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ODALC Turns One

In one short year, Oakland Digital Arts & Literacy Center has made a bold first step into the technology nonprofit world. During that time, the City of Oakland has witnessed a number of new ideas and community projects from this ambitious and quickly growing source of philanthropy.

OAKLAND, Calif. – July 31st, 2010 - It's no secret that the City of Oakland has had a difficult year. A \$30.5 million budget deficit, crime, poverty, social unrest, cuts to public services are all recurring themes in top news stories pertaining to the city. With so many systemic problems on Oakland's radar, it's all too easy for individual hardships to slip past the public consciousness. Hard-working citizens live in poverty as the cost of living has outstripped minimum wage; family-owned businesses that have been operating for decades are being forced to close their doors. As other industries hurtle forward to keep pace with a shifting economic landscape brought about by recession and the dawning of a digital age, underserved communities are effectively being declared obsolete and left behind.

One year ago, Shaun Tai founded Oakland Digital Arts & Literacy Center, or ODALC, to see that those alienated from the digital age have a place to take refuge, to learn computer technology at their own pace and claim their rightful place in the future workforce. This is much easier said than done.

As Oakland struggles to make ends meet this year, so has the nonprofit sector. By the same token, starting a nonprofit organization would seem like an impossible task, yet against all odds ODALC has grown from one man's vision to a fully-fledged brick-and-mortar operation in the span of one year. Esteemed allies including City Councilwoman Jean Quan and Director of Education Kitty Kelly Epstein attended ODALC's 1224 Harrison Street facility grand opening.

"This year has been filled with sacrifice, success, and joy," said Tai. "Nonprofits usually don't get into the bulk of their programming until they secure funding, but with ODALC we wanted to hit the ground running and prove to people that there's a demand for what we do, the community believes in us, and that our work matters."

Things seem to be working well so far. If you drove on Highway 80 past the Gilman Street exit or travelled near Broadway and 41st in Oakland, chances are you encountered ODALC's mark on the community. The Inspire Oakland Billboard Contest, which provided four aspiring, local graphic designers with the chance to have their work seen on five Bay Area billboards, displayed the winning entries from the end of April to the end of May. Each of the entries, bearing the message "Inspire Oakland," served to showcase local talent and generate Oakland's interest in digital art.

On March 25th, ODALC produced Mayor Ron Dellums' video campaign nominating the City of Oakland for Google's *Google Fiber for Communities* project, which could potentially endow the city with an experimental fiber network, increasing Internet speeds exponentially. "Oakland Digital Arts and Literacy Center is a new and innovative resource to help Oakland residents navigate the opportunities of tomorrow," Mayor Dellums stated in an open letter of support. "We look forward to working with ODALC again very soon."

Earlier on March, ODALC put on a public workshop teaching young amateur musicians from urban communities how to market and publish their creative work online, turning their passion into a potential career path. The workshop, titled "Evolution of the Music Business in Web 2.0," featured an expert panel of volunteers from Pandora Internet Radio (which incidentally is based in Oakland), Bandcamp.com, and hip-hop icon Ray Luv.

"There is so much innovation and development happening online, it's important that we channel that productivity back into the communities that need it the most," said Tai "ODALC and its work this year represent what I hope will be one of many steps toward a better, brighter future for Oakland and the East Bay Area."

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For more information and to pledge your support, visit www.odalc.org.