
AFRICATOWN-SEATTLE'S LIBERTY BANK BUILDING OPENS TO ROUSING SUPPORT AND CELEBRATION

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By Jose Gutierrez Jr.

The long wait is over. An idea more than a decade in the making, comes to a ripe fruition as The Liberty Bank Building opens with the multitudes of Seattle in attendance to celebrate. Apartments and designed communities open all the time. This one is special. Located on the very site of the first African-American-owned bank in the Pacific Northwest, Liberty Bank - a vibrant new building has opened its wake.

Liberty Bank, during its storied existence, served as a financial institution that supported the idea, with action, of being a reliable source of loans and financing for African-Americans who could not rely on other banks to offer fair and equitable terms or loans at all. Liberty Bank closed in 1988, but its legacy has not been forgotten and has been renewed with the opening of the symbolic and monumental Liberty Bank Building, which contains 115 living units and now rests on the same

foundation on which the bank itself once stood. Now, residents will live in a building that upholds a legacy once championed by the now defunct bank.



The legacy is one of affordable and equitable housing, which has been a wishful idea and dream for many Seattleites in the booming explosion and increase of real estate, rent and mortgage prices in recent years. The housing at The Liberty Bank Building is one of modern architecture, artful design and adornment, prime location and with rent-control and income-based rates. From all over the city, state and beyond visitors came to embrace the latest addition to the Seattle community's skyline. "This is great! I remember when we used to call it 'The CD (Central District)", says Nestor 'Nasty Nes' Rodriguez, a legendary radio personality who is a pioneer in Hip-Hop and R&B radio in Seattle and the entire USA. He came from his home in Los Angeles to share in the festivities. "I really don't want to leave. It is such a good time to see so many familiar, friendly and new faces, celebrating this new building and cause!"



Nasty Nes was not alone in his adoration of the occasion. Other notable luminaries came and were recognized for their presence in community affairs over the years. Larry Gossett was among many recognized by hostess, Dr. Marcia Arunga. Also in attendance was Mayor Jenny Durkin, who spoke eloquently about the history and significance of the day. Kshama Sawant of the Seattle City Council met with and greeted her fellow citizens, being recognized for her representation of the wider community. Local icon, Chukundi 'DJ Kun Luv' Salisbury hosted the music. Former Washington state representative Dawn Mason spoke vibrant and inspirational words and among the more than a thousand people who would stream through the streets, courtyard and in and out of the building to enjoy a catered meal and tours of the property, was Dr. Maxine Mimms. Mimms, 91-years of age is one of the co-founders of The Evergreen State College's Tacoma Campus - she is one of the deans of education in the state of Washington and a consultant to both Oprah Winfrey and Cicely Tyson. She and a group of elders hosted a prayer circle, blessing the event and people present.

The Liberty Bank Building ribbon-cutting and official 'open to the public' event, was a long time coming and represented the sweat, effort and resilience of true teamwork. Not only were community members the catalysts to devise this effort, which many people dismissed as lofty and unrealistic, but people like Wyking Garret (announced as the unchallenged 'Mayor of Africatown' during the event) and others rallied the support, commitment and follow-through of public and private sectors over an extended period of time to deliver a result that will stand as an example for other communities seeking fair and equitable housing and restoration, to model their efforts after.