

King Boulevard bustling bastion of business

Catisha Marsh
Sentinel-Voice

Booker Burney, co-owner of Hair Unlimited, disagrees with notions that business isn't lucrative on Martin Luther King Boulevard.

"It's a good location," Burney said, "It's an upcoming part of the Westside and the busiest street (in the area). Traffic is backed up at all the lights. With the city investing here and new businesses coming in, we'll really attract a lot more business."

Burney said the new businesses will create job opportunities. "We're beginning to live up to the name of the street," he said.

House of Flavor, presently on 1230 W.

Owens Ave., will return to Martin Luther King Boulevard. "There's more traffic, more visibility," co-owner Kyle Heckard said. "We'll also be next to community legends—Hair Unlimited and Larry's Sight and Sound."

Grooves Corner Café, once the site of Chez's Place, plans to open in the coming weeks. The café will feature poetry readings, comedy nights hosted by Lou Collins, Sunday gospel brunches and "old school" nights.

Vanessa Williams, who co-owns Grooves with husband Daryl, wants to create an atmosphere that promotes African-American cultural awareness and said it's time West Las Vegas received a share of redevelopment funds.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

The new expansion taking place at the strip center on Martin L. King Blvd. and Washington will house four new tenants when completed next month.

"When you look at the beliefs and you would think that the street that bears his accomplishments of Dr. Martin Luther King, name should be presented better," she said.

Move

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"We were the first to move in and the last to move out," said Sight and Sound owner Larry Wilburn about being forced to leave his long-time home.

Wilburn opened his business on Owens in 1965 as part of the City Redevelopment Project. The city is now ousting the string of stores from their W. Owens location so that the Magic Johnson Company can rebuild from the ground up.

"We're doing everything we can to help private people and businesses make this

transition," said Councilman Gary Reese. He said that he's allotted the maximum amount of relocation monies to Sight and Sound—a total of \$40,000.

Besides saying that the city funds aren't nearly enough to make the move, Wilburn isn't anxious to leave for other reasons.

He also doesn't think that the new location will be as profitable.

"There's a lot of automobile traffic, but no foot traffic. MLK is just not a shopping environment. It's also only developed on one

side. It's a disadvantage, really," said Wilburn.

Wilburn and his employees also can't help but feel a bit sentimental.

Angie Hopkins, manager of Sight and Sound, has mixed feelings about leaving. She said, "I'll miss the place—I've been working here for 18 years."

Wilburn's history goes back even further than the Hopkins' years.

"When I first came to Vegas in 1954, almost all blacks—which was less than 10,000—98 percent of us lived between Bonanza

bordered on the South, Owens on the North, Martin Luther King on the West and A street to the East," Wilburn said, "We couldn't socialize outside of that area."

Wilburn worked as one of the first black waiters on the Strip at a restaurant called the Algiers.

When the restaurant closed after two years, Wilburn decided to open up his own business.

"Employment for blacks was limited; we could be either porters, maids, dishwashers, or do domestic work. I decided to lease the

only available storefront."

Larry's Sight and Sound started selling blues, jazz and gospel to its customers. There were no more than a dozen record labels back then. Now, the store carries tons of genres from hundreds of companies and rap has evolved into the number one selling art form.

Wilburn's experience has taught him that the old adage, "Blacks don't do business with blacks!" is completely false.

Unlike many enterprises that went under once blacks were able to do business outside the Westside after the

Civil Rights Movement, Sight and Sound flourished.

"I'm very grateful to blacks. The community has been very supportive and loyal. If you're fair and consistent, blacks will sustain you," he said.

Wilburn would like to move back to W. Owens once the city and the Magic Johnson Co. finish rebuilding or at least open another store at his old location.

Reese said that the city would consider allowing former tenants to have first pick at spots once the new development is completed.

Recycling Black Dollars kicks off new Las Vegas chapter

Catisha Marsh
Sentinel-Voice

Incompetent black business owners: They're unprofessional. Always late. And their products or services are below par.

