

LOS ANGELES

A Quick Study of Community Activism

■Civics: About 400 people learn the ins and outs of city government at empowerment seminar.

By DAREN BRISCOE, TIMES STAFF WRITER

More than 400 community activists-in-training took crash courses in the art of effective advocacy and learned the ins and outs of city government during the 8th District Empowerment Congress on Saturday.

Held at USC, the session featured hourlong workshops on subjects ranging from how to find funding for neighborhood groups to navigating City Hall.

Los Angeles City Councilman Mark Ridley-Thomas organized the annual event in 1992, and touted its success. "We've created a model of civic engagement at the local level," Ridley-Thomas said, noting that past participants have "helped write legislation, demonstrated against violence in the community and demanded high standards and accountability from city government." Ridley-Thomas' 8th District extends south from the Santa Monica Freeway to 110th Street, and from east to west roughly from Crenshaw to the Harbor Freeway.

Residents from at least six of the city's 15 council districts attended, according to organizers, as well as a variety of city officials, nonprofit groups and businesspeople.

Olivia Allison has been frustrated in her attempts to make a home she owns in the Mid-City area available for community programs. After attending a workshop on leadership training with her granddaughter, Keyama Underwood, Allison said she was encouraged.

"I got so much information," she said, slipping a business card someone handed her into her purse. "I learned how to start looking for resources to improve the property so I can do something with it."

Gov. Gray Davis, the keynote speaker at the event, invoked Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in praising the participants.

"Let us continue to honor Dr. King's legacy by rededicating ourselves to a life of service to our fellow human beings," he said.

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