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November 22, 2013

[Market Makeover: Transforming Boyle Heights' Sociedad and Euclid Stores](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/market-makeovers-in-boyle-heights-transforming-sociedad-and-euclid-markets.html) [\(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/market-makeovers-in-boyle-heights-transforming-sociedad-and-euclid-markets.html\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/market-makeovers-in-boyle-heights-transforming-sociedad-and-euclid-markets.html)

[Jackie Illum \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/columnists/jackie-illum/\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/columnists/jackie-illum/)



[Public Matters' Market Makeover \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/projects/public-matters-market-makeovers/\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/projects/public-matters-market-makeovers/) is a comprehensive strategy for addressing the "grocery gap" in "food deserts," areas that have limited access to quality, healthy food; an overabundance of fast food; and alarmingly high rates of chronic conditions related to poor diet.

"It is devastating to see the health conditions of the people living in my community," says Shirley Ramirez, a Market Makeovers Community Liaison. "A lot of people don't know why they have these illnesses and they should know why. It should be a right for us to have quality produce in our community." Ramirez is one of roughly a dozen Market Makeover Community Liaisons. They are emerging adults who began working with Proyecto MercadoFRESCO as high school students learning about food justice in classes led by Public Matters specially tailored to the project. They come from East Los Angeles Renaissance Academy at Esteban Torres High School and Roosevelt High School and most of them have been with the Market Makeover program for longer than the two years I have. This summer, thanks to an LA2050 award Public Matters received from the Goldhirsh Foundation, the Community Liaisons transitioned from students to paid community leaders and project contributors. Now mostly in college and experts in the Market Makeover process, the Community Liaisons are leading the store transformations in Boyle Heights. They are dynamic and passionate leaders who have grown up with Market Makeovers. They embody the project's goals. The poor diet-related health outcomes that impact East L.A. and Boyle Heights also impact the Community Liaisons and their families. For them, the change Market Makeovers strives for isn't transformative; it's personal.

Planning For Change

This past summer, the Community Liaisons participated in intensive workshops three days a week at Roosevelt High School with Public Matters and Nathan Cheng to map out and plan the logistics of the physical transformation of Sociedad and Euclid Markets in Boyle Heights. Nathan is a nationally known food systems expert who ran his own produce stand and several restaurants. The concept of working with corner stores to improve healthy food access traces back to him. Nathan originated the idea over a dozen years ago. He trains the store owners and Community Liaisons in how to effectively manage healthy retail.

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The Community Liaisons discussing Market Makeover logistics and mapping out new floor plans for Sociedad and Euclid Markets.

Sociedad and Euclid are the two Boyle Heights markets that are being transformed as part of the Market Makeovers project with the UCLA-USC Center for Population Health and Health Disparities. While typical of corner stores in general and in Boyle Heights in particular, the stores differ greatly in scale, customer base, and intent.

Story Continues Below

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Since June, the Community Liaisons have worked intimately with Nathan and Public Matters' Creative Director Reanne Estrada on store designs, layouts, and inventory. Floor plans have been made, data has been visualized, and the physical transformation of the markets has begun. The Community Liaisons mapped out Sociedad and Euclid's current and desired customer base, the types of produce and culturally appropriate healthy food products that should go in the stores, and the overall layout and design of each store. The Community Liaisons conducted a preliminary inventory of both markets and measured the existing floor plans. With this information, it was easier to plan both markets' future layouts to create a more inviting place for customers.



Community Liaisons taking inventory at Sociedad and Euclid Markets.

