

# Memorial sought for historic neighborhood

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would be a spiritual destination for Pentecostals from around the world while boosting Little Tokyo's economy.

Estimated at \$250,000, the project would be an outdoor promenade and a mural depicting the histories of the church and of the diverse neighborhood where immi-

grants and nonwhites lived.

The Bradley foundation, which is affiliated with UCLA, has committed \$25,000 to fund a feasibility study, and the city's Community Redevelopment Agency has promised \$25,000 of in-kind service, according to Hamasaki.

Last week, the city Human

Relations Commission and councilwoman Jan Perry, whose district includes Little Tokyo, gave their support.

"It's a fascinating project," Perry said. "It's fascinating because it will broaden people's understanding about the historical context of Little Tokyo and the migration southward of Central Avenue

and of African Americans."

Still, the Japanese cultural center would not change its position that the mural would hamper operations because that wall contains power panels and hardware required for plaza events, said Victor Wong, director of administra-

tion.

But the center does support "the recognition of the location as a historical site," said Wong, and will cooperate with Pentecostal centennial celebrations set for April.

Pentecostals believe the spiritual gifts of speaking in

tongues, witnessing signs and performing miracles are available to them through baptism. They are thought to be the single largest group of Protestants worldwide, with an estimated 500 million members.

## Leader OK with controversy

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given case." Bell is known for taking strong stands on racial justice issues, including marches against the suburban police department in Forest Hill, where blacks accused mostly white officers of abuse, and picketing the magnet program of the Fort Worth public school system because he believed it favored whites.

David Currie, executive director of Texas Baptists Committed, a group closely tied to the state convention, said Bell is a proven leader who is willing to take tough stands.

"Not being African-American, I don't understand some of the stands he has taken locally, and that may be controversial with some people, but I'm not African-American and I don't wear those shoes,"

said Currie, who is white.

Bell, 54, has long held leadership positions within the organization and points to strong support from the mostly white membership, including his 4-1 margin of victory in November.

Bell's confrontational style may not change, but he said his activism will take a back seat during his one-year term so he can focus on making the Baptist General Convention of Texas more effective and clear in its mission.

The general convention emphasizes a long tradition of benevolent pursuits, like caring for orphans and providing disaster relief, and Bell comes from a tradition in which addressing social issues is inseparable from Christianity.

"If the church goes broke trying to help (hurricane)

evacuees, so mote it be. That's what we're supposed to be about. But that's not been the way Baptists have been viewed," he said.

The Rev. David Montoya, pastor of Calvary Baptist Church in Mineral Wells, said Bell was chosen by Currie, whose influential group is credited for resisting fundamentalist attempts to take over the convention.

"David Currie has said this is a reward for Michael Bell, that he was picked because he was black and because he will bring black churches into the BGCT," Montoya said. "But even if Michael Bell had been white, we would have opposed him. If he had been Chinese, we would have opposed him. I don't want someone to tell me who should be the president, other than the spirit of God."

## Rural Alabama churches burn

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

CENTREVILLE, Ala.—A series of fires damaged six rural Alabama churches and investigators are trying to determine whether they were arson.

Most of the churches were Baptist, located near major highways, and all but one were in Bibb County, about 25 miles south of Birmingham.

The other church, in Chilton County, had been undergoing construction, which could have been a source of the fire, said Ragan Ingram, a spokesman for the state insurance agency that oversees fire investigations. That

church, New Harmony Baptist in Fairview, was destroyed.

No arrests had been made Friday morning.

In 1996, race was a factor in a series of arsons that damaged rural black churches in Alabama and elsewhere. But Ingram said the fires late Thursday and early Friday destroyed both the churches of predominantly black congregations and predominantly white congregations.

The Ashby Baptist Church in Brierfield and Rehobeth Baptist Church in Randolph both burned to the ground.

Jim Parker, a member of the

Ashby Baptist Church, told WBRC television in Birmingham that he understood the fire began near the pulpit and that the fires at other churches had a similar pattern.

The pastor of Old Union Baptist, the Rev. David Hand, said a fire at his church, also in Brierfield, was discovered about 4:30 a.m. and extinguished before it could cause serious damage.


Ingram said the two other churches are in Antioch and near Centreville. It wasn't immediately clear how seriously they were damaged.

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