

St. Louis Urban League Breaks Ground at QuikTrip Site

By Mariah Stewart
Special to the NNPA from the
St. Louis American

The burnt-out QuikTrip convenience store in Ferguson, which became a symbol of racial unrest after a police officer killed an unarmed black teenager nearby almost a year ago, will soon reopen as a community center focused on job training for African Americans.

The store was looted, burned and spray painted “R.I.P. Mike Brown” before civilians pitched in and cleaned up the site. As rioting along West Florissant Road intensified, heavily armed police with armored vehicles pointed rifles at protesters and fired tear gas and “less lethal” projectiles into crowds.

The Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis held a groundbreaking ceremony at the site July 9. Under a white tent sheltering dignitaries, Michael McMillan, president and CEO of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, said the organization aims to train and find employment for 500 young people in the region by the end of summer.

“After Michael Brown’s death, many young people in the community said they were not being listened to and their voices were not heard,” McMillan told the au-



Michael McMillan, president and CEO of the Urban League of Metropolitan St. Louis, wielded a shovel alongside Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, at the groundbreaking for a new community center at the site of the burnt-out QuikTrip in Ferguson.

dience.

“We decided to go out and walk the streets of Ferguson and talk to people to find out what we could

of those young people said they needed jobs and economic opportunity in this area.”

Data collected by the Federal

‘We decided to go out and walk the streets of Ferguson and talk to people to find out what we could do as the Urban League to make a difference’

do as the Urban League to make a difference. Every single one

Reserve Bank of St. Louis show unemployment among African

Americans in the St. Louis region at 9.5 percent, compared with 4.8 percent for whites.

After talking with Ferguson youth, McMillan created the Urban League’s Save Our Sons initiative. McMillan said the program has already helped 100 young men find jobs. The new center built on the site of the torched QuikTrip will house Save Our Sons, as well as three other social services organizations: Provident, Better Family Life and Lutheran Church Missouri Synod.

McMillan also announced that the construction crew for the new center will be a 100 percent African-American. Kwame Building Group will manage the construction, which is expected to be completed in early 2016.

QuikTrip donated the land and

paid to demolish the ruined building and remediate the site. Enterprise Holdings and the Taylor Family gave a combined \$1.8 million, and Centene Corporation donated \$650,000. Another \$1.5 million came from several other St. Louis-based companies, including Ameren, Emerson, Edward Jones, Armstrong Teasdale, and several civic organizations.

Marc Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League, attended the groundbreaking and said it points toward hope for the future in Ferguson. Morial said, “Building the Community Empowerment Center represents movement in a positive direction.”

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Parks

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will be asked to contribute to the initiative.

Young children may not be dropped off unsupervised at any of the bureau’s community centers.

The East Portland Community Center is open 6 a.m. to 9:30 p.m. weekdays; 7 a.m. to 6 p.m.

Saturdays; and 8 a.m. to 6 p.m. Sundays.

The free program will not include admission to the East Portland pool, which currently is at capacity.

For more information, go to the center’s webpage, or contact the center at (503) 823-3450.

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