



# Los Angeles Times

MONDAY, JULY 12, 2004

OPINION

## She Cared; So Should We

In grocery-starved South Los Angeles, where low-fat milk, fresh vegetables and unspoiled meat are as scarce as good jobs, the Food 4 Less under construction at Slauson and Central avenues is a tribute to the tireless advocacy of Juanita Tate, founder of Concerned Citizens of South-Central Los Angeles, who died last week of a stroke at 66.

Tate launched Concerned Citizens in the early 1980s to fight city efforts to build a trash incinerating plant. In the years that followed, she worked just as hard to bring in housing and services needed by the area's mostly poor residents as she did to keep out the polluting industries that too often are put in their neighborhoods.

Her nonprofit group now owns and operates six housing developments, which offer child care, adult education and job training. It has built soccer fields and opened a credit union, amenities that middle-class neighborhoods take for granted.

The state can make it easier for Concerned Citizens and other groups trying to revitalize inner cities to continue Tate's work by overhauling state regulations on the development of so-called brownfields, plots of land contaminated by years of industrial use.

The Food 4 Less that Tate fought so hard to get is being built on a brownfield that had been occupied by a plumbing shop and truck repair lot.

California has 90,000 to 120,000 such brownfields, more than any other state. Few developers relish building on them, especially in older, poorer neighborhoods where the profit margin on even a successful development is often too small to cover the costs of a cleanup. In addition, investors who buy the land could be held liable for future problems even though they did not cause the pollution.

City grants helped pay for the cleanup at Slauson and Central. But the cash-strapped city and state can't afford to clean up every brownfield in California.

Reasonable reforms like those proposed by the nonprofit California Center for Land Recycling, which worked closely with Tate, would make it less daunting for private developers to take on brownfields by streamlining the overlapping agencies that oversee cleanups and limiting liability for investors who buy land they did not pollute.

Tate would have been the last to abandon tough cleanup laws. But even Oakland Mayor Jerry Brown, who was one of California's greenest governors, has come to see the need to make the rules adopted more than 20 years ago less cumbersome.