

FRA Awards 2018

Nikki's Place Restaurant – Incentive Programs
Outstanding Rehabilitation, Renovation, or Reuse Project
City of Orlando, Community Redevelopment Agency

Summary

The Parramore neighborhood of downtown Orlando is a blighted community where businesses have struggled to remain open. One exception to this is the soul-food restaurant Nikki's Place, which has served the community for years - not only by serving up home-style cooked meals, but also through their contributions to the area. After nearly 20 years of operating, this small business was devastated by a fire that forced their closure due to significant damage to the building and kitchen. The downtown Orlando Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) responded by assisting financially which allowed this business to reopen in August 2017.



Nikki's Place owner, Nick Aiken,
inside the restaurant after fire

Innovation

- The Parramore neighborhood of downtown Orlando is a predominantly African-American community that has struggled to retain small businesses. One exception to this is the soul-food restaurant Nikki's Place that has been serving the area under its current ownership since 1999.
 - Nick Aiken, the restaurant's co-owner, has deep roots in the community as he started working at the restaurant that would one day become Nikki's Place in 1949 when it was Roser's Restaurant, which his aunt owned.
- In March 2015, a fire that started in an apartment above the restaurant caused extensive damage to the building and kitchen equipment, leading to the closure of this well-established and well-known area business.
- The owners approached the CRA in late 2015 and through the combining of the Minority/Women Entrepreneur Business Assistance Program (MEBA) and Downtown Façade and Building Stabilization Program (DFBSP) incentive programs, CRA staff was able to maximize the dollar amount of funding the business/property owners could receive, \$32,000.

Community Impact

- The restoration of the building that houses Nikki's Place, along with the reopening of the restaurant have had several positive impacts on the community.
- Assisting the owners of Nikki's Place with the rehabilitation of their building and the reopening their restaurant is one attempt at preserving the cultural heritage of the community, while growth in the area continues.
- From a social perspective, the owners of Nikki's Place have contributed greatly to the neighborhood over the years through helping to feed the homeless and providing economic opportunities through hiring local community members, including training those interested in developing their culinary skills, increasing their future marketability.
- The funding provided through the MEBA and DFBSP programs encourages reuse of vacant or underutilized buildings, improves appearance, and supports the long-term viability of downtown Orlando through increasing the presence of a variety of businesses. This in turn increases the taxable valuation of properties, thus increasing the amount of funds available to continue revitalization efforts in downtown Orlando, including the Parramore community.

Funding

CRA staff was able to maximize the monetary benefit to the building and restaurant owners of Nikki's Place by coupling the funds from two separate incentive programs, MEBA and DFBSP. Together, more than \$32,000 in funding was awarded and used towards the reopening of the restaurant and rehabilitation of the building.



Nikki's Place building shortly after fire



Nikki's Place building after reopening

Problem Solving

- Major issues in the Parramore community include a lack of retail (including restaurant) options and inadequate quality retail space.
 - As a result, residents, workers, and visitors alike, have to travel outside of the area for basic products and services.
- In an attempt to counter these issues, the downtown CRA has made the MEBA program available to the Parramore community to retain existing businesses and attract new ones, along with the DFBSP which provides funding for façade improvements and structural improvements/enhancements.
- Both programs currently provide up to \$40,000 in funding; a business could qualify for up to \$80,000.
- These programs have been leveraged by entrepreneurs, small business owners, and building owners, leading to a monetary investment by the CRA of \$600,000 in small businesses and \$650,000 in improvements to commercial buildings in the area over the last 10 years.

Applicability to Other Communities

- The MEBA and DFBSP programs were established to assist the CRA in helping spur investment in the areas blighted communities, and as a result, help lead to the establishment of more small businesses, along with improving the façade, structural integrity, and systems of the buildings in the area.
- These programs could be easily replicated in other CRAs to address some of the common issues of blighted communities and help spur investment.



Nikki's Place soul food

Other Things to Know

Nikki's Place has made a successful return to its daily operations. Despite their two and a half year closure due to the fire, they are exceeding their financial goals and number of customers served.



Nikki's Place owners,
Nick and Elaine Aiken