

## NEWS RELEASE

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### **WACO THEATER CENTER ANNOUNCES PARTNERSHIP WITH THE CITY OF LOS ANGELES AND MOVE TO THE VISION THEATER PERFORMING ARTS CENTER IN HISTORIC LEIMERT PARK LED BY ARTISTIC DIRECTOR TINA KNOWLES**

*The Organization Will Serve As Co-Operator and Co-Manager Alongside  
The City Of Los Angeles Department of Cultural Affairs*

**LOS ANGELES, CA — May 7, 2025—**[WACO \(Where Art Can Occur\) Theater Center](http://WACO (Where Art Can Occur) Theater Center), the celebrated performing and visual arts organization dedicated to empowering communities and nurturing the dreams of artists and youth in Los Angeles, proudly announces its new role as co-operator and co-manager of the newly renovated Vision Theater Performing Arts Center in South Los Angeles' historic Leimert Park Village. This collaboration marks a transformative chapter for the neighborhood and a move for the organization, blending its storied legacy with WACO's mission of championing art, culture, and mentorship.

"Joining forces with the City of Los Angeles through the Vision Theater is more than a partnership—it's the beginning of a bold new chapter for WACO and our impact on Los Angeles and the world," says **Shay Wafer, Executive Director of WACO Theater Center**. "We believe storytelling has the power to transform lives, and the Vision Theater offers an unparalleled platform to share diverse voices from around the world. This space will be both a home and a national destination, impacting future visitors, youth, and the neighborhood economy. As we step into this shared future, this partnership allows us to elevate local, national, and global talent and intertwine our mission to sustain the rich culture and history embedded in Leimert Park."

Under the artistic direction of visionary Tina Knowles and the proven leadership of Shay Wafer, WACO Theater Center's relocation to the Vision Theater aims to spur impact, complementing the local artistic culture while driving economic growth and fostering community development. As a creative epicenter, the venue will attract an estimated **150,000 visitors annually**, driving increased foot traffic for local businesses and fostering unprecedented economic growth in the area.

"I know firsthand that the arts can be a saving grace. The opportunity I had to see a professional dance company perform as a young person from a small town, Galveston, Texas, gave me access to a world beyond my own understanding," says **Tina Knowles, Artistic Director and Founder of WACO Theater Center**. "Our children deserve to have a place, right here in their

neighborhood, where families and especially our children, can go and feel empowered. The Vision Theater is a gift of empowerment for us, the next generation, and together—with the help of WACO, the City of LA, and the community—we will ensure it remains true to that commitment.”

Leimert Park has been a long-standing, vibrant hub for Black art and culture in Los Angeles. The Vision Theater has stood at its center for nearly a century, originally serving as a neighborhood movie theater. In 1990, legendary actress and trailblazer Marla Gibbs purchased the theater alongside her daughter Angela Gibbs, renaming it the Vision Theater. Following an economic recession and the aftermath of the 1992 Los Angeles uprising, the City of Los Angeles purchased the theater in 1999 and later transformed it into a performing arts center.

“I want to thank WACO for partnering with the City in this important effort to revitalize the Vision Theater – a historic and iconic community space that has been closed for too long,” **says Mayor Karen Bass**. “With experience in the performing arts, WACO will execute and enhance the vision to highlight the vast creative and artistic visions of artists and youth throughout the City. We will continue to support creative expression.”

The Vision Theater underwent multimillion-dollar renovations beginning in 2011, followed by transformative construction phases in 2015. These upgrades included reconfigured seating, an expanded stage, a fly loft, dressing rooms, green rooms, technical offices, and an orchestra pit. Owned by the City of Los Angeles and now co-managed and co-operated with WACO and the Department of Cultural Affairs, the new state-of-the-art Vision Theater Performing Arts Center will serve as a home for cultural enrichment and artistic expression in the heart of the community.

“The Vision Theater is a part of the cultural legacy of South Los Angeles, and I am proud that the City is taking powerful steps forward in realizing its potential,” **said Councilwoman Heather Hutt, Council District 10**. “This partnership between WACO, an organization that is deeply rooted in the community and committed to uplifting Black voices through the arts, and the City will revitalize the theater, but also create a sanctuary for creativity, education, and cultural pride right in the heart of the Tenth District.”

Since 2016, WACO has been dedicated to presenting, commissioning, and amplifying artistic works that celebrate and highlight the rich heritage of the African diaspora. Through a combination of performing arts, visual arts, mentorship, and education, WACO has provided a home for artists and youth to share their voices and showcase their creativity to connect and inspire others, supporting over 800 artists and 1,200 young people to build their dreams to date. In 2023 alone, WACO’s Angels and Warriors mentorship program supported 88 young people, while its arts programming elevated 157 artists.

For more information about WACO Theater Center, please visit <https://wacothheatercenter.com/>

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### About WACO Theater Center

Founded in 2016 by Tina Knowles and Richard Lawson, WACO (Where Art Can Occur) Theater Center is a non-profit organization based in Los Angeles dedicated to empowering artists and audiences alike by providing a platform for stories rooted in the African diaspora. Through performing and visual arts, mentorship, and education, WACO has provided a home for artists and youth to share their voices and showcase their creativity to connect and inspire others. WACO's artistic and education programming is rooted in Black art and culture, incubating new creative ideas, encouraging collaboration, and fostering an environment for community dialogue around diasporic stories.

WACO Theater Center is a registered 501 (c)(3) non-profit organization.

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