

Exhibit on Black La Jolla and Concert by Renowned Jazz Musician Charles McPherson to Mark Black History Month at UC San Diego

UCSD Arts Library exhibit sheds light on La Jolla's historic, little-known black community

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Dolores Davies

The community of La Jolla is renowned for its stunning coastal beauty, its village charm, and the high price of its ocean-view real estate. But, a little-known chapter in La Jolla's storied past is the fact that the seaside burg was once home to a bustling and vital African-American community that grew to almost 500 residents between 1920 and 1945, second only to Logan Heights in the number of black households.

The exhibit, *Hidden Faces of La Jolla: Portraits of Black San Diegans*, which documents this fascinating part of La Jolla's history, will be on display Feb. 1-28 in the UCSD Arts Library, located on the west wing of the lower level of the Geisel Library Building on the UC San Diego campus. According to Cristin McVey, whose UCSD doctoral dissertation focused on the forgotten histories of San Diego's early black communities, the black community of La Jolla circa 1920-1945 was a vibrant community that played an important role in the local economy.

"The black residents owned real estate or leased from black landlords and operated a variety of small businesses, including a barbershop, a BBQ restaurant, a pool hall, garages, and gardening and hauling outfits that were vital to the local economy," says McVey.

But, while the population of La Jolla tripled from 1950 to 1960, the number of black residents fell sharply, she said. The economy, property tax increases, and fears of rezoning that could lead to a decline in property value caused many black families to sell their La Jolla homes. The number of blacks declined and by the 1980s, what had once been a bustling black community in La Jolla dwindled to a few black families.

According to McVey, photographer Molly Low was urged to document what remained of the black community of La Jolla. Taken between 1988 and 1990, her portraits of these residents offer both an artistic and historic account of black La Jolla. The subject's own writing below each portrait further documents each personal experience.

McVey describes the images as contemplative and dignified. Stacked on televisions, dressers, and bookshelves are portraits and snapshots of loved ones. A toddler poses with his first football. A teenager is decked out for her prom. Surrounding the objects are personal mementoes such as an antique clock, a basketball, a copy of *Ebony* magazine, and a collection of hats.

"These personal images, captured in the background of Low's portraits, ground the subject in a black visual narrative larger than the image itself," McVey says. "The exhibit is a rare opportunity for San Diegans to be welcomed into the lives and homes of these 'hidden' faces of La Jolla."

Low is a resident of La Jolla. Her interest in photography began in 1975 while practicing psychotherapy at Jacobi Hospital in New York. She later studied at Grossmont College. She approaches photography as a social

documentarian and an artist. The exhibition is sponsored by the UCSD African & African-American Studies Research Project (AAASRP) and the UCSD Arts Library.

In addition to the exhibit, the UCSD Arts Library will sponsor a live concert Feb. 22 at 7 p.m. at The Loft at UCSD, featuring international jazz superstar Charles McPherson and his touring quartet. McPherson, a world-renowned saxophonist, has a personal connection to the exhibit on black La Jolla: his mother was a resident of the black La Jolla community documented in the exhibit. The concert, which is being underwritten by the UCSD AAASRP, the Chancellor's Office, the Friends of the UCSD Libraries, and the UCSD Libraries, is free and open to the public.

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At age Twelve, I moved to La Jolla with my father and younger brother. My Grandfather lived here, he owned several lots two upon which he had houses I moved, had six children and work here, as a self employed mason. I have one good friend from the old days Wilford Matthews. The wealth here in La Jolla doesn't bother me. Some of the rich efforts are good for me: a good school system, a nice library work readily available nearby, a cinema, a hospital, can walk to the beach the supermarket and movies. Of course Prejudice is found here and everywhere. It does no good to fly off the handle or sit around and hope I just cut my losses and move on. Fortunately I haven't encountered that much of it.

Peter Taylor Jr age 56

Oct 9, 1989



I came to LA JOLLA in 1941 to wash cars for a friend. I liked it and I have been here ever since I never married because I want help my mother and family and think a wife would not understand. That is mother in the picture. Most of my friends. My age is dead. A lot of blacks was here when I came. They was real friends. Ever one got along real well. They started selling out and moving to San Diego. I have a lot of friends here white and black. They are more important to me than money. I look to do favors for people. I take my friends shopping or other than do for them.

Aug-22-1989

Jack B. Baumgardner
Age 76



my name is Tiffany and I live with my grandparents I have a lot of friends and Edger are my best friends I like white and I want to be white like my mom. but I like black a little because my dad is black.

tiffany dixon

9 years old

10-4-89