

Oakland Inspiration Awards go to Goapele and MC Hammer

Published at Oakland Local on Thursday, December 15, 2011



Oakland Digital's Executive Director Shaun Tai, MC Hammer & directors at Yahoo! Small Business

Article & Photo by Howard Dyckoff

The Hammer came down in Oakland, CA, this month at Niles Hall in Preservation Park.

This would be musical legend MC Hammer, who, along with singer Goapele and North Social Co-Founder Alex Bernstein, each received an Inspiration Award from the innovative Oakland Digital Arts and Literacy Center (ODALC).

Bernstein, a former center/guard in the NFL and a digital music innovator with association to Virgin Digital and the Echo music service, now helps Oakland-based North Social help businesses build an active and engaged fan base on Facebook with a pallet of specialized tools.

Oakland native Goapele sang in the Oakland Youth Choir before releasing her album Closer. In 2006, the Ella Baker Center for Human Rights honored Goapele with its first ever Human Rights Cultural Hero Award. Goapele is a current top Billboard artist.

While Goapele was honored for artistic and political contributions to the community and the inspiration she provides through her music, Hammer has re-invented himself as a digital entrepreneur and is the driving force behind WireDoo – a “deep search” engine for exploring relationships between data that is now in beta testing.

Oakland Digital is a non-profit corporation promoting digital and Internet literacy to small businesses and low-income communities in Oakland. Earlier in March, 2011, Oakland Digital held the first annual Social Media for Small Business Symposium (SMfSB) at Oakland's City Hall with the help of then newly-elected Mayor Jean Quan. The SMfSB event, the first of its

kind in the Bay Area, introduced new social media and digital marketing tools available to small businesses and the non-profit community at little or no cost. This was followed up with a 6-week long Digital Equity series of classes which covered web site creation, social media campaigns and Search Engine Optimization.

Adding to the celebrity content, the Bay Area's own Barbara Rodgers acted as MC for the evening. Rodgers is well-known as the co-anchor of CBS 5's weekend newscasts from 1987 to 2000.

Norman Weekes, representing Oakland Digital and the Board of Directors, described its service to Oakland over its 2-year history and catalogued its successes. Weekes said Oakland's rich diversity and the skills and creativity of its residents gave it unique strengths and opportunities for the challenging environment of 2011 and 2012. Weekes thanked the Oakland City government and Mayor Jean Quan for the ongoing support Oakland Digital has received in its programs for small businesses and low-income residents.

Weekes explained, "At Oakland Digital, we love to share technology and information across all age groups, all cultures, all income levels, all genders and all institutions. Weekes also said Oakland Digital was part of the "... 99% who do good work in the hills and do good work in the flatlands, who do good work in city hall and do good work at Eastmont Mall. This is the Oakland, where hope never dies and this is the Oakland that inspires us all."

Oakland Mayor Jean Quan also spoke at Inspiration Awards 2011 which was attended by over 170 people.

Quan looked forward to more innovation from community-based organizations like Oakland Digital to help move Oakland forward into the digital age and to make Oakland a hub of new economic and cultural activity on the West Coast.

###