

## Black Market Co-Op Forms To Support Black Business Development

BY PHYLLIS GAINES

It isn't often that someone with an idea for a new business can find an outlet to test their theory and try to find the right market. This is especially difficult and true for minorities who may struggle for years trying to work out of their basement or spare bedroom, seeking out the occasional craft show to sell their products.

The Black Market Co-Op was organized specifically to address this frustration. The founding Co-Op members met earlier this year while participating in the Black Business Expo, sponsored by PCC Cascade Campus every February during Black History Month. They were disappointed in the attendance at the event, as well as the fact that it occurred only once a year. They began to discuss ways to improve the Expo and ended up deciding to create their own.

"It made no sense for us to complain about an activity over which we had no control," said Phyllis Gaines, one of the founding members and owner of Vessels, Tableware With

Meaning. "It's PCC's budget and staff, and we just pay our money to have a space. Some of us volunteered to help, but it was difficult to have any impact on the decisions."

For these reasons, a number of the vendors met the very next month to plan another marketplace. After a couple of meetings, a core group of business owners formed the Black Market Co-Op, dedicated to providing a regular series of marketing events to promote and encourage minority business development. In addition to Gaines, founding members include Roslyn Hill, Shades of Color Ethnic Art Gallery; Donnie Lewis, Donnie's; Raymond Quinton, the Herald-Times newspaper; Evelyn Warren, Wearable Accessories; and Robert Livingston, Diane's Gems.

The Co-Op committee pooled their funds to rent a building and buy advertising. They invited more than 150 minority-owned businesses to participate by renting a space for the day. Their first Market Co-Op was held June 18 at the OAME Cascade Plaza building. A community celebration of Juneteenth, the event featured good food, many popular local musicians and community groups, as well as 34 African-American busi-

ness owners selling a wide variety of products, many of them Afro-centric and hand-made. The event was a community success with over 400 people attending.

The next Black Market Co-Op will be held October 14 and 15, again at the OAME Cascade Plaza building. At the "Pre-Holiday Extraganza," businesses will have the opportunity to celebrate the up-coming holidays and begin to capture those spending dollars early. Cost to participate in the 2-day event is \$50; a few spaces are still available. Interested business owners should pick-up an application at the Shades of Color Gallery, located at 316 NE Thompson Street. A deposit of \$25 is required to reserve a table.

The Black Market Co-Op runs from 6-9 P.M. on Friday, October 14, and 10 A.M. - 6 P.M. Saturday, October 15. The event will feature holiday entertainment and raffles held throughout the day. Admission is free, and the public is asked to bring two canned food items for holiday baskets for the needy. For more information, call 288-3779 or 249-1849. The Co-Op committee intends to hold at least four Market Co-Op's throughout 1995.

*Celebrating Minority Business Enterprise for the weeks of September 28th & October 5th.*

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