These are the types of attitudes that motivated Muhammad Nassardeen to start Recycling Black Dollars, a business membership organization that provides support and encourages networking among black businesses.

"We have a race-esteem problem," Nassardeen said. "... We think, 'I'm special', but other blacks are not. ... This is a problem we have subconsciously. We believe we're inferior. We have to reprogram ourselves."

Economic empowerment group debuts today

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Recycling Black Dollar Communications will launch its Las Vegas chapter and nationally acclaimed "Change Bank Day" at its inaugural luncheon today from noon to 2 p.m. at 828 Spring Mountain Road, Suite 314. The event will be hosted by the Rev. Clayton Bywaters of the Grace Mercy Christian Ministry. Bywaters is a former UNLV football coach.

Ernest Fountain, president of New Ventures Capital and Enterprise Community Credit Union will be a luncheon speaker.

As a community relations director for a healthcare organization, Nassardeen constantly heard black doctors complain about how other black professionals were incapable of performing their jobs well.

He initially started RBD to encourage black professionals to patronize one another. The program soon expanded to include all black business people. Currently, there are three chapters, one in Los Angeles, one in Washington, D.C. and the third debuting in Las Vegas Thursday.

Bronda Everett, Executive Director of the Las Vegas RBD, says that the governing board for the new organization will comprise

the charter members, namely, the owners of Seven Seas, Sir Speedy Printing, New Venture Capital Development and Enterprise Community Credit Union, Lift Every Voice, Inc., the Black Business Directory and Grace Mercy Christian Ministry.

"We're educating and assisting businesses with connecting with one another," said Everett. "We're also a full-scale marketing company, so we can help them get the word out about their products and services."

The Los Angeles, D.C. and Las Vegas chapters will operate independently of one another, but they will host (See Black dollars, Page 5)

RBD is a business membership organization started by Muhammad Nassardeen in Southern California 11 years ago to motivate individuals, organizations, businesspeople and consumers to invest in black businesses.

Change Bank Day was initiated after the Million Man March in 1995. The inaugural program in January 1996 drew more than 1,400 new depositors who contributed \$7 million. The event is held annually.

Those interested can call Bronda Everett at 392-5303.

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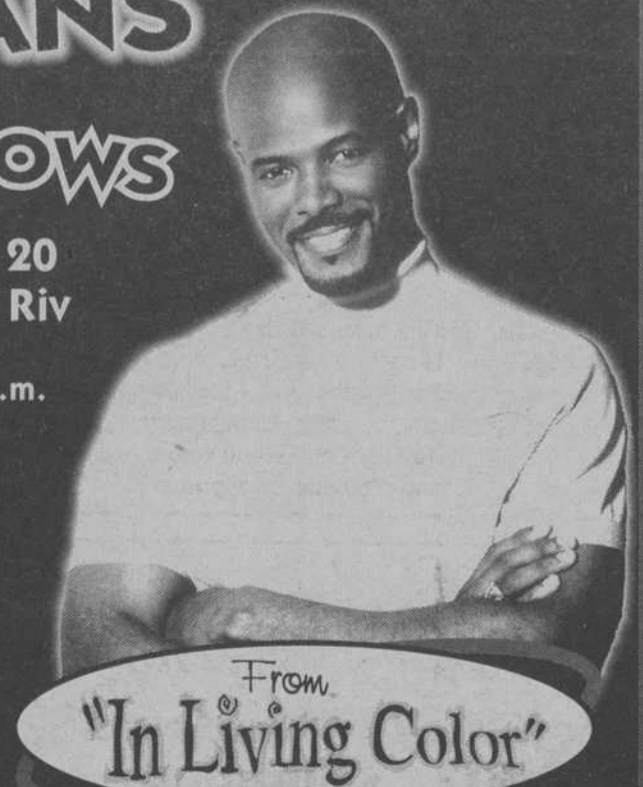
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