

## Twin Cities win award aiming to turn transit into treasure



David Joles, Star Tribune

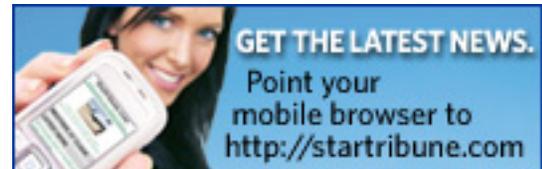
Theresa Baker held granddaughter Dimari Henderson, 3, while master stylist James Wilson worked on her hair at the Ultimate Look Salon and Barber Shop. The University Avenue salon has benefited from help for business along the Central Corridor route.

A \$16 million award will help families and businesses close to light-rail routes in the Twin Cities thrive.

By **JEAN HOPFENSBERGER**, Star Tribune

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The neighborhoods surrounding light-rail routes in the Twin Cities received a blast of good news



Wednesday: The area just won \$16 million to crank up housing, businesses and development in their communities.

If all goes as planned, up to 600 units of affordable housing will be renovated or built, mainly along the Central Corridor line linking Minneapolis and St. Paul. Another 100 neighboring businesses along the Central Corridor will get technical help, facade face-lifts and other improvements.

The award is designed to prod key light-rail players to create a template of "best practices" that will guide future light-rail community development across the region, local officials say.

"This is a big deal," said John Couchman, a vice president at the St. Paul Foundation, which will manage the grant from Living Cities, a collaboration of 21 of the world's biggest foundations and financial institutions. "The Twin Cities is one of just five places in the country selected to get this money. It's a major step in creating a coordinated strategy for community development along light-rail lines throughout the region."

St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman and Minneapolis Mayor R.T. Rybak are attending the official announcement of the award Thursday in Detroit. The award came on the heels of news that the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD) will give the Twin Cities \$5 million to plan development along five future transit routes.

Some neighborhoods along the light-rail route in St.

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An advertisement for a performance at Mystic Lake Casino Hotel. On the left is a photograph of two women, one with long red hair and one with dark curly hair. To the right of the photo, the text reads: "HEART SATURDAY, DECEMBER 18 ON SALE SATURDAY, OCTOBER 30". Below this, it says "Mystic LAKE CASINO • HOTEL" and "mysticlake.com". At the bottom, in smaller text, it says "Owned and Operated by the Shakopee Mdewakanton Sioux Community".

Paul will also benefit from another federal grant to help duplicate the Harlem Children's Zone project for children and families, Coleman said.

"This is huge," he said. "I'm sure there's no other community in the country that has support from the federal government and philanthropic community at this level."

Added Rybak: "This, along with the HUD money, means the difference between building a great transit line and building a great community."

## 'More help is great'

For folks such as Dominique Wells, the owner of the Ultimate Look Salon and Barber Shop along the Central Corridor route in St. Paul, the announcement was a welcome reminder that national leaders are thinking about the impact that light-rail construction can have on lower-income communities.

"I think having more help is great ... and a lot of the businesses should take advantage of it," he said.

The reason that philanthropic groups are so interested in light rail is because -- if developed right -- it has the potential to improve lower-income residents' access to jobs, education and transportation, said Lee Sheehy, who oversees regional development grants at the McKnight Foundation.

For example, Wells said that by taking advantage of several business opportunities available along the

Central Corridor, he's been able to strengthen his business.

"We got a website up and running," Wells said. "New business cards. A new logo. We painted the inside of the building. Trying to get a database together to keep track of customers so we can communicate with them during the construction period and after."

## Where the money goes

The \$16 million, the majority of which is in loans, is expected to attract even more public and private capital, city officials said. About \$12 million will be used to renovate housing along light-rail lines, said Tom Fulton, president of the housing fund.

It will mainly help St. Paul's University Avenue area, but also housing along the Hiawatha route and the planned Southwest Transitway, he said. Purchasing foreclosed homes and renovating them for new owners will be a priority, he said.

Another \$1.5 million will be routed to businesses, mainly along University Avenue, to help them survive the light-rail construction period and thrive after. The money should help a few business owners buy their buildings, help others expand their operations and provide marketing, online and other services, said Mike Temali, president of the Neighborhood Development Center of St. Paul, which will administer the money.

In addition, the award will attempt to institutionalize the working relationships among governmental,

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private and philanthropic players to make sure that light-rail development doesn't harm low- and moderate-income neighborhoods in its path.

"Our modest little effort in the Central Corridor turned into something interesting," said Nancy Homans, policy director for Coleman. "It seems to have reflected bigger ideas happening across the country and captured the imagination of national foundations."

Living Cities CEO Ben Hecht hinted this award may not be the last time the metro area gets help from his organization.

"This support to the Twin Cities continues our long-term interest in this community," Hecht said in a release. "We look forward to working with this community in the efforts to create more opportunities for low-income residents."

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