

Economic development corporation honors its founder

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SOUTH LOS ANGELES — Marva Smith Battle-Bey, a longtime community advocate, died last year, but the organization she founded is making sure her legacy is not forgotten.

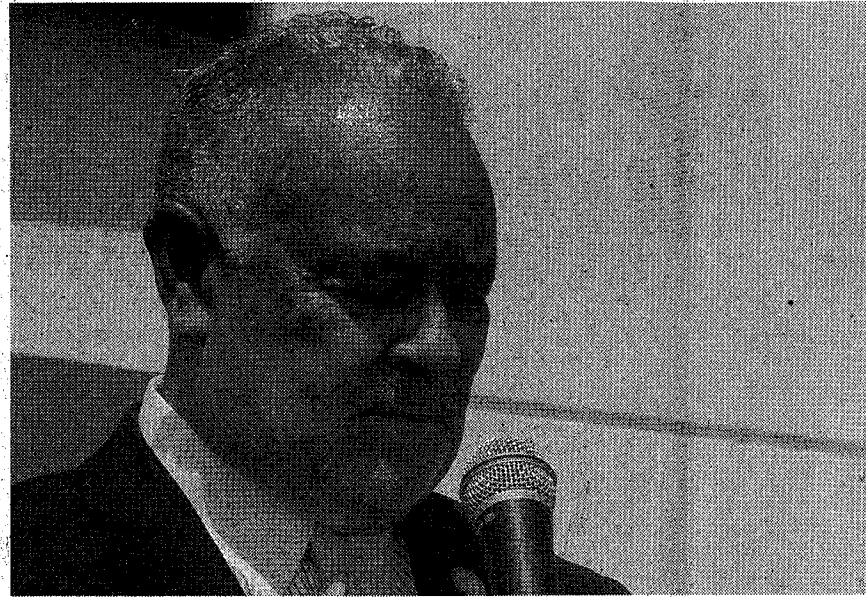
On April 27, the Vermont-Slauson Economic Development Corporation (VSEDC) honored the late Battle-Bey by naming its headquarters after her. Her successor, Joseph T. Rouzan III, was introduced at the ceremony.

“We are standing on a precipice where there will be no excuse for anybody to go without work,” City Councilman Marqueece Harris-Dawson said at the ceremony. “Joe, we really, really need you.”

The organization provides programs and services aimed at building up South L.A. Some of those include helping small business owners with marketing and management as well as implementing an outreach program to encourage water and energy conservation.

The organization came about after Sears announced it was closing its South L.A. store in 1979.

As part of a citizen advisory committee established by then-Mayor Tom



Joe Rouzan, the new executive director of the Vermont-Slauson Economic Development Corporation, speaks April 27 at ceremonies naming the organization's headquarters after its founder, Marva Smith Battle-Bey. Battle-Bey, who founded the organization in 1981, died last year.

Courtesy photo

Bradley in response to the Sears' closure, the economic development corporation began in 1981.

The corporation provided the first major retail investment in the neighborhood since the 1965 Watts Riots. During

Battle-Bey's time as executive director, the organization became the owner of two shopping centers, developed and financed six supermarkets and rehabilitated hundreds of housing units for low- and moderate-income residents.

The nonprofit also has created more than 3,000 jobs for local residents and operates a business enterprise center.

Representatives from the local City National Bank presented a \$50,000 check at the ceremony to help support economic development.

“As a bank, we've made a commitment to invest in the communities we work with,” bank Vice President Brian Grant said.

Grant said that small businesses that don't qualify for a loan could start out at VSEDC, which would help them set up a business plan so they can obtain funding.

Carlos Rodas, the founder of Raster Print, a print shop in South L.A., said the VSEDC “was like having a next door neighbor to all the city services.”

Rodas spoke at the ceremony on how the nonprofit helped his company win an award for the best small business in South L.A.

He said attending the free sessions on social media outreach contributed to his business growth. In addition, the VSEDC helped him with the paperwork to get his business license and gave him a building it owned to set up shop.

“We were competing with 20 other people for the space, some of whom had more experience and had been in

business longer,” Rodas said. “But they wanted to lease it to a business who was a representative of what they preached: small, family-owned, would grow the community. We stand for what Marva Battle-Bey believed in.”

Rouzan who grew up in Los Angeles, said he has known about the Vermont-Slauson Economic Development Corporation for much of his life.

But when the organization approached him about the role of executive director, he was already retired. His most recent position was as director of the city of Los Angeles Business Source program, for which he oversaw nine business source centers throughout the city.

At first he turned down the job, but decided he couldn't stay away.

“My number one goal is to increase youth entrepreneurship,” he said. “And my next biggest goal is to develop a tech incubator in South L.A.”

Rouzan said he tries to live by his father's philosophy, that “the measure of your character is not in the number of degrees, plaques or trophies you have. It's how you make an impact on the people around you.”

His father is a former Inglewood police chief who also served as a Los Angeles police commissioner in the 1990s.