

URBAN TREASURES

Celebrating the selfless people & organizations who add to the quality of our lives. Andrea Shorter Amos



Andrea Shorter Amos is a beautiful blend of entrepreneur, parent and community activist. Andrea, owner of Creative Events on Madison's east side, was called to action when her sons into a bit of trouble.

"I had an incident with two of my kids," Andrea said. "As a parent, I had to stand up and fight for my kids with the school district. It caused me to put a little more effort into providing for the children and their needs and redirect their mindset from some of the negative things they go out and see."

Andrea could have just searched for a family solution. But instead, she decided to positively influence the environment her sons were growing up in. She formed Creating a Village.

"I was thinking, 'Put them all in the same room,'" Andrea said. "Creating a Village will place different mentors from all walks of life in the room and then invite our youth into the building and connect them with those people. The first event that I had, which was Boys to Men, was extremely huge. A lot of our boys are still connected to this day with the guys. I had an architect, Rafeeq Asad, who had some our young boys go with him. I was just shown pictures that the boys are still working with him to become our new architects. We also invited the young boys to let them see what brotherhood looks like all the way to

college. They have family outside of family. I want to introduce those things to the youth to give them another alternative to being out on the street getting into trouble."

Andrea uses Creative Events as the meeting place and then brings kids and adults together.

"We have a program coming up, Stop the Gun Violence," Andrea said. "We're collaborating with a group from Chicago. And we are going to collaborate to stop the gun violence. That's going to be crazy because it is from two different directions. We're also going to host our first Back to School book bag drive. We want to offer the kids t-shirts and underwear. We want to offer the book bag and school supplies. We'll do some of the kids' hair to get them started right going to school."

Andrea knows that everyone has to be involved for the future of the community.

"Our kids are our future," Andrea said. "What would it look like if we just didn't get involved at all? It wouldn't be so pretty outside. I want to see my little young people who want to become nurses take care of me one day. I want a house built one day from my own child. That that puts a smile on my heart. I want other people to join in and help out. Let's hold hands and make it a whole unity."

Andrea Shorter Amos is our Urban Treasure.



Robert "Bob" Wynn and Climb USA

The Long View of Creating Wealth



Bob Wynn, the founder and CEO of Climb USA, has been promoting wealth development in Madison's Black community and beyond for over 40 years.

By Jonathan Gramling

Part 1 of 2

Robert "Bob" Wynn, the founder and CEO of Climb USA, a financial literacy and youth investment non-profit located in the Urban League's Black Business Hub, was almost eased into his passion for promoting investment as a path to wealth development and management. Wynn became a labor lawyer with the UAW after graduating from the University of Michigan Law School in the area of real estate and wills.

The UAW offices were located in downtown Detroit near the corporate offices of the Big Four car manufacturers.

"We were in the vicinity where there were a lot of General Motors employees, two of whom became my friends," Wynn recalled. "We would see each other at lunch. At the time, Chrysler was going through the financial crisis and the stock got as low as \$3 per share. There I had been all the way through law school and sitting there with a group of friends. They're talking about investing in Chrysler and buying stock cheap. And it hit me. I didn't even know how to buy a share of stock. And so a guy from General Motors was an MBA. And he sat me down and showed me how to read the Wall Street Journal small print where all of the companies and their stock prices were listed every day. He recommended that I paper trade, which is simply picking out 1-2 stocks that you are going to follow their price movement in the newspaper week by week and just get a feel for how the stock prices change."

Wynn had moved to Madison in 1981 to become a legislative analyst for the State Senate and instructor for Madison College. When his father died, his mom leaned on him to help with the finances.

"My mother was never included in the financial management of the household," Wynn said. "Since I was a lawyer, she just thought I knew about money and finances. And so she would ask me everything. And I didn't know. So I had to study it. I just kind of got pulled into it

because I was expected to know. So I was studying up just so I could answer my mom's questions. And then I found out that my dad had been a prolific saver. He never made a lot of money and he had four kids whom he put through college. But he had close to \$100,000 just saved up after he had paid off the home that he had built. And I thought, 'If he had known how to invest then our circumstances would have been majorly different because he had a substantial amount that could have grown at an investment rate as opposed to just a savings rate.' And so I began to educate myself more and more. My mom was willing to venture into investing. And so we opened up a Merrill Lynch account. The broker there got us involved in a couple of stocks."

While Wynn had gotten the family's wealth invested in "safe" stocks, he was interested in taking an educated risk with his own funds.

"I just started learning on my own," Wynn said. "Merrill Lynch at the time had a free book for clients called How to Buy Stocks. It was one of the most boring books that I had ever read. But I forced myself to read the whole thing. And it was a good guide on all of the basics. That got me interested. And then when I was back here in Madison, of all companies, there was a series of classes put on by E F Hutton. I went to those classes. When the classes were nearly over, I told the presenter — he was an account executive for E F Hutton — that I had been learning a lot about stocks and I would like to open up an account. So I bought some mutual funds through E F Hutton. That was my first account. And at some point, I got the Merrill Lynch account."

