

MLK-style campaign seeks to lift L.A.'s poor

By Gene C. Johnson Jr.
Special to Sentinel-Voice

SOUTH LOS ANGELES - Clergy, activists and union leaders have announced that they have kicked off a 21st century version of the Poor People's Campaign, a movement begun 40 years ago by Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.

The new effort is an association of elected officials, grassroots organizations and clergy members geared to — in a similar movement initiated by King prior to his death in 1968

— ending poverty in Los Angeles County.

On Dec. 4, 1967, King announced his plans for a Poor People's Campaign, which he considered a second phase of the Civil Rights Movement. Before his assassination six months later, King and the organization he led, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, set lofty goals, planning to lead thousands of protesters into Washington, D.C., to demand congressional implementation of an "economic bill of rights."

A key provision being a \$30 billion anti-

poverty package that would have included a guaranteed annual income for the poor nationwide.

Tyrone Freeman, the SEIU-United Long Term Care Workers Union leader and SCLC-L.A. board chairman who is organizing the campaign, said the newly begun effort would work to provide job training and education and spur heightened civic participation. He said the movement is about lifting all people out of poverty, "no matter what creed or ethnicity, out of the mist of poverty and into

the sunlight of prosperity."

Some of those organizations participating in the campaign include the National Black Business Council, Mothers In Action, Bethel AME Church, Community Coalition, the NAACP and The Organization Us.

Inglewood Mayor Roosevelt Dorn said his city will take part in the campaign by passing a living wage ordinance and then establishing an employment office in the city within the next month.

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problems."

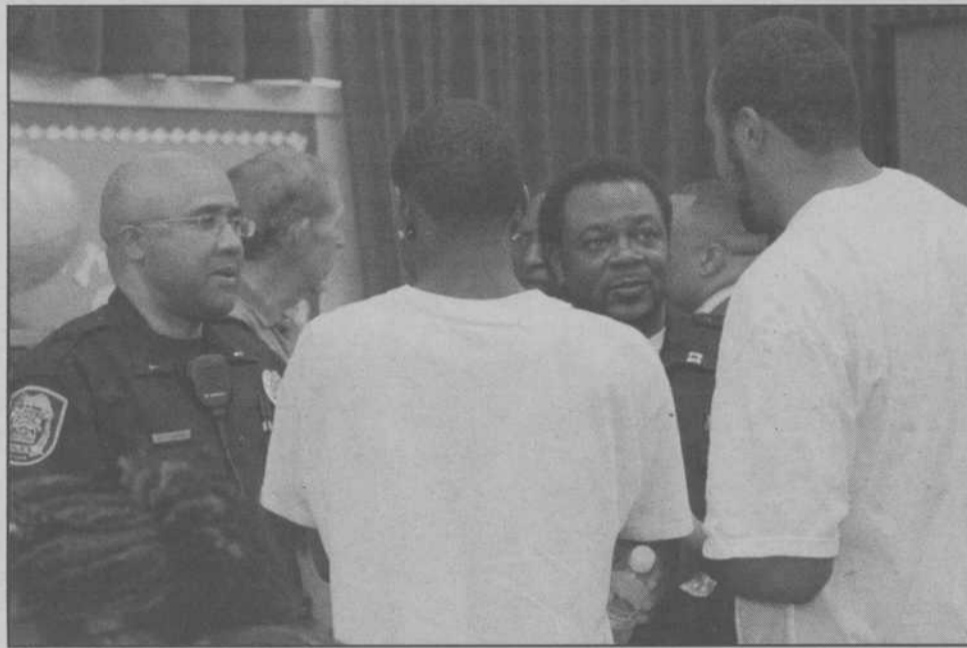
North Las Vegas Police Chief Mark Paresi spoke to the residents regarding police and community relations.

Paresi stated: "We are increasing the number of officers on the force that will allow us the opportunity to deploy more officers in this neighborhood. I believe that we share the responsibility of the behavior in this neighborhood. We can organize, engage and effectively work on the problems in the community. I believe that parents play an important role in raising their children. They need to know what goes in their children's bedrooms and inspect them from time to time, looking for drugs and guns, and be that adult and role model to hold them accountable for their actions."

Residents were asked to submit comment cards if they wanted to address any issues or concerns during the session. Some of the questions asked referred to housing issues, police presence in the community, the lack of jobs and economic development, safety, and future growth.

Resident Wendell Venerable stated: "The only thing that these kids do around here everyday is to smoke crack cocaine and do tricks. There are no community centers around here to offer them something to do. The EOB [Economic Opportunity Board] building is abandoned and used as a hangout by some of the people. The kids wander around during the day and nobody stops them and asks why they aren't in school. He went on to state that he has never seen the mayor of North Las Vegas at any community meetings in the neighborhood and wonders if the mayor cares about this community.

Annette Wilridge said, I'm here tonight, because they're talking about closing



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

North Las Vegas police and concerned residents speak during a community forum recently about ways to reduce crime and improve neighborhood conditions.

Buena Vista Springs apartments and throwing people out into the streets. I live there with my kids and we don't have anyplace else to go. The police are here everyday dealing with shootings and drive-bys. I don't want to be homeless, so I want to know what they're going to do about it."

The housing complex located at Martin Luther King Boulevard and Carey Avenue is being closed because HUD is no longer issuing payment to the owners due to conditions on the property that are reportedly below code. In a more recent development, more than 1,000 residents are being forced to move within the next month or so.

Richard Johnson commented, "I've lived in this community for 30 years, and I have seen this community thrive in the past and now suffer from a lack of commitment from the city to care for the lives of the individuals living here and the infrastructure existing here. I believe that my city council member and the other leaders downtown don't care what happens here, and have looked the other way as they develop the newer communities using our tax dollars. We want them to care about us and keep our community just like

the way they do it in Summerlin."

Dorothy Lawson said, "I've been living in the Delmonico neighborhood for over 28 years and this community has been neglected by the city. People have had abandoned vehicles sitting in their front and back yards for

years that others use to hide in to deal their drugs or smoke their crack cocaine. We don't need to furnish these criminals anywhere to commit their crimes and bring down the community."

J. D. Thornton Jr. voiced his concerns: "There's a lot of crime in this community

and the city has neglected us. We need to come together as a community and work with the authorities to improve our neighborhood. You have to worry about people trying to break into your home, too much rental property and landlords moving people in and not doing background checkups on any undesirables or problem people. Also, the halfway houses that they set up in this community lack any supervision, and people are left to their own and no one is accountable."

Katherine Joseph is pleased that more community forums will be held. "I'm glad that we have agreed to hold more meetings here in the community, because it is difficult for some of us to air out all of our dirty laundry at once. As our councilman stated, we need to attend some of the city council meetings and let them know what's going on in our community and what they can do to help us improve things. We need more speed bumps to slow the cars down and not

be speeding on our streets. We need to work with our young people and keep them from committing crimes and preying upon others. We need block watches, and a neighborhood association that will help us keep our community safe and thriving."

Margaret Coleman spoke on the ongoing problem that she experienced years ago working at a downtown hotel-casino property. Coleman claims that her health was injured from environmental contaminants and has been fighting to collect for a long time, so she asked for assistance from her representatives.

Robinson thanked the residents for their comments.

"I didn't host this meeting for any media attention. There are many challenges in the community that we need to address, challenges that haven't been dealt with in years. Now is the time for us to reach out and work with this community," Robinson said.

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