It's Not the Field of Dreams

Physically transforming a market is the "easy" part. Creating a customer demand for quality fruits and vegetables is a tougher sell. Education about nutrition, healthy eating, and food justice are essential to changing behavior and to the long-term sustainability of the project. The summer workshops included time with Marie Estrada to create a social marketing campaign to support the store transformations. Marie is a marketing guru with years of experience as an editor and marketer in publishing and numerous small businesses. Marie worked with the Community Liaisons for two weeks on marketing and promotion strategies, the importance of storytelling, and how to effectively communicate a group messages. Often seen in the life-size fruit and veggie costumes they helped design, the Community Liaisons form of social marketing relies on creativity, community engagement and humor. When you see developing interactive games around food justice or healthy eating or with giant cardboard cut-out letters proclaiming "FRESCO" you know this isn't your garden-variety big marketing firm at work. It's a home-spun, peer-to-peer form of social engagement.



The Community Liaisons worked with Marie Estrada on a social marketing campaign, telling their stories, and developed skits to perform in public places.



Pre-transformation: products sat on tables rather than organized on shelves in Sociedad Market.

Awash in sunlight in a south-facing storefront at the busy corner of Whittier and Mott Streets, Sociedad Market is a tiny store. There are no fruits or vegetables. The primary customer base is men buying alcohol. The rest of the inventory consists of junk foods and household items. Giancarlo Piccini, the owner, is new to Boyle Heights and to owning a corner store. His store is proximal to Roosevelt High School and Hollenbeck Middle School, making it a prime location for students to grab a healthy snack at the end of the day. Enter Market Makeovers.

Euclid Market

Euclid Market, on the other hand, is a very large store near the intersection of Euclid and 6th street. It's a family-run store owned by the Avila family that owns several stores and lives in Boyle Heights. The market is located in a residential part of the neighborhood. Euclid Market does sell some produce, but it lacks the proper refrigeration for these items and stocks them in a beverage refrigerator near the back of the store. Improper refrigeration yields soft vegetables with greatly reduced nutritional value. Many moms and kids frequent the store after school, particularly from a nearby elementary school, children tugging on their mom's sleeve to buy them a large soda and a bag of chips. A meat counter inside the store attracts additional customers looking for something more than convenience food. In addition to picking up their meat, customers will grab any extra grocery items they may need to cook a meal. Euclid also houses a large variety of toys, household and kitchen items, and sundries. It's the store that has a little bit of everything.



Pre-transformation: the vast array of products found in Euclid Market were placed anywhere and everywhere in the store.

From Loaiza to Sociedad

Boyle Heights has a long history of activism. Wanting to reflect and honor this tradition, the Community Liaisons have transformed the previously drab off-white Loaiza Market into the now vibrant red Sociedad Market. "Sociedad", or society, reflects store owner Giancarlo's goal to turn his market into a hub of community activity and community life. The name change is part of the effort to convert the perception of the store, not just its physical appearance. Corner stores can serve a vital function in the community as a social gathering space. Giancarlo's desire is to root himself and the store as part of Boyle Heights' vitality and vibrancy.



Several weeks of hard work paid off as the outside of Sociedad Market was transformed to a vibrant red.



