Kevin Johnson proposes innovative reforms with dramatic plan to turn around Sacramento High School

Sacramento High School is the second oldest high school west of the Mississippi.

Oak Park native and businessman Kevin Johnson will announce Tuesday, December 10 that his St. HOPE Corporation will ask the Sacramento City Unified School District Board of Trustees to back its plan to begin a new high school at the Sacramento High School campus. The announcement is scheduled for 11 a.m. at St. HOPE Academy located at 4104 Martin Luther King, Jr. Boulevard (at 16th Ave.).

Approval for such a proposal would require community review and comment and ultimately the agreement of the school board members. St. HOPE’s proposal calls for the re-creation of Sac High as a charter school. Under state charter school law, districts must sanction independent charter school plans if they meet fiscal and academic requirements.

St. HOPE is seeking to create a school of five to six small learning academies and anticipates a significant number of new financial commitments of support from the business community.

St. HOPE Corporation was founded by Johnson as a nonprofit organization designed to revitalize inner-city communities through public education and economic development. Already established with a successful 13-year history with St. HOPE Academy, an after-school youth education program, St. HOPE Corporation will soon also open the doors to a K-4 charter school approved by the district. This charter school is named PS 7 after the number of Johnson’s jersey when he played with the Phoenix Suns basketball team. It will open in August 2003.

Johnson is hoping for a strong and independent partnership with Sacramento City Unified at Sacramento High. “Sac City is doing a tremendous job of turning an urban district around, but no one group of people can do it alone,” Johnson said. “Education is the primary vehicle for establishing better neighborhoods and building stronger urban cores. I want to be a part of that with people I respect and who have vision,” he added.

St. HOPE has already lined up financial pledges to help revitalize Sac High. “If our proposal is approved, we know we’ll need help from within and outside the district. “We have approached business leaders here in Sacramento and have received some significant commitments. Within the week, we anticipate obtaining support form the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation,” Johnson said.

Johnson has high hopes. “Together, we can create an educational environment that will significantly help the students of Sacramento High overcome the myriad daunting obstacles they currently face,” Johnson said.

St. HOPE plans to build upon successful efforts already implemented by the Sac High administration, such as the school’s visual and performing arts curriculum. “We want this program to be the best in the country. It is well on its way, but it needs resources. We can meet that need with some of the pledges we’ve been able to organize.”

The former NBA star acknowledged the special role that Sacramento High holds in the hearts of many city residents. “Sac High is the second-oldest operating school west of the Mississippi in one of the oldest and most vital neighborhoods in the city,” Johnson observed. “A lot of people graduated from Sac High and hold cherished memories of their years there. If the proposal is approved, we will keep the school name and create a new future for a city treasure,” he added.

District officials will discuss the issue within the next two weeks. Board action on whether to approve St. HOPE’s plan is expected by January.
St. HOPE Academy

*Education • Train • Empower*

**Background**
St. HOPE Academy began in 1989 as an after-school program in a portable classroom at Sacramento High School. Founded by NBA All-Star and Oak Park native Kevin Johnson, St. HOPE is a nonprofit community development corporation whose mission is to revitalize inner-city communities through public education, leadership training, and economic development. Over the last 14 years, St. HOPE has dramatically improved educational outcomes in the Oak Park community as well as made a significant economic impact.

In 2003, St. HOPE formed St. HOPE Public Schools, a K-12 independent charter school system that provides high-quality education to nearly 2000 students in seven small schools. PS7 serves 200 students in grades K-4 and Sacramento High School, which houses six small schools on one campus, serves over 1700 students in grades 9-12. Through its Nonprofit Business Model, St. HOPE has also brought 11 business, 139 jobs, and $7.5 million in development projects to Oak Park.

**Mission**
To revitalize inner-city communities through public education, leadership training, economic development, and the arts.

**Public Education**
Through after school programming and the development of a preschool, St. HOPE provides academic instruction, service learning, leadership training, and character development that supports Oak Park youth, in particular those enrolled in St. HOPE Public Schools, an independent K-12 charter school system.

**Leadership Training**
Through Neighborhood Corps, volunteer service projects, internships, and fellowships empower individuals to become leaders through public service and develop effective solutions to urban challenges. Through a leadership training institute, staff and participants learn to think critically about issues essential to effective inner city economic development.

**Economic Development**
Through real estate development and property management, St. HOPE strives to create an economy that brings jobs and businesses to Oak Park. St. HOPE’s catalyst project is the 40 Acres Art Gallery and Cultural Center, a mixed-use retail complex located in the heart of the Oak Park commercial district that features the Guild Theater, underground books, Starbucks, Uncle Jed’s Cut Hut, a restaurant, and the Upper Rooms loft apartments.

