Bank gives City Heights unit $25,000
San Diego Union-Tribune - Thursday, May 2, 1996
Author: Ray Huard

The City Heights Development Corp. has received a $25,000 award from Great Western Bank for the agency's 15-year-long drive to restore one of San Diego's oldest communities.

The nonprofit redevelopment agency, among only four organizations chosen nationally for the award, was picked because of "the comprehensive approach they take to community reorganization," said Great Western community development director Sharon Butler in presenting the award earlier this week.

From streetlights to potholes, from forming neighborhood volunteer organizations to rebuilding abandoned apartment complexes, if it's happening in City Heights, the City Heights Community Development Corp. is likely a part of it, Butler said.

"Our primary focus is to take the abandoned, vacant buildings and put people to work restoring these houses, making them livable," said City Heights Community Development Corp. director Jay Powell.

And the agency has plenty to work with.

At last count, the city listed 41 boarded-up buildings in City Heights, said Robert Villarreal, the corporation's economic development director.

Recently finished was a remodel of a 13-unit apartment called Teralte Courts on Highland Avenue, which Powell said will serve as the example for similar projects in the community.

The hope is that owners of homes near the restored structures will follow the agency's lead and improve their property, Powell said.

Bordered roughly by Interstate 805, 54th Street, El Cajon Boulevard and Route 94, City Heights has about 72,000 residents, many of whom are out of work or in need of better-paying jobs, Powell said.

Census takers in 1990 found that about a third of City Heights residents lived below the poverty level and about half of those were children, Villarreal said.

"We would like to see a commitment, a real strong commitment to providing jobs for the residents," Powell said.

Within the next few months, Powell said City Development Corp. hopes to form a
partnership with a general contractor to put City Heights residents to work on agency housing-rehabilitation projects.

Besides restoring housing, he said, the agency hopes to close portions of Polk Street and turn it into a series of parks and playgrounds.