Wynn became the director of the WI Dept. of Commerce's Bureau of Minority Business Development, but always kept expanding his interest in investment. He was approached by Dr. Floyd Rose about the possibility of forming an investment club.

"He just called me one day and said, 'Bob let's start an investment club,'" Wynn said. "I really didn't know

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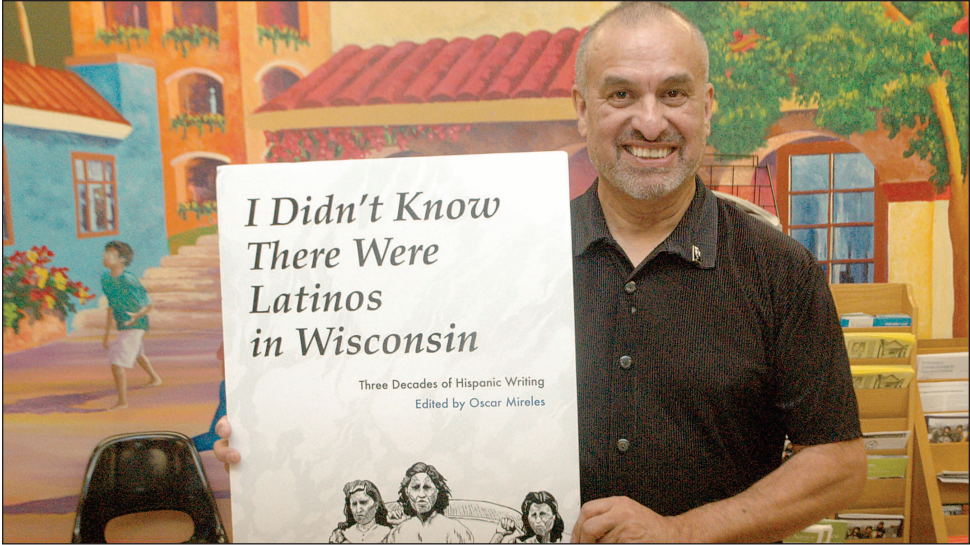
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LOUD Latino Arts Conference at Centro Hispano’s Calli

Laying a Solid Foundation



Oscar Mireles was Madison’s first Latino poet laureate.

By Jonathan Gramling

Part 2 of 2

Oscar Mireles, Madison’s former poet laureate, has been active in Madison’s art scene for many years. As he neared retirement, he decided to formalize that work into LOUD, Latinos Organizing for Understanding and Development. One of the projects that Mireles undertook through LOUD was the Wisconsin Conference on Latino Arts and Culture held at Centro Hispano’s Calli on May 2-3.

The conference was just a part of regular cultural events that LOUD picks up from other groups or creates itself that Mireles hopes LOUD will sponsor each year.

In May, around the time of Cinco de Mayo, LOUD sponsors the Latino Art Fair, which was held in conjunction with the arts conference.

“LOUD kind of came at the right time,” Mireles said. “The Latino Chamber of Commerce had been doing the Latino Art Fair for about eight years. I was familiar with it because I read poetry for the first one they had. And when they transitioned over to the Madison Public Library, I also read poetry. At Overture, I also read poetry as an artist at the Latino Art Fair. As they were

transitioning to getting a lot of federal resources after COVID, they shared that they weren’t going to do the art fair. They thought it might be something that I might be interested in taking over with LOUD. So part of it was it was a timely thing and it was a good transition versus just letting it die.”

LOUD has also gotten involved in Día de los Muertos celebrations.

“Professor Carolyn Smythe Kellenborn was doing a Day of the Dead celebration featuring altar boxes,” Mireles said. “She had been doing that for a number of years. She had come to some of the Art Parties that I organized. And my wife Diana and I did altar boxes one year to honor my grandfather. Diana did it to honor her brother. We got involved in making an altar. And even though it’s a little box, it’s a lot more involved. So I got a chance to work with her as a participant. And then when they had the presentations, she asked if I would speak about the creation of the altar and who it was honoring. After that when she had a full sense of what it was, she asked if that was something that LOUD would be interested in taking over. Once again, it was something that was going on for a while. As you well know, things kind of go and you need some principle people to drive it forward. As those people move on, you

have to have a transition plan. I know with the Juneteenth celebration, it looks like they now have a transition plan. If you don’t have that, then a lot of things just disappear. And then a couple of years later, people say, ‘Hey whatever happened to that?’”

The third piece is the Latin Music Festival that is held at the Majestic Theater on King Street the Wednesday before Thanksgiving. It was started and managed for many years by Ricardo Gonzalez who was looking to transition out of the management duties.

“He asked me if I was interested in transitioning it over,” Mireles said. “We did that last year. LOUD is honoring the legacy of what other people were doing and we’ve been blessed that they have kind of take it on.”

If this were all that Mireles was doing through LOUD, it would be an easy retirement with activities spaced throughout the year. But Mireles has also been involved in Art Party.

