

Chicago to lose historic black site

By Patrice Nkrumah
Special to Sentinel-Voice

CHICAGO (NNPA)—A historical landmark theater in the heart of the Black community on the city's South Side closed its doors June 30, perhaps for the final time. Owners of the New Regal Theatre said the 2,300-seat auditorium could no longer generate the revenue needed to sustain business.

Originally opened in 1928, the theatre hosted numerous productions targeting the Black community and many compared the Regal with the Apollo Theatre in New York City. The original Regal closed in 1968 after the owner, S.B. Fuller, fell on hard economic times.

The original theatre was torn down in 1973 and made into a parking lot. In 1987, Ed Gardner, founder of Soft Sheen hair care products, and his wife, Bettian, purchased what was then the closed Avalon theater a few miles south of the original location and revitalized it into what has been the New Regal Theatre for the past 16 years.

Gardner said he and his wife don't want to see the business go, but they cannot afford to pay back a city grant of \$1 million that was taken out when the theatre first opened, or deal with a myriad of other problems that the city has ignored.

The terms of the grant stipulate that if the theatre is sold within 40 years, the total amount of the grant, plus interest, is due. Gardner said the interest on the grant is \$700,000. He

doesn't understand why the city can't forgive his debt for the good of the community, when in the past they have forgiven debts that were much higher for other venues.

"They allowed the Chicago Theatre to run up a debt of over \$22 million, but somehow they managed to forgive that debt," Gardner said.

The Chicago Theatre is downtown on the world famous State Street. Its amenities include better street lighting, cleaner streets and less crime because of a strong police presence. The Regal is located in an area inundated with the social problems that plague the inner city.

"If the city really cared, they could stop all of this in a heartbeat. They can shut down crime in a neighborhood when they really want to," Gardner said.

He said he isn't asking the city to help with the operating costs of the facility, but to simply forgive the debt.

He also tried to get the city to sponsor programs at the theatre that would generate revenue, such as targeting senior citizens and children, but there was no response. Instead, the Regal had to rely on small Black production companies to use their venue.

City officials told The Final Call that they did all they could to help the Regal and other Black theaters. The Regal employed 12 full-time staff people.

Patrice Nkrumah writes for The Final Call newspaper in Chicago.

Simon

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hat and successfully execute that event."

Simon's drive and commitment to excellence started at an early age. Born in Lake Charles, La., Simon is one of four boys. "My father was very regiment oriented," Simon said.

"What was instilled in us is that your word is your bond. I'm an honest person and my integrity has not been challenged. If you say you're going to do something, then do it and fulfill it at your best."

At 16, Simon launched his first business venture, a mobile DJ company. He started out with parties and large events. Later, he decided that he only wanted to deal with major corporations.

"I always knew I wanted to be a cop and be in entertainment radio," Simon said.

He came to Las Vegas in 1990. After completing his tour in the U.S. Air Force as a police officer, Simon served seven and one-half years as a police officer in Henderson. He will soon celebrate his ten-year anniversary as a Metro Officer in Las Vegas. Simon currently serves in the Division of Identity Theft.

Simon also juggles his roles as husband and father. He and his wife, Leslie, were married last year and raise six children between them from previous marriages.

"If you don't have a strong black woman behind you, you don't get the success you want," said Simon. "I love my wife and I love my kids. I don't have the 'what's in it for me' spirit. My wife makes me turn off my cellphones now on the weekends. That's strictly family time, time to unwind," Simon added.

Their united spirit is what drives this husband and wife team to success. Leslie Simon is the vice president of operations for the NCP Group. Recently, the Urban Sports and Entertainment Group named Mr. Simon as executive director of the Las Vegas Football

Classic.

"We specialize in the production and the operation of pre-game shows or halftime shows at sporting events. This is a welcome challenge," Simon said.

The Southern University Jaguars and the North Carolina A&T State University Aggies plan to bring down the house on Sept. 13 in the Sam Boyd Stadium in the first Las Vegas Football Classic. Organizers are guaranteeing \$375,000 to each Historically Black University, including expenses. This will make it one of the highest classic paydays in black college sports.

Clark County High School seniors will receive \$10,000 in minority scholarships from the classic and the estimated economic impact to the Las Vegas area is \$20 million.

Although the pressures and stresses of producing an event like the LV Football Classic may seem daunting to most, Simon thrives on this adrenaline rush and shows no signs of slowing down. In fact, he has developed a junior executive program within the company called "Making the Crew."


"The concept is similar to what P. Diddy is doing with his program, 'Making the Band,' Simon explained. "Making the Crew" is 'boot camp' for junior executives in the making. We teach them how to be executives. They learn everything from the business and financial side of things to how to conduct themselves in interviews and meetings with CEOs of large corporations.

"Executives don't care if you're a man or a woman, black, white or yellow, you better be able to handle your business," Simon said.


When asked, where does he see himself in ten years, Simon laughed and said "still answering phones."

"I plan to be retired from Metro and generating between \$10 million to \$14 million a year in business contracts with the NCP Group."


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