**Arts Enrichment**
Through exposure to the arts, St. HOPE provides opportunities for educational, cultural, spiritual and community enrichment. The historic Guild Theater, built in 1915, offers a completely renovated 200-seat, state-of-the-art venue showcasing film, theater performances, concerts, lectures, poetry readings, children’s programming, and more. In addition, the 40 Acres Art Gallery promotes, exhibits and collects art that reflects the rich multi-cultural diversity existing in Sacramento’s Oak Park community.

[http://www.sthope.com](http://www.sthope.com)
History remade in Oak Park

Its revival continues as an arts and retail center grows out of aging buildings.

By Robert D. Dávila
BEE STAFF WRITER

Oak Park proudly celebrated the debut Friday of the 40 Acres Art Gallery and Cultural Center, former NBA star Kevin Johnson's newest development trophy for a community on the rebound.

The project restores the historic Guild Theater and Woodruff Hotel buildings, which opened in 1915 in the heart of Sacramento's first suburb. The mixed-use retail center includes a 200-seat theater, Starbucks coffeehouse, bookstore, barber shop and space for a restaurant set to open in the fall.

The site, on Broadway at 35th Street, sits across the street from the stately US Bank building, which Johnson's St. HOPE Development Co. rehabilitated in 1995. Johnson predicted the 40 Acres complex, built at a cost of about $4 million, would bring more jobs and

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"This is definitely nice. But I wonder how many of these people are actually from Oak Park."
Thomas Rose-Bolden

Acres: Oak Park home values have risen dramatically

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Economic investment to the community.

"If Sacramento as a region is to reach its potential, Oak Park must be a part of that," he said.

Light rain did not dampen the enthusiasm of a standing-room-only crowd that spilled out of the opening ceremony in the Guild Theater, including state Treasurer Phil Angelides, Sacramento Mayor Heather Fargo and City Council members Lauren Hammond and Dave Jones. The Starbuck's, which opened five weeks ago, already has become a popular hangout for students at nearby McGeorge School of Law.

Seeing the restored theater "is like a dream for me," said Mike Benjamin, who watched movies at the Guild as a boy in the 1960s.

"The seats were wooden, and the doors were almost falling off the hinges," he recalled. "Now kids will see the seats are padded, and the place is beautiful. That says so much for our future."

Thomas Rose-Bolden recalled a seedy liquor store formerly at the site of Underground Books next door. With inviting stuffed chairs and artwork by local artists, the bookstore is expected to serve as a literary headquarters for Oak Park, which does not have a library.

"This is definitely nice," Rose-Bolden said as visitors poured out of the Guild. "But I wonder how many of these people are actually from Oak Park. How this is going to help businesses that are already here remains to be seen."

Oak Park has made progress reversing a decline that began in the 1960s, when construction of Highway 99 walled off the community. Racial tensions followed, and Oak Park gained an image of rundown homes and crime-plagued streets.

Today, the community is a hodgepodge of boarded-up houses and nicely maintained homes, weed-choked lots and neatly trimmed yards. Some pockets remain neglected, and a visitor's sense of safety varies from street to street. But signs of revitalization are sprouting, carefully nurtured by a mix of public and private efforts.

Much of the rebirth has been fostered by native son Johnson, who also founded St. HOPE Academy on Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard and restored a landmark Victorian on Broadway. Future projects for his development firm include a pediatric clinic across the street from the 40 Acres complex and a controversial plan to revamp Sacramento High School as a charter campus.

The city of Sacramento and the Sacramento Housing and Redevelopment Agency also have poured millions of public dollars into turning around Oak Park. Projects include infrastructure improvements, landscaping, street beautification, installation of historic streetlights, storefront makeovers and funding to rehabilitate dilapidated housing. Meanwhile, the opening of the Shriners hospital and expansion of the UC Davis Medical Center on Stockton Boulevard have sparked commercial development on the edge of Oak Park.

Community efforts hit a milestone in 1999, when Food Source supermarket opened at Broadway and Stockton Boulevard. Hollywood Video and a Walgreens drug store followed a year later, bringing basic amenities long missing in Oak Park. Today, Sacramento County is building a flagship primary care medical center at a cost of $41 million that is expected to open this year.

"The momentum is definitely picking up," SHRA Executive Director Anne Moore said. "There is still more to do, but we've got some significant catalysts there."

Meanwhile, Oak Park home values have climbed faster than in the region as a whole, fueled by an improving neighborhood image and affordability that has lured more low- and medium-income buyers. The median sale price in Oak Park has more than doubled over the past three years as investors, first-time buyers and others bid up prices to record levels.

Johnson, who returned to Sacramento after a successful pro basketball career with the Phoenix Suns, said the wave of activity proves Oak Park has turned the corner on 40 years of decline.

"All we want is good schools, safe streets and a good quality of life," Johnson said. "The next 40 years will be really prosperous, and those will be the ones that define Oak Park."

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