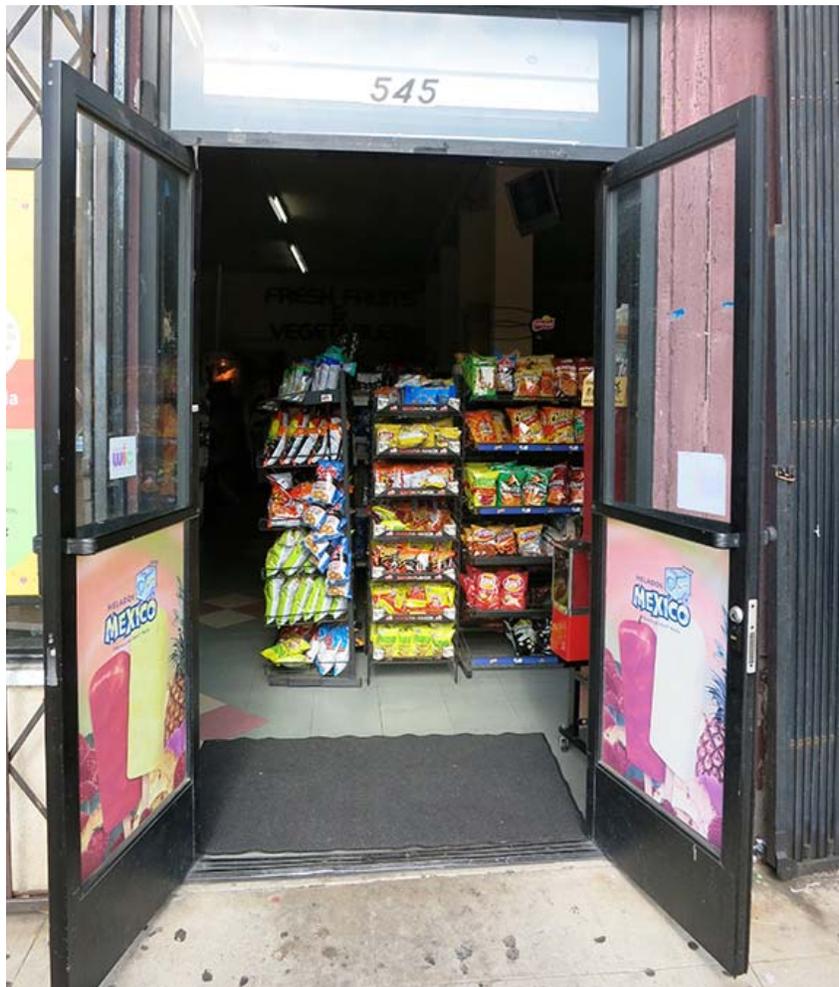
From start to finish, the Community Liaisons were involved in every step of the mural making process.

Much of this past summer was spent painting an eye-catching mural inside Sociedad Market depicting silhouettes of iconic Boyle Heights structures, as well as the skyline of Downtown Los Angeles, visible from many streets in the neighborhood. The Community Liaisons chose the structures they wanted to represent in the mural and hand drew everything before they painted it on the walls. In keeping with Giancarlo's wishes, the mural creates a strong sense of place inside the market, boldly exclaiming "Boyle Heights" on the back wall.

