

## Developer Aims to Rescue Shop From Meltdown

March 05, 2003 | Jean Merl | Times Staff Writer



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The developers of a controversial sports complex in Carson said this week that they are helping the widowed owner of a popular ice cream shop in her battle to hang onto the business she has run in a nearby strip mall for 23 years.

AEG, builder and owner of the Home Depot Center sports complex, nearing completion on the Cal State Dominguez Hills campus, said it has hired a law firm for Wanda Johnson-Pope, owner of Ken's Ice Cream, and will pay her legal bills.

Johnson-Pope, 64, a fixture in the Carson Plaza of small businesses near the new sports complex, was unable to renew her lease because a property management firm for the strip mall had promised a recently opened Baskin-Robbins franchise that it would have no competitors.

"We think she has been put into a very unfair position. She was wronged," said Tim Leiweke, president and chief executive of AEG. "This is our community, too, and we think Ken's should be a part of the neighborhood for years to come."

But an official of the Summit Team, which manages the property, said his firm has been portrayed unfairly as the villain. Michael Israelsky said that, because the previous management firm had already cut a deal with Baskin-Robbins, Summit Team had no choice in the matter when it took over last year.

"I felt very bad for Wanda ... but it was out of my hands," Israelsky said.

AEG, the firm backed by billionaire Philip F. Anschutz, who also owns Staples Center in downtown Los Angeles, has struggled for broad community acceptance since it first unveiled plans for the \$140-million complex, which will be home to the Galaxy soccer team and also recently won designation as an Olympic training site for several other sports.

Helping Johnson-Pope — whose impending ouster brought outrage in Carson and beyond — gives AEG an opportunity to demonstrate that it will be "a good neighbor," as a company spokesman put it, and, perhaps, to ease fears that the mom-and-pop businesses long popular in Carson were going to lose out to national chains better known to stadium-goers.

Leiweke also addressed rumors in the community about AEG's intentions for a different strip mall, across the street from the complex, that it has been trying to purchase. He said the firm, if it succeeds in buying that site, intends to upgrade it and would not tear it down for parking, as some have speculated.

AEG hired the law firm of Freedman and Taitelman to represent Johnson-Pope. The case is scheduled for a jury trial on April 8.

Meanwhile, Johnson-Pope will keep mixing shakes and scooping oversized cones at the shop she named after her son.

"They came to my rescue," Johnson-Pope said of AEG, which also offered to let her sell ice cream at the stadium on game days. "I am thrilled to death with all that's happening."