

Lighting The Road To The Future

New Orleans

Data

News Weekly

"The People's Paper"

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January 3 - January 16, 2009 43rd Year Volume 19 www.ladatanews.com

The Soul of New Orleans

2009

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2009

What's in store for the City of New Orleans?



Mayor Ray Nagin

Shaniece B. Bickham, Ph.D.

The year 2008 proved to be one of many ups and downs, and twists and turns for the City of New Orleans. The city has endured political scandals and controversies between the City Council and Mayor Ray Nagin's administration, education strides and struggles, violent crimes, and continuous recovery efforts and initiatives.

Last issue, Data News Weekly revisited the triumphant times of 2008 in the city, so what's next? This week Data News Weekly will look ahead to the future and explore what the City of New Orleans will have to offer for its citizens in 2009.

Keeping an Eye on Local Government

In 2009, New Orleans residents should expect to hear more from the Office of the Inspector General, which Robert Cerasoli spearheads. The office has a staff of approximately 16, and is mainly responsible for ensuring the lawful operations and spending of the city's money to hope-

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Please call (504) 284-3840 for subscription information. Dated material two weeks in advance. Not responsible for publishing or return of unsolicited manuscripts or photos.

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fully rid city government of corrupt spending and waste. The first public report from Cerasoli and his office was released in mid-December and focused on the city's use of take-home vehicles. Cerasoli and staff found



Dr. Ed Blakely heads the recovery efforts for the City of New Orleans overseeing the various phases of redevelopment.

among other issues that the city has 273 take-home vehicles when a city ordinance only allows a total of 60, no appropriate documentation exists regarding assignments of vehicles, and fuel usage is not properly monitored or documented.

This is just the first report of many to come in the future from the Office of the Inspector General, especially in light of the fact that the City Council has begun to add on even more duties for Cerasoli's staff. Particularly, the Council voted 6-1 for Cerasoli to offer advice on how to revise the budget-review process. He plans to have a report regarding the budget-review process to the Council by March 30, 2009.

Improving Public Education in New Orleans

The Recovery School District has plans to open five new facilities for schools damaged by Hurricane Katrina. Groundbreakings for four of the five schools have already taken place. The new buildings are part of the Quick Start Initiative to increase the number of new school constructions in New Orleans. Original plans have occupancy scheduled for September 2009 for all five schools.



Inspector General Robert Cerasoli and his staff have the important job of serving as a watchdog over local government.

The schools receiving the new facilities are: (1) Lake Area High School, being built as a high-tech academy for 750 students in grades 9-12 with an approximate cost of \$35 million for construction; (2) L.B. Landry High School, being built to accommodate 950 students from grades 9-12 with an approximate cost of \$40 million for construction; (3) Langston Hughes Elementary School, being built to house 440 PreK through 8th graders with an approximate cost of \$17.5 million for construction; (4) Andrew Wilson Elementary School, which will be renovated to modern standards while keeping the historical characteristics of the original building with an approximate cost of \$15 million for construction, and (5) Fannie C. Williams Elementary School, being completely renovated with an approximate construction cost of \$13 million.

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Dealing with Crime in New Orleans

Since Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Police Department now has over 1,500 officers thanks to a new graduating class of recruits. Fifty-four graduated in late December, and the department is expecting at least 40 more graduates by June 2009. The NOPD will also have assistance from the National Guard a while longer in 2009. The state recently approved the National Guard to remain in New Orleans until March 1, 2009, at a cost of \$1.8 million.

On Dec. 30, 2008, the City had 178 reported murders as compared to 208 around that time last year, which represents a small decrease. As the police department continues to increase the size of its force, hopefully the murder rate and overall crime statistics will reflect a decrease at the end of 2009.

On the prosecution end of crime-fighting, Orleans Parish District Attorney Leon Cannizzaro also has big crime-fighting initiatives planned for 2009. Just before the New Year, Cannizzaro announced that he was disbanding the Violent Offenders Unit of his office. Lawyers who were assigned to this unit have been reassigned to the Homicide Screening Unit and the Trial Section of the District Attorney's Office. Cannizzaro said that his decision will make the office more productive.

Continuing Recovery Initiatives

December 2008 proved to be a busy month for the City's recovery efforts. To name a few, the NOPD Third District was able to move into its new station after its original facility was destroyed in Hurricane Katrina and Irish Channel residents received much-needed street improvements. There are also plans in the works to reopen public libraries in the near future. Recovery efforts for the city have been overseen by Ed Blakely since 2007. While progress has been made, there has been much criticism regarding the slow rate of recovery and rebuilding of the neighborhoods. In addition, the fate of Blakely's stay in New Orleans is still in limbo as he decides how much longer he plans to remain in his post with New Orleans.

Other recovery plans include a new LSU-VA hospital with a medical campus that will spread westward from Claiborne Avenue towards the criminal courthouse at Tulane Avenue and Broad Street. There is concern from this neighborhood's residents, however, because residents and small business owners will have to relocate in order to make room for the new hospital.

The reopening of the Mahalia Jackson Theater of Performing Arts next week is

also a much-anticipated recovery accomplishment. The arts community in New Orleans will now have the theater they call home to once again showcase ballets, theatrical events, concerts and other performances.

Looking Ahead

According to the New Orleans Convention and Visitors' Bureau, New Orleans has a lot to look forward to in 2009. A boost in tour-



Police Chief Warren Riley is expecting the New Orleans Police Department to grow to 1,550 officers in 2009.

ism and conventions will be a definite boost for the City, especially for downtown and French Quarter businesses that rely on the tourism industry for stability. Recent studies also show that although the American economy is in a downward slope, the economy in New Orleans is holding steady, mostly because of the active rebuilding work taking place in the area.

