

Social entrepreneur and 2012 Bush Fellow

Written by Tene Wells
Friday, 30 November 2012 10:19

I am a social entrepreneur and business owner with an office in my home. I live and work in North Minneapolis. I help small businesses, nonprofits and people in my community create wealth.

Here's my story.

The other day, my iPhone battery was dying and with less than 10 percent battery life and a bunch of client calls to make, I panicked when I couldn't find my USB cord. The closest Apple store is in the Uptown neighborhood, five miles from my home. As I dashed out the door prepared to drive to Uptown I remembered West Wireless, a generic wireless product store on West Broadway and DuPont Avenue North is less than five blocks from my townhouse. I drove to the store, thankful for the convenience of having a wireless store in my neighborhood. North Minneapolis has very few conveniences that many other neighborhoods take for granted, like grocery stores, gas stations, dry cleaners, restaurants with wine in wineglasses and table cloths. West Wireless saved me gas and time and kept my money in the community where I live. I make a living helping others build wealth, create local jobs and pay taxes. Shopping in my neighborhood aligns with my mission to create economic vitality.

It was dark at 5 p.m. when I pulled up in front of the store. I fought the fear I felt when I saw several young Black men standing on the sidewalk in front of the West Wireless store. Unfortunately, I have heard too many stories of women getting their purses snatched by young men looking for economic opportunities by preying on the weak. More than 50 percent of the men in North Minneapolis between the age of 16 and 35 are unemployed.* I am a Black woman. I have Black bothers, a Black grandson and have known and loved many Black men. Yet, I questioned where to park my car and how to proceed without being disrespected.

As I entered the store, a young man, the age of my grandson, asked me if I wanted to "take him home." I was grateful for the money I saved shopping in my neighborhood, rather than having to drive to Uptown where the price of the cord would have been twice as much. Yet, when I paid for the \$10 cord with a \$20 bill, I was nervous because the transaction was visible from the window. Sure enough, as I walked quickly to my car another young man asked me for my \$10 change. When I ignored him, he yelled, "You can give me \$5, bitch."

Because this is wrong on so many levels, I had to write this letter to my community to ask that we do something, so our mothers, grandmothers, sisters, daughters, wives and ladies can live in a community where we feel safe and respected.

I want you to ask the young men to obey loitering laws so the businesses in our community can succeed. We need these businesses for jobs and taxes. Many of the women in our community don't have cars and need to shop for food for their children. If the stores lose customers because of harassment, the women in our community will have problems feeding our children.

I know that these young men belong to all of us. They are our sons, grandson, cousin, brothers and nephews and we have the power to help them become the assets our community, needs.

When you talk to these young men, remind them they are the descendants of warriors, slaves,

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freemen, soldiers, teachers, business owners, doctors, champions, factory workers and farmers that worked hard and contributed to their community. I ask my community to talk to these young men and help them find a new path in life. I want you to tell these young men to stop destroying our community by disrespecting themselves and me.

Also, if you have an opportunity to shop on West Broadway your buying power will support businesses that create economic vitality in the neighborhood with the largest African descendant population in Minnesota.

*This statistic has not been verified by Insight News.