

MARKET CREEK PLAZA

San Diego, California

Development Team

Owner/Developer

**Jacobs Center for Neighborhood
Innovation**
San Diego, California
www.jacobscenter.org

Architect/Site Planner

Fehlman LaBarre Architects
San Diego, California
www.fehlmanlabarre.com

Planner/Development Manager

Diamond Management Inc.
San Diego, California

On the site of what was once a long-abandoned factory bordered by barbed wire stands a new, vibrant ten-acre (4 ha) commercial and cultural center known as Market Creek Plaza. Teams involving more than 3,000 residents of southeastern San Diego's Diamond Neighborhoods—an area with a history of ethnic tensions, a population of 88,000, and a median income at only 70 percent of the city's \$46,000 median income—came together to plan, design, build, lease, and operate the project, in partnership with the nonprofit Jacobs Center for Neighborhood Innovation (JCNI). Market Creek Plaza, which opened in January 2001 and was completed in August 2005 at a cost of approximately \$25 million, meets these residents' needs with 77,482 square feet (7,198 m²) of retail space, including a bank, restaurants, multicultural shops, and the first major chain grocery store in the community in 30 years. The project also contains a 500-seat open-air amphitheater that hosts a variety of community events. Public art throughout the plaza celebrates local heroes and the community's ethnic and cultural identities. The project is now owned by more than 500 local residents who purchased ownership units in the plaza through a first-of-its-kind community development initial public offering (CD-IPO).

“Plenty of people told us this was never going to work. The site suffered from extensive blight, contamination, long-term disinvestment, a flood plain, poor access, gang territories—every challenge imaginable,” says Jennifer S. Vanica, president and CEO of the Jacobs Family Foundation and JCNI. “People also told us that a broad community process could not be used for commercial development, which is competitive by nature. But we took the risk and worked in partnership with the residents of San Diego's Diamond Neighborhoods to develop the vibrant village they envisioned. Market Creek Plaza shows what can happen when residents come together around a common vision for change. Over time, we began to realize that the project's greatest impact was the deep relationships that were forged.”

When JCNI came to the area in 1998, it faced a number of challenges, including the issue of how to encourage neighborhood residents from diverse ethnic groups and cultural backgrounds to work together. A group of residents who later became known as neighborhood coordinators began by creating opportunities for multicultural interaction. JCNI hosted popular “ethnic nights,” which culminated in a multicultural “unity night” featuring food, dances, and traditional costumes. Another challenge JCNI faced was a skeptical community that had been failed by the unkept promises of previous developers and outsiders. The developer listened to feedback from neighborhood residents and continued to demonstrate its long-term commitment to the community throughout the development process.

Achieving broad community participation was yet another challenge. Team coordinators conducted 800 neighborhood surveys in four languages and held hundreds of community meetings, from which res-



idents' visions for the plaza emerged. A network of multicultural resident teams then worked on every aspect of the project, from choosing the color of the buildings to selecting the businesses that would occupy the plaza. The process of working together in the participatory process had a profound impact on the community by enabling team members to learn about each other's cultures and to embrace their differences.

JCNI's biggest risk was a financial one. Market Creek Plaza eventually received a \$15 million loan through the federal new markets tax credit (NMTC) program as well as program-related investments from four foundations (in addition to the Jacobs Family Foundation) and tax abatements from the local redevelopment agency. Attracting tenants to a neighborhood with no proven commercial center also proved challenging. Today, the plaza features a number of national businesses such as Food 4 Less, Starbucks, and Wells Fargo Bank as well as local retailers and restaurants.

Market Creek Plaza has had a pronounced economic and social impact on the neighborhood and the region. It created 360 construction jobs and provided training for emerging contractors. It also has produced more than 170 permanent jobs, 54 percent of which occupy local residents. It is home to one of San Diego's largest collections of public multicultural art, valued at more than \$1.4 million. Finally, it has recaptured nearly \$24.4 million in annual economic leakage from the neighborhood and become a community gathering place in every sense of the term.

Project Data

Websites

www.marketcreekplaza.com
www.shopmcp.com

Site Area

10 acres (4 hectares)

Facilities

77,482 sf (7,198 m²) retail

Land Uses

retail, restaurant, amphitheater, civic, parks/open space, surface parking

Start/Completion Dates

October 1998–August 2005