

OneCalifornia ▶ In the News

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by Conway Jones

▶ Geoffrey Canada: “We are the Canary in the Cage”

When Geoffrey Canada talks, everyone listens. No, he is not Merrill Lynch, but he has the backing of Wall Street for his Harlem Children’s Zone.

Geoffrey Canada was the keynote speaker last week at Scott’s restaurant and later at a reception at the Oakland Museum. The two events, attended by hundreds of people, were hosted by OneCalifornia Bank, the new community bank that just opened at 1438 Webster Street in Oakland. Mayor Dellums attended the evening reception.

The principal founders of the Bank, Tom Steyer and his wife, Kat Taylor, were there. They have provided \$22.5 million in start-up capital for the bank to implement their vision of a sustainable, effective community development organization. The Bank’s mission is to improve economic opportunity through partnerships which benefit low- to moderate-income communities through banking services and OneCal NextDoor, their non-profit engaging in charitable and educational activities.



Geoffrey Canada

What better guest for OneCalifornia Bank to bring to Oakland? To hear Canada tell it, “If the children in Oakland are in trouble, it’s your fault. If you don’t fix it, nobody is going to fix it.” Consistent with Dellums’ charge that each Oaklander must take responsibility for solutions to community problems, Canada did so in Harlem with partnerships, integrated services, and public and private money.

Geoffrey Canada established the Harlem Children’s Zone in New York in 1990, and currently has 10,000 children enrolled over a 97-block area. Canada’s solution: fix it all, simultaneously.

“We think you start this at birth. And you continue it until kids graduate from college,” says Canada.

“Blacks and Hispanics are the canary in the cage,” a reference to the practice of taking caged canaries into the mines to signal if the air becomes foul and the miners must escape. “Minorities are the canaries of this society,” Canada said.

What can we do about it? We can do what he is doing. Take responsibility. We, Oaklanders, have to take responsibility by recognizing the problems for youth, then by taking action.

The cost of the program is \$50 million and two-thirds of it is from private donations, and as Canada points out, the investment amounts to \$33,500 per child instead of \$60,000 per incarcerated adult. With unemployment at 50% for Black men without a college degree and 72% for those without a high school diploma, there’s an epidemic, needing the solution of interlocking network of social services, education, and community-building programs.

Earlier this year, Zoe Cruz, President of Morgan Stanley, twisted the arms of her board members and they gave \$12 million as part of the \$50 million annual operations budget for this year. He said that this same model could be replicated here.

Canada has created a model for success and OneCalifornia Bank intends to do the same here in Oakland. Let’s all join in that effort. For information, e-mail mybank@OneCalBank.com.