It’s not where you’d expect to find a fresh\ntutal of celery or a delicious, locally grown\ncucumber, but walk through the aisles at Sam’s\nMarketer in Oak Park and you’ll now find a\ncooler filled with fresh produce. In the past,\nfinding healthy foods in South Sacramento\nrequired a visit to a grocery store, which could\nbe more than a mile away. One nonprofit is\nworking to change that through a new program\nfunded by the Building Healthy Communities\grant of The California Endowment.\nAlchemist Community Development Corp.\nwas founded in 2004 with the goal of\nidentifying the challenges and opportunities\nthat arise from urban growth. Today, the\nnonprofit supports Sacramento-area residents\nthrough projects aimed at creating more\nhealthy and diverse communities. One of those\nprojects is converting neighborhood markets\ninto healthy convenience stores.\nExecutive Director Davida Douglas says the\norganization began approaching convenience\nstore owners in South Sacramento last year\nto see if they would be open to carrying more\nhealthy food options in their stores.\n“[We] mapped out all of the corner stores,\nconducted focus groups, did interviews with\nstore owners and developed criteria for who\nwe could work with,” Douglas says. “For\nthe existing clientele, one of the things we\ndiscussed with the store owners was adding\nhealthy options next to the sodas and junk food.\nBut we also discussed the potential to bring in\nnew customers that did not shop there before.”

Currently, Alchemist CDC is partnering with\ntwo convenience stores in South Sacramento —\nSam’s Market and Elder Creek Market.\nAlchemist CDC helped these stores transition\nby ordering and stocking all the produce,\nas well as helping the owners establish a\nrelationship with local growers and suppliers.\nEventually, these duties will fall on the store\nowners themselves. Alchemist CDC is also\nhelping with marketing the healthier options in\nthe stores by providing signage that includes\nnutritional information and preparation tips.\nThey are also doing community outreach.

“My hope is that in the next few years we’ll\nadd more stores and continue to work with\nstore owners.”
Davida Douglas, executive\ndirector of Alchemist Community\nDevelopment Corp.

“Before, there wasn’t very visible signage,”\nDouglas says. “We’ve created and brought in\nnew signs, sent out mailings and gone door-to-\ndoor to do outreach.”
Prior to the nonprofit working with these\ntwo convenience stores, the closest access to\nfresh produce was approximately a mile away.\nDouglas says one of the things they learned\nfrom their focus groups was that residents

who depended on public transit were traveling\nmuch farther once a month to get better deals\non their groceries. Working with convenience\nstores in their neighborhoods gives those\nresidents more options when groceries run out\nor expire.
Ultimately, Douglas says she would like to see\nthe project expand to even more convenience\nstores 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.”

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

BUILDING HEALTHY COMMUNITIES

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Making Healthy Choices Convenient

By Mike Blount