“We were remodeling Omega School,” Mireles said. “We were able to, during the renovation, add additional track lighting to that which also existed to create a lower level gallery at Omega School. The LOUD Gallery at Omega happened about 1-2 years later as we were renovating our building. I hadn’t full envisioned that when we were renovating. I think it was a benefit to Omega because it really brought a lot of community people in to see the art work and then learn about Omega.”

And then there is the anthology of poetry that Mireles is in the final stages of producing.

Climb USA From Page 6

what that meant. But I just said okay. That was in 1987. He and I sent out a letter to people whom we knew. I was a young attorney, so there were a few young Black attorneys in town. We sent it to them. There were other people we knew who worked in corporations or government. We met at a bank. We had a good 30 people who showed up. And then we talked about this whole investment club model. Floyd had found the connection to Better Investing, the big non-profit that is a trade association for investment clubs. And so we adopted their model early on and they gave us the partnership agreement documents and things of that nature. And so we got started in mid-summer 1987. That was a memorable year because it was the same year that later on that fall, where we had Black Friday and all of the significant downturn in the stock market. But in the summer, things were just churning along. And we were just getting started. I can distinctly remember because I was a promoter of minority business development that we had 21 members altogether in that new investment club. It was called the Madison Area Investment Club. We had 17 African Americans and four whites. And fast forward to today, the club is still going. It merged with another club and the new name is WIN Investment Club.”

Wynn is the first to admit that he is no expert on investing. He never went to college to study it. Most of what he has learned is self-taught and through that has gotten a lot of information over the years.

“It’s through that whole investment club model that I learned a great deal,” Wynn said. “And again, I never list any of these applications as being an expert in investing because I am not. I’ve invested a long time, but my knowledge is sort of a respite at what I call the intermediate level because I have spent my career mostly with new investors. So I am constantly repeating the 1.01 of compounding, which is a number one concept that you want people to learn. So I teach that over and over and over again. It’s almost like missionary work. I want to convert people from being non-investors to being investors. So you are always talking with people who are outside of the arena of investing trying to educate them and encourage them to become an investor. So I spend a lot of

“Something that I did as poet laureate was a book ‘I Didn’t Know There Were Latinos in Wisconsin,’” Mireles said. “I knew when I returned I would want to do a fourth installment of the book. We’re in the process of doing a fourth anthology. On Thursday, I will be at the APPLETON Public Library, I will be doing a reading to share my artwork and selections from the newer poets who will be included. And secondly — and more importantly — we are encouraging people who might come and have an interest in Latino poetry to really get more submissions from that Fox Valley area. It’s a combination of poetry reading and recruitment. The second thing about the book is that we are going to feature 50 new writers. We are really expanding the tent and getting newer voices and different voices involved. We have several musicians and several academics who have their own careers, but haven’t written or submitted poetry. We definitely have some new voices. You might remember Denora Marquez from the Latino Strings Art Program. She submitted a poem that she wrote about her daughter’s braids. I didn’t realize she was a writer. It’s just a powerful kind of piece.”

Retirement Oscar Mireles style feels more like full-time work to others. But Mireles’ love of Latine culture and desire to see it flourish in Madison and Wisconsin propels him forward. It is a sense of purpose that keeps Mireles getting up out of bed each morning to meet the challenges of the day. And what a grand purpose it is.

my time on that level.”

Through his work in Minority Business Development, Wynn saw firsthand the impact that wealth development has on budding entrepreneurs.

“People who have been investing have an advantage over people who just focus on entrepreneurship because often times, they hadn’t built a person nest egg that could help them segway into entrepreneurship using their own savings before they have to go out and prematurely borrow and get too debt-ridden to be able to meet cash flow,” Wynn said.


While he was at Commerce, they created a fund to help entrepreneurs get started, the Minority Business Development Fund. Governor Thompson wanted to give a grant to the non-profit Urban Hope that Reggie White, the famed Green Bay Packer, had founded.


“I had to interact with the Green Bay Packer management and Reggie White over an extended period of time, close to a year,” Wynn said. “It ended up getting me on the board of Urban Hope. It was at that time that my eyes really got opened to athletes and the money that they make.”

On his own and through ProSquared LLC, which he founded, Wynn began to work with college athletes.

“Athletes really need to understand money and finances because I also heard war stories about some athletes being taken advantage of just because they didn’t know as much about money or finances as some of the average people who have built their wealth through entrepreneurship or through the corporate ladder,” Wynn said. “You’re learning so many things about money along the way, whereas with athletes, it’s sort of a short circuit process where they have spent all of their time developing their athletic skills to the expense of learning about money and finances along the way. So they hit this sudden wealth and are somewhat vulnerable to what they don’t know. And so that is one reason why I was focusing on them. And the reason I got more involved with UW-Madison was because there were a couple of athletes who did go pro and kind of had some missteps with their finances.”


Next issue: Asset Builders and Climb USA






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