

MOTION


Dr. "Sweet" Alice Harris is a prominent community activist in Los Angeles. Mrs. Alice Harris has dedicated her life to mentoring youth and providing assistance to people who are disadvantaged or underserved. She is the Executive Director and founder of the Parents of Watts Working with Youth's and Adults Inc., a social services organization that she started out of her home in the mid-1960s as a way to alleviate tensions in her culturally diverse neighborhood of Watts after the 1965 riots.

Born and raised in Gasden, Alabama on December 29th, 1933, Harris moved to Los Angeles during the 1950s as part of the Great Migration, seeking better opportunities and a brighter future for herself and her family. She faced numerous challenges and hardships as an African-American woman in Watts, a community that was marred by poverty, gang violence, and social neglect.

The Parents of Watts is a nonprofit organization that was incorporated in 1983 and encourages children to stay in school and always avoid drugs. Operating on a shoestring budget out of eight homes purchased by Harris on Lou-Dillon Avenue, her organization's programs provide emergency food and shelter for the homeless, prepare teenagers for trade school, college, and university as well as the job market while also offering drug counseling, health seminars, and parenting classes.

Despite adversities, Harris became a resilient and revered figure in her community. In 1967, she founded Parents of Watts in response to the escalating gang violence and social turmoil that deeply affected the neighborhood. The organization focused on creating a safe and nurturing environment for the youth, advocating for social change, and providing support for families grappling with poverty and crime. Parents of Watts became a beacon of hope for the community, offering various programs, including educational support, mentorship, and advocacy for social justice issues. Linking with other civic groups, she formed the Black and Brown Committee, which eventually became the Parents of Watts, Inc. ("P.O.W.").

Affectionately known as "Sweet" Alice, she is known worldwide for her generosity and empathy. She is a highly regarded neighborhood advocate who works closely with elected officials and often serves as a liaison between parents and their children's schools. She is well-known for speaking her mind in pursuing equal services and opportunities for her fellow residents and for also countering any resistance she gets from uncooperative parents, school administrators, or city officials with her trademark question: "Do you want to be part of the building crew or the wrecking crew?"


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Throughout her ninety (90) years of life, “Sweets” has tirelessly dedicated herself to uplifting and empowering the residents of Watts as well as anyone who walks through her doors. She is instrumental in fostering positive relationships between law enforcement and the community, working to bridge the gap and cultivate trust. Furthermore, she has been a vocal proponent of education, encouraging young people to pursue academic excellence and strive for a brighter future.

In 1992, the Beverly Hills/Hollywood NAACP awarded Sweet Alice with the Medgar Evers Community Service Award. In May 1993, Essence Magazine presented her with their sixth annual award for her work (which was featured in Essence Magazine). In 2002, California Lieutenant Governor Cruz Bustamante named Harris “Woman of the Year,” in honor of her community outreach efforts through The Parents of Watts. On March 24, 2003, Assemblymember Mervyn M. Dymally presented Sweet Alice with the “Woman of The Year” award. In 2007, The Women's Conference spear-headed and founded by Maria Shriver awarded her the Minerva Award.

In 2008, Harris received an honorary Doctor of Humane Letters degree from the University of Southern California. That same year, she was also named one of United States President George H. Bush's "Points of Light", bestowed upon citizens who made a significant impact in their communities through volunteer work.

When walking inside P.O.W. doors, you can view photos of every President from Jimmy Carter to Vice-President Kamala Harris. She has received thousands of commendations, recommendations, and certificates of appreciation. She is permanently imprinted in the Watts neighborhood with honors such as her photo on the grounds at Prominence of Promenade at Ted Watkins Park (June 17, 1994), at the Cultural Crescent as a community leader at the Watts Towers. There is also a park named “Sweet” Alice play-park located in Watts on Compton Ave. In 2016, King/Drew High School of Medicine and Science dedicated The Oral Arts Room on the fourth floor to Dr. “Sweet” Alice Harris (just to name a few).

Her unwavering commitment to social change and her passion for empowering others have earned her widespread admiration and respect. Today, Dr. Sweet Alice Harris continues to be a formidable force for positive change and her legacy serves as a testament to the transformative power of community activism and grassroots initiatives. Her remarkable journey and contributions have left an indelible mark on the history of Watts and will always stand as a testament to the resilience and strength of the human spirit. Harris’ impact extends far beyond the boundaries of Watts; she has inspired countless individuals and organizations to make a difference in their communities. Through working with youth and adults for over the last 50 years, Sweet Alice will continue to leave an indelible mark on Watts.

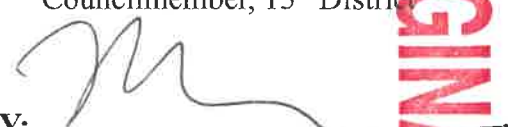
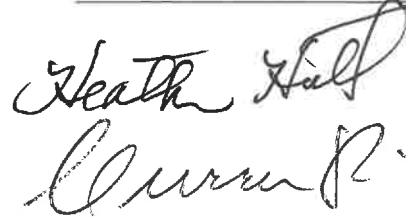
I THEREFORE MOVE that the intersection of Lou Dillon Avenue and Santa Ana Boulevard North in Watts be designated as "Sweet Alice Square", and that the Department of Transportation be directed to erect permanent ceremonial sign(s) to this effect at this location.

PRESENTED BY:


TIM McOSKER

Councilmember, 15th District

SECONDED BY:

ORIGINAL