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From Vera Davis to a New Junior Arts Center: A Venice Legacy Continues

The new Vera Davis Junior Arts Center is more than a renovation of a historic Venice building. It represents the continuation of a legacy of community service stretching back decades, and a new project Venice has been waiting to see realized.

Who Was Vera Davis?

Vera Davis McClendon was a beloved Oakwood community leader and a fierce advocate for children, seniors, women, low-income families, and Venice's Black and Brown communities.

A mother of nine, Davis dedicated much of her life to helping others. After training with Volunteers in Service to America (VISTA), she launched the Venice Neighborhood Adult Participation Project and worked through the Low Income and Elderly United Community Assistance Program (LIEU-CAP).

Her community work helped provide food distributions, youth programs, childcare, employment opportunities for teenagers, job training and placement, and assistance for women and children escaping domestic violence. Her center also hosted recovery meetings, educational programs, and other services for people who might otherwise have had nowhere to turn.

A Center at the Heart of Oakwood

For decades, the center associated with Vera Davis became an important cultural and social anchor in Oakwood and a place where generations of Venice families could gather, organize, receive assistance, and find community.

In 1997, the former Venice Library at 610 California Avenue was renamed the Vera Davis McClendon Youth and Family Center in recognition of her extraordinary service to Venice.

Over the years, the building became home to nonprofit organizations and programs providing youth activities, immigration assistance, recovery meetings, cultural events, food distribution, and services for low-income residents.

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A Promise Dating Back to Proposition K

The story of the new Junior Arts Center actually begins in 1996, when Los Angeles voters approved Proposition K – L.A. for Kids.

Prop K established a citywide assessment to generate \$25 million annually for 30 years to acquire, improve, construct, and maintain parks, recreation facilities, childcare facilities, and other projects serving Los Angeles youth.

Among the 183 projects specifically identified for funding was a project right here in Venice: \$500,000 to “refurbish, retrofit, and convert the former Venice Library on California Ave. into a Jr. Arts Center.”

That former library is the Vera Davis Center.

Funding available for the project has grown over the years as interest accrued, and after decades of waiting, the vision contemplated when voters approved Proposition K is finally moving toward reality.



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What Should the Next Chapter Look Like?

As the building begins its next chapter as the Vera Davis Junior Arts Center, the community has an opportunity to help determine what happens inside it.

What kinds of arts programs should be offered? What would excite Venice children and families? What classes, workshops, performances, or creative opportunities would make you want to walk through those doors?

Is there an opportunity for additional community services and/or resources to be on site for all ages in addition to the art focused programs?

Could there be one or more free of charge community rooms available to the public for Alateen and other recovery programs, neighborhood meetings, presentations or other important gatherings?

*The building may be changing,
but the goal remains deeply connected to Vera Davis's legacy:
**creating a place that serves the community, supports young people,
and gives the next generation opportunities to grow.***