

2017 IDA ACHIEVEMENT AWARDS SUBMISSION – EVENTS AND PROGRAMMING WESTWOOD VILLAGE IMPROVEMENT ASSOCIATION

Background

Westwood Village is a heavily used and densely populated 25-square block commercial district that shares a border with the UCLA campus. Despite the proximity, many UCLA students remain insulated on campus and are not aware of district businesses, or events and activities that take place in the community. This is especially true for first-year students, transfer students, and new graduate students.

Resolving this lack of awareness has been a constant challenge since the inception of the Westwood Village Improvement Association (WVIA) nearly seven years ago. Efforts to outreach students have routinely come up short, with just small numbers of students attending events and activities. Complicating matters is the constant turnover as students graduate and leave the area. It sometimes feels like by the time a student truly understands our district, he or she is ready to leave our community, and they take that knowledge and experience with them.

Assessment

The WVIA, managing entity for the Westwood Business Improvement District (WBID), understood that we needed to hold a grand event, much larger in scale than anything that had been done previously, to attract and then entertain thousands of people at once. This event had to introduce our new population to our district so they would get to know us, and then return again and again in the future. The event had to be successful so we could host it again, year after year, and continue to introduce newcomers to our district.

Engagement

The WVIA connected with partners at UCLA Residential Life who agreed with the importance of introducing students new to UCLA to the commercial district next to campus. UCLA Residential Life and the WVIA determined to hold an event called the Westwood Village/UCLA Block Party and it would be coordinated with events already taking place on campus during orientation for Bruin Welcome Week. At the conclusion of a final on-campus Welcome Week event, students would be escorted by the campus police and student leaders to our district, thus guaranteeing us our audience of new students.

The WVIA then engaged with local merchants willing to participate by donating goods and services to thousands of new visitors to the district. The WVIA also began

working with local City elected officials and staff and City departments to create a venue that was both safe and suitable for thousands of people.

Event Planning

Together with UCLA Residential Life, the WVIA began planning the Westwood Village/UCLA Block Party Event. The immediate goals in the planning stage were as follows:

- Create a safe and welcoming environment for visitors
- Promote local district merchants
- Entertain visitors

A Safe and Welcoming Environment

After completing an initial assessment of the venue area and approximating the number of visitors to the event, the WVIA and UCLA determined that 23 law enforcement officers were needed for public safety. Representatives from the Los Angeles Fire Department, the City of Los Angeles Building and Safety Department, the Los Angeles Department of Transportation, and Street Maintenance were also required. K-Rail wall barricades and generators were required to secure the venue as well as provide electricity to various events and activities. These items made up the bulk of the \$27,000 budget, totaling just over \$17,500.

Promote Local Merchants

Local Westwood merchants understood the importance of the Block Party, yet convincing merchants to donate potentially hundreds, or even thousands of dollars worth of goods and services as a means of introducing themselves to new UCLA students was not an easy task, especially since the event was new and had no history of success.

Fortunately, 13 local merchants agreed to participate in booths or on the street in the Block Party, and many more agreed to do promotions from within their stores. This participation was enough to achieve critical mass and enable the WBID to effectively promote itself as a destination for shopping, dining, and entertainment.

Entertainment

It is hard enough to bring thousands of people to an event, but keeping them there is a whole other challenge. We needed to provide great entertainment, and on a budget.

Ultimately, the WVIA and UCLA determined the following events could be delivered on a budget of approximately \$10,000:

- Petting Zoo
- Roller Skating Rink
- Outdoor Movie Screening
- Local Radio Station DJ

To supplement these paid activities, UCLA coordinated with student performance groups, and the WVIA also encourage participating merchants to host games like ring toss and corn hole and then donate prizes and gift cards to the winners.

Result

The event was a huge success, certainly one of the most impactful projects the WVIA has ever completed. Nearly 10,000 students and local residents came to the event. Participating merchants were thrilled and are now eager to participate again in 2018. Merchants who didn't join the 2017 event are asking to join in 2018. UCLA has asked us to host the Block Party again in 2018 and make it bigger and better. We have now created a sponsorship package to help us offset some of our costs.

Most important, however, is that the new student population at UCLA loved the event and we have anecdotal evidence that many students are now dedicated Westwood Village patrons.

Word of the success of the event has gotten out and UCLA students that are not incoming first-year students, transfers, or new graduate students are now asking for the WVIA and UCLA to host events catered to them. We will build on our momentum and create dedicated events for these groups as well.

The WVIA is currently in the planning stages for the 2018 Block Party, and we are excited that the Westwood Village/UCLA Block Party is now a part of our community for the foreseeable future.