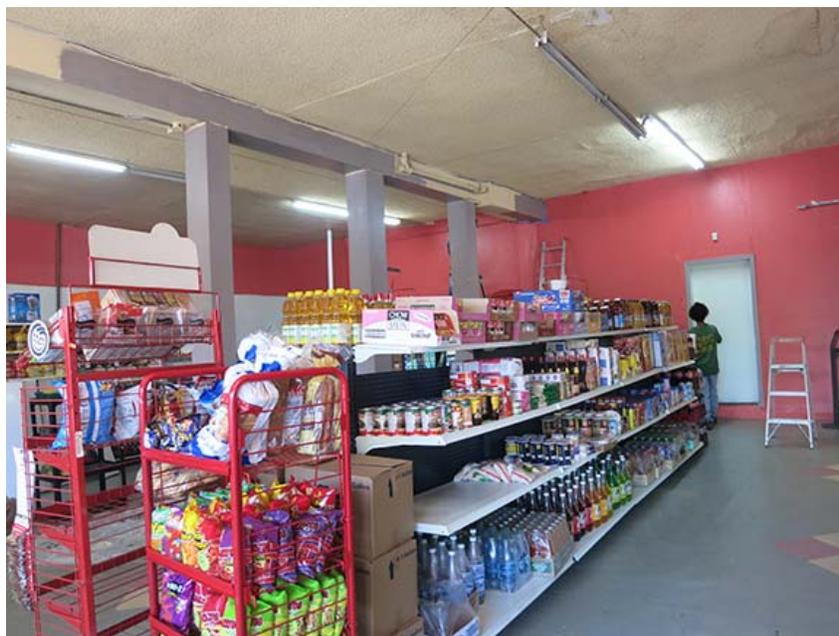
Euclid, The Store that Has It All

Ever feel crowded in a corner store? Blame Big Food. The snack food and beverage companies are the guilty party behind the layout of most corner stores. Their main intent is to sell as many products as possible, resulting in visual overload when you walk into a store and when you go to the cash register. Removing the clutter and changing the layout of a market like Euclid helps create the sense of a true community market. Just as with other corner stores, Big Food has cluttered Euclid Market with junk food: despite the over 2,000 square feet of space, customers are bombarded with snack items as soon as they walk in the door. With a much larger store, Nathan and the Community Liaisons' vision was to transform Euclid Market into a one stop shop with all of the foods and household items a family may need without requiring someone to get in a car or on a bus. Euclid's crowded shelves were taken apart by the Community Liaisons and reconfigured into two long rows perpendicular to the storefront, creating spacious aisles and zones. A fresh coat of white paint accented by a black backdrop makes the products pop off the shelves. Even in the midst of the transformation, customers are buying more products thanks to the redesign. Long-term customers say the store feels bigger. Euclid's institutional yellow walls were painted a warm and inviting terra rosa red. Newly warm grey columns now accent the walls. Just wait for the exterior

treatment coming soon.



From cluttered entryway to spacious interior, the Euclid Market transformation makes it feel like an entirely different store.



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The Community Liaisons provide invaluable input and leadership in every step of the Market Makeover process. They make changes to the food landscape and health outcomes of their community, bettering their lives and the lives of their family and friends. Stay tuned to follow the progress of the Boyle Heights Market

Makeovers and to learn more about these young leaders.



Community Liaison social marketing in action, PARK(ing) Day 2013.

Want to read more? Check out more of Artbound's most recent articles:

[Public Matters: Market Makeover SMACKDOWN! \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/public-matters-market-makeover-smackdown-public-matters.html\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/public-matters-market-makeover-smackdown-public-matters.html)

SOCIAL: Art + People talks with artists Mike Blockstein and Reanne Estrada about their partnerships, their teenaged collaborators, and the role of arts in social justice.

[Market Makeovers: Public Matters, Place, and Pedagogy \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/market-makeovers-public-matters-food.html\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/market-makeovers-public-matters-food.html)

Public Matters' Market Makeovers green the food desert -- one corner store at a time.

[The Ethics and Aesthetics of Place \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/public-matters-market-makeovers-ethics-of-place.html\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/public-matters-market-makeovers-ethics-of-place.html)

Public Matters performs extended, life as art "residencies" in and with communities; they disrupt the participant-observer paradigm by becoming participant-stakeholders.

[Proyecto MercadoFRESCO: Enlightenment & a Giant Taco \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/proyecto-mercado-fresco-public-matters.html\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/proyecto-mercado-fresco-public-matters.html)

Proyecto MercadoFRESCO is trying to shift the cultural perception of the corner store from public health blight to community resource.

[I Was a Teenage Avocado \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/public-matters-proyecto-mercado-fresco-lilybeth-hernandez.html\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/public-matters-proyecto-mercado-fresco-lilybeth-hernandez.html)

Lilybeth Hernandez has worn avocado costumes in parades and participated in "veggie fashion shows," all to promote public health and fight food deserts across East L.A.

[Blurry by Design: Public Matters on Social Enterprise \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/social-enterprise-public-matters.html\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/social-enterprise-public-matters.html)

Public Matters encourages productive outcomes from the meeting of two sets of otherwise contrary institutional logics: that of the market and of the social movement.

[Bringing Healthy Food Alternatives to Boyle Heights \(http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/public-matters-market-makeovers-boyle-heights.html\)](http://www.kcet.org/arts/artbound/counties/los-angeles/public-matters-market-makeovers-boyle-heights.html)

Poor diet and lack of physical activity in Boyle Heights are made possible by barriers to health in the L.A. neighborhood.

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