It is difficult to say where the state stands financially, however. Gov. Bobby Jindal re-



Gov. Bobby Jindal recently announced severe budget cuts for Louisiana due to a \$341 million deficit in the state's 2009 budget.

cently announced a \$341 million deficit in the State of Louisiana's 2009 budget. The governor's proposed cuts to deal with the deficit include \$118 million from the Department of Health and Hospitals, \$20 million from the Department of Social Services, \$11 million from the Department of Education, and \$55 million from the Department of Higher Education.

Mayor Nagin And Local Arts Organizations Announce Reopening of the Mahalia Jackson Theater

Storm-damaged facility updated with state-of-the-art features

Mayor C. Ray Nagin, joined by members of the New Orleans City Council and local arts organizations on Dec. 19, officially announced the line-up of programs and entertainers that will highlight the re-opening of the Mahalia Jackson Theater for the Performing Arts.

Opening events will begin on Thursday, Jan. 8, with a special program featuring New Orleans performers. The week-long celebration will include top singers, dancers and musicians, including, among others, violinist Itzhak Perlman, Gospel singer Yolanda Adams and tenor Placido Domingo.

The re-opening of the theater marks a major accomplishment in the rebuilding of city infrastructure. Along with public safety facilities, Mayor Nagin prioritized the complete refurbishment of the Mahalia Jackson Theater immediately after Hurricane Katrina and the flooding that followed.

"The re-opening of the Mahalia Jackson Theater will demonstrate to the world that New Orleans is back – our culture is back, our city is rebuilding and we will be even better than before," said Mayor Nagin. "We have planned an outstanding week of activities that has something for every New Orleanian and we look forward to this spectacular celebration."

The cost for the renovation of the theater is approximately \$22 million. To date, FEMA has obligated \$8.9 million to the project.

Inaugurated in 1973, when New Orleans native Norman Treigle performed Giuseppe Verdi's *Messa di Requiem* with the New Orleans Philharmonic Orchestra, the Mahalia Jackson Theater was severely damaged during Hurricane Katrina. Wind damaged the roof, read doors, stage and other fixtures. It also shattered an 8-foot-by-16-foot window. The basement of the theater received more than 14 feet of water, which damaged the motor control center, orchestra lifts, HVAC controls, sewerage ejector pumps and other structural components. The repaired building will include a state-of-the-art sound system, a new orchestra shell and enhanced lighting. The theater also features a removable floor exclusively for dance performances.

The theater is located at 801 North Rampart St. in Armstrong Park, which is also being com-



Irma Thomas

pletely renovated. The refurbished Mahalia Jackson Theater will serve as a symbol of the rejuvenation of the city's cultural assets.

The week will begin with a very special concert, the New Orleans All Star Revue. The show will feature a diverse offering of quintessential New Orleans performers, including Grammy winning songstress Irma Thomas, Preservation Hall Jazz Band, Kermit Ruffins, Rebirth Brass Band, Marva Wright, Michael Ward, Phillip Manuel, Jeremy Davenport, Ingrid Lucia and Fredy Omar. The free event will welcome the entire community to celebrate the re-opening of this historic venue.

One of the highlights of the week will be a special tribute to gospel legend Mahalia Jackson, during which Mayor Nagin will present the first "Mahalia Jackson Gospel Pioneer Award" to a local citizen who has championed gospel music in the New Orleans community. Gospel superstar Yolanda Adams and trumpet virtuoso Irvin Mayfield will headline the "Tribute to Mahalia Jackson," which was coordinated by the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra. Adams will perform several of her own songs and will be joined on selected songs by the One New Orleans Chorus. Adams and Mayfield will collaborate on one or more songs during the show.

Jackson is a native of the Black Pearl area of New Orleans' Carrollton neighborhood. With her powerful, distinct voice, she became one of the most influential gospel singers in the world and was the first person to be dubbed the Queen of Gospel Music. She sang at President John F. Kennedy's inaugural ball. She was an ardent supporter of the Civil Rights Movement, and sang to a crowd of 250,000 at the March on Washington in 1963 at the request of her friend the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. She sang again



Marva Wright

for Dr. King at his funeral in 1968, after which she disappeared from most public political activities. Dr. King once said, "A voice like hers comes along once in a millennium."

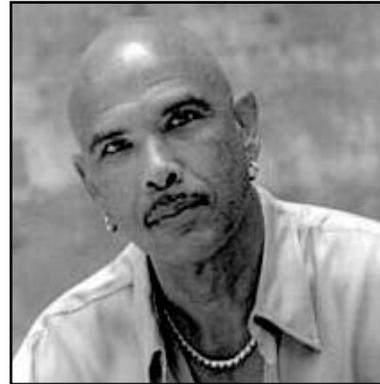
The National Academy of Re-



Michael Ward

Recording Arts & Sciences created the Gospel Music or Other Religious Recording category for Jackson, making her the first Gospel Music Artist to win a Grammy Award. She performed for Presidents Truman, Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon. She also sang for Queen Elizabeth II and Sir Winston Churchill of the United Kingdom, the King and Queen of Denmark, the Presidents of France and Liberia, the Empress of Japan, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi of India, the prime ministers of several Caribbean islands and several other heads of state and political figures worldwide. She died in 1972 at the age of 60.

Another artist who has demonstrated a strong commitment also is being honored as part of the re-opening. Mayor Nagin and the New Orleans City Council have named the