urban League headquarters.

"One of the areas that we're very concerned about is our current business owners," said QCDC's NCP director Bernita Johnson-Gabriel. "They see a lot of development going on and they're wondering if they're going to be included. We want to make sure that they're strong and that we're adding to and complementing what's already in the community."

Business owners circulated throughout the room, stopping at side tables to talk to bankers and resource persons, as bankers flowed between the tables, passing out and collecting business cards.

Carmentia Carnes, with Chase Bank, came for personal as well as professional reasons: her grandparents grew up in Bronzeville. "This is our kids' legacy," she said. "This area with its beauty, access to downtown, access to other communities, makes it very attractive. There's a timer that we're under. If we want a stake in Bronzeville, we need to come and make that stake right now."

Bronzeville is "booming for those who are creative enough to know how to tap into it," said Andrew Nelson, owner of the

Bronzeville Travel Agency. He has been in business since 1983 and enjoyed the opportunity to network with other business owners and bankers.

Many small business owners don't know what to say or who to approach at a bank, said Jerri Edwards of Shore Bank. "It's important to attend seminars such as this to bridge that gap and make everyone feel comfortable talking to one another."

Ron Carter, publisher/editor of the South Street Journal and former president of the 47th Street Business Assn., still sees challenges for business development in Bronzeville. Bringing banks and businesses together is a step in the right direction, he said, acknowledging the leadership of Bronzeville Chamber president Johnnie Blair, who helped organize the event.

Carter believes an accurate count of African-American businesses is needed in Bronzeville and other neighborhoods to make sure indigenous businesses are developed and survive. "Tonight does represent a good view of businesses small and large working together," he said.

A QCDC survey of business owners found that building better relationships with banks and becoming part of a small business network were priorities, observed Chinwe Onyegoro, a QCDC consultant. The annual forum responds to that desire, she said, by helping people find out what's happening and allowing business owners to see, meet and click with bankers.

During the quality-of-life planning process, residents said they wanted development, but they wanted to keep the uniqueness of the community, Onyegoro added.

"The only way to develop a unique community is to really look at our heritage, and look at the resources and assets that we have here. Some of our biggest resources and assets are local entrepreneurs and local business owners," she said.

NOTES FROM THE FIELD



PHOTO BY ERIC YOUNG SMITH

"Art Attacks" in South Chicago

Youth wrote their wishes on homemade paper and hung them in a "wish tree" on June 11 as part of South Chicago's series of "Art Attack" events. More than 30 students and adults participated in the wish tree ceremony, which was hosted by the South Chicago Art Center in its community garden at 89th Street and Brandon Avenue.

The series continued in July as young artists made a mural by weaving plastic into the chain link fence at the former South Works steel site. A drum circle and poetry event is planned for the fall. The series was conceived during the neighborhood's Building Community through the Arts planning process.

Boat cruise honors Parents as Mentors

By Jackeline Martinez

Family, friends and school administrators took a celebratory Lake Michigan lunch cruise on June 11 to honor 23 parents for their achievements in the Parents as Mentors Program on Chicago's Southwest Side. It was the first graduation ceremony for the parents at Eberhart, Marquette and Talman elementary schools.

The program was started in January 2006 by the Southwest Organizing Project (SWOP), along with partners at the three schools, to strengthen parent involvement with the education system and their community.

The parents earn a small stipend for spending eight hours a week in the classroom as resources and role models, and two hours in workshops to sharpen their mentoring skills and to boost team-building.

Parent Juana Paniagua from Eberhart School said that she used to be a shy person, but now is outgoing and opinionated. "[The program] helped me gain confidence in myself," she told the

appreciative audience. "[Now] I am an important part in the students' education."

The Parents as Mentors program was modeled after an award-winning program by the Logan Square Neighborhood Association. SWOP hopes to expand the project at the existing schools and add two more elementary schools as soon as next year, said SWOP organizer Stephanie Garza. LISC contributed \$25,000 to get the program started, and schools pitched in \$7,300.

