

## **CRA Seeks to Raise Curtain on Revamped Theater**

By **DANIEL MILLER** - 2/25/2008

**Los Angeles Business Journal Staff**

For more than 80 years, the neon sign on the roof of the historic Westlake Theater in Los Angeles' MacArthur Park neighborhood has stood in place, unfazed by the passing years. Meanwhile, the inside has been transformed from a movie theater and vaudeville house into a swap meet.

But the Community Redevelopment Agency of the city of Los Angeles has plans to restore the 638 S. Alvarado St. landmark and build a multi-use development around it that could span half a city block.

The agency bought the 18,673-square-foot theater earlier this month for \$5.7 million, as well as four adjacent properties for an additional \$5.1 million. It now owns about 80,000 square feet in the area and is seeking other landlords along the street to work with on the project.

The CRA wants to resell the space to a buyer who will restore the theater into a movie and performing arts space, and develop a 97,000-square-foot, mixed-use development replete with affordable housing, retail and parking.

"It is a great building," said Leslie Lambert, the CRA Hollywood & Central regional administrator. "Most of the interior characteristics are still there. It has a great stage to do really legitimate theater. It has a projection room to show movies."

The company will start marketing the property to developers soon. The swap meets will continue to operate in the space until development begins.

Built in 1926, the Westlake was run by the Fox Theater chain for a number of years as a first-run movie house and later by Metropolitan Theaters, which showed second- and third-run movies. Eventually, it switched to Spanish-language films before being converted for swap meets.

### **Historic Little Tokyo**

While tourists and locals alike flock to Little Tokyo for the restaurants, few realize that it's one of the oldest communities in all of L.A., dating back to the 1870s.

Leaders in Little Tokyo want to get the word out and have applied to the federal government for a special Preserve America's Communities designation that would make the area eligible for funds to market itself as a historic treasure.

"We would like people around the country and around the world to come see some of the historic neighborhoods in Little Tokyo," said Bill Watanabe, executive director of the Little Tokyo Service Center.

If Little Tokyo gets the designation, it would then be eligible for federal grants ranging from \$5,000 to \$100,000 that can be used to mail brochures or establish a visitors center. The neighborhood also would be added to a nationwide list of some 500 historical places to visit.

Santa Monica is the only other county community with the Preserve America's designation.

### **Billboard Campaign**

Billboards, bus shelters and buses in downtown Los Angeles are currently plastered with advertisements aiming to recruit foster and adoptive parents.

The three-month advertising campaign is courtesy of \$1.5 million in outdoor ad space that has been donated by various advertising companies. It has been coordinated by Santa Monica-based agency the

Ballpark, which put together the program for non-profit Children's Bureau, a child abuse prevention organization.

"The campaign is similar in scope to launching a new season at the Hollywood Bowl," said Alan Berkes, principal and creative director for the Ballpark.

Children's Bureau is also building a mall-like facility that will serve the downtown population at 1910 Magnolia Ave., near Staples Center.

The organization is looking to partner with various downtown businesses such as banks, insurance providers and health care companies to open up storefronts that will offer services to low-income families.

"Our strategy is to be very community based with downtown Los Angeles," said Berkes. "The facility will be a beacon for community events."

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