

Relief groups merge

By Kay Hwangbo
Korea Times

The two biggest Korean American riot-relief organizations have merged, which could mean fairer and more efficient help for victims.

The Koreatown Emergency Relief Committee—sponsored by the Korea Times, Korean Youth Center and Oriental Mission Church—has turned over most of its remaining funds to the Koreatown Emergency Response Task Force through an intermediary, according to Pyong Yong Min, an administrator of the committee's fund.

The task force has now emerged as the leading community relief organization. Task force co-chairman Kee Whan Ha emphasized the importance of the two groups getting together.

"There was a lot of cheating going on because people were filling out (applications for relief checks) at both places," Ha said. "If we don't have one committee, there are a lot of mix-ups. So, I wish we can...to set up one policy for the Korean community so we can effectively deal with government agencies."

On June 6, the committee handed \$1.4 million to the Association of Korean American Victims of L.A. Riot, which turned it over to the task force. The task force now has \$1.8 million in hand to help victims.

Before the committee passed the money to the task force, Ha said the task force planned to amass more money before releasing a new wave of relief checks. The checks will most likely go toward helping business owners, Ha said.

The committee has already distributed \$1.1 million for food and other immediate needs to 2,191 victims, while the task force has given away \$1.2 million to 2,400 business people.

The committee was accused of dragging its feet in joining with the task force, which has broad-based community support. But committee chairman Eui Young Yu has explained that the committee was waiting for the task force to appoint a group of professional fund managers without personal stakes in the money's distribution.

"We don't have a conflict of interest," Ha responded. "We are pretty much professional. The group comes from all different sectors. We have two bankers, the chair of the CPA association, the chair of the ministers association, and the president of the victims association."

Min said the committee has \$100,000 left over. After a June 16 audit, the committee will give the remainder to the victims association, Min said.

The Korean American Coalition/Korean American Relief Fund has collected \$28,000, which will

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Koreatown riot victims can still apply for unemployment benefits, mortgage/rental payment assistance and other kinds of relief at the assistance center, located at 3400 Wilshire Blvd., which will be open until July 15. People can also get information about victims' assistance programs at the World Agape Mission Church, which is not a full-service service center.

About 34 Korean Americans have received loan approvals from the Small Business Administration. Business owners who suffered property damage or financial losses have until Feb. 2, 1993 to apply for loans up to \$500,000 at 4 percent interest.

Many people know that riot-affected employees can collect unemployment insurance, but few know about a newly created program that gives similar benefits to the self-employed, say state Employment Development Department representatives.

Self-employed people may collect \$40 to \$230 per week, depending on their 1991 earnings, until Oct. 31. That means a husband-and-wife business team could receive as much as \$460 per week until they find work or start a new business.

"A lot of people are confused about the program," EDD representative Mickey Ruiz said. "If they have their own business, they think they do not qualify for unemployment."

"We had to educate people about the different programs," agreed fellow EDD representative Myrna Zendejas.

The deadline to apply for unemployment insurance is July 6.

Other federal programs include mortgage and rental payment help, for up to 18 months; and Department of Agriculture food banks.

The state of California will guarantee 95 percent of "bridge loans," or loans that qualified small-business owners take out while waiting for SBA loan approvals. People who were injured during the riots may receive state grants for medical, dental and psychological treatment at county mental health centers.

For more information on bridge loans, call Sam Kim at the Urban Development Corporation at 213/382-4300.

The state Assembly Revenue and Taxation Committee is considering authorizing tax credits for business owners who rebuild in the riot-damaged areas, according to the Los Angeles Times.

Injured victims of violent crime can get up to \$2,000 for loss of wages and support from a program of the Los Angeles County district attorney's office, the Times reported. For more information, call 800/777-9229. Crisis counseling is available at local mental-health agencies.

In the private sector, Bank of America is offering up to \$100,000 in small-business loans for property damage and financial loss, according to the Los Angeles Times. The Red Cross provided emergency food, clothing, shelter and medical care immediately after the riots.

Rumors that Korean government and business may send a large donation to Korean American riot victims are just that, Ha of the task force said.

"They keep talking, but up to now we don't see concrete things yet," Ha said.

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eventually go to the task force, according to vice president Robert Park. Money was raised from mostly non-Korean sources, Park said, after the KAC sent notices to news editors across the country.

Regarding federal, state and local assistance programs, Korean Americans who flooded the Koreatown disaster assistance centers in the first weeks after the riots are now playing the waiting game, waiting for decisions on their grant and loan applications.

Only a handful of people sought help at the Ambassador Hotel Disaster Assistance Center on a recent Tuesday afternoon, a drastic drop from the 500 applicants who used to appear daily at the Ardmore Park center, which preceded the hotel site.

Korean Americans comprised about 80 percent of the total 5,500 people served at both sites, according to Thomas Giddings, who manages Federal Emergency Management Agency operations at the center.

"Koreans were very organized. They came right in" when the center first opened, Giddings said. Other ethnic groups filtered in later, he said.

"Considering the number of applicants and the size of the devastation, it was a smooth process without any major friction," said Kyle Kim, Giddings' counterpart at the state level.

Kim recalled many afternoons when Korean Americans patiently waited in line despite stifling heat.

"The American folks were amazed," Kim said.

Highlights of the center's relief effort were the volunteerism of Koreans, from high-school students to senior citizens, and the flexibility that the center showed toward business owners who did not have proper documentation, Kim said.