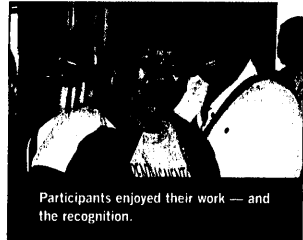


PHOTO BY JACKELINE MARTINEZ

Participants enjoyed their work—and the recognition.

Tax prep refunds bring \$10 million to NCP areas

By Ed Finkel

Free income-tax preparation services generated more than \$10 million in refunds in eight New Communities Program neighborhoods in 2006, with several centers showing major increases in the number of individuals served.

The center sponsored by the Near West Side Community Development Corporation more than tripled its volume of refunds by moving the program to Malcolm X College and expanding the hours of service. That center generated \$637,495 in refunds for 438 households.

Traffic and refunds doubled at the Southeast Chicago Development Commission's Job Resource Center, putting \$676,000 into local pockets or bank accounts, while the third annual Auburn Gresham Tax Clinic, co-sponsored by Greater Auburn-Gresham Development Corp. (GADC) and St. Sabina's Employment Resource Center, generated just under \$1.5 million for more than 1,000 households, up from \$1.2 million.

"The Auburn Gresham free income tax

site has become a treasure for residents of Auburn Gresham, Englewood, and the surrounding South Side and south suburban communities," said Carlos Nelson, executive director of GADC.

LISC/Chicago has helped establish or expand six of the tax clinics as part of its Centers for Working Families program. The clinics are operated by the Center for Economic Progress (CEP) and staffed by trained volunteers who serve families with annual incomes less than \$36,000 and individuals earning less than \$15,000. CEP ran a total of 14 tax centers citywide in 2006, generating nearly \$20.5 million in total refunds.

The second-largest volume of all Chicago tax clinics was at the Instituto del Progreso Latino's program in Pilsen, which generated \$2.85 million in refunds to 1,790 households. Other clinics were in Bronzeville (\$1.2 million), Humboldt Park (\$1.19 million), North Lawndale (\$1.26 million) and Woodlawn (\$918,000).

Visitors CONTINUED FROM PAGE 1 recent tour of NCP neighborhoods. A former mayor of Dayton, Ohio, Turner was recently named chairman of a new House subcommittee that will oversee a range of local government issues, including housing and urban development.

Meanwhile, delegations of neighborhood practitioners from around the country—Indianapolis, Philadelphia, Miami, San

Francisco—have been visiting NCP neighborhoods. So have representatives of major philanthropies.

"I'm not complaining," says Joel Bookman. As LISC/Chicago's director of programs, he and NCP deputy director Susana Vasquez have been doing a lot of the show-and-tell. "It's a problem of prosperity," said Bookman, "We've always thought NCP has potential for wider application."

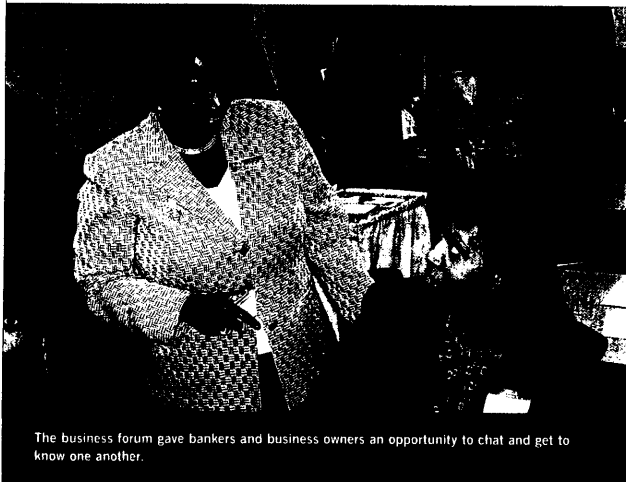


PHOTO BY RICHARD MUHAMMAD

The business forum gave bankers and business owners an opportunity to chat and get to know one another.