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In Neighborhoods



BUILDING A HEALTHY SACRAMENTO

Making Healthy Choices Convenient

BY MIKE BLOUNT

It's not where you'd expect to find a fresh stalk of celery or a delicious, locally grown cucumber, but walk through the aisles at Sam's Market in Oak Park and you'll now find a cooler filled with fresh produce. In the past, finding healthy foods in South Sacramento required a visit to a grocery store, which could be more than a mile away. One nonprofit is working to change that through a new program funded by the Building Healthy Communities grant of The California Endowment.

Alchemist Community Development Corp. was founded in 2004 with the goal of identifying the challenges and opportunities that arise from urban growth. Today, the nonprofit supports Sacramento-area residents through projects aimed at creating more healthy and diverse communities. One of those projects is converting neighborhood markets into healthy convenience stores.

Executive Director Davida Douglas says the organization began approaching convenience-store owners in South Sacramento last year to see if they would be open to carrying more healthy food options in their stores.

"We mapped out all of the corner stores, conducted focus groups, did interviews with store owners and developed criteria for who we could work with," Douglas says. "For the existing clientele, one of the things we discussed with the store owners was adding healthy options next to the sodas and junk food. But we also discussed the potential to bring in new customers that did not shop there before."

Currently, Alchemist CDC is partnering with two convenience stores in South Sacramento — Sam's Market and Elder Creek Market.

Alchemist CDC helped these stores transition by ordering and stocking all the produce, as well as helping the owners establish a relationship with local growers and suppliers. Eventually, these duties will fall on the store owners themselves. Alchemist CDC is also helping with marketing the healthier options in the stores by providing signage that includes nutritional information and preparation tips. They are also doing community outreach.

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Davida Douglas, executive director of Alchemist Community Development Corp.

"Before, there wasn't very visible signage," Douglas says. "We've created and brought in new signs, sent out mailings and gone door-to-door to do outreach."

Prior to the nonprofit working with these two convenience stores, the closest access to fresh produce was approximately a mile away. Douglas says one of the things they learned from their focus groups was that residents

who depended on public transit were traveling much farther once a month to get better deals on their groceries. Working with convenience stores in their neighborhoods gives those residents more options when groceries run out or expire.

Ultimately, Douglas says she would like to see the project expand to even more convenience stores in South Sacramento.

"My hope is that in the next few years we'll add more stores and continue to work with store owners," Douglas says. "But so far, the reaction has been very positive."

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

In 2010, The California Endowment launched a 10-year, \$1 billion plan to improve the health of 14 challenged communities across the state. Over the 10 years, residents, community-based organizations and public institutions will work together to address the socioeconomic and environmental challenges contributing to the poor health of their communities.

Davida Douglas is the executive director of Alchemist Community Development Corp. The organization works with local convenience-store owners to increase access to healthy foods in South Sacramento.
Photo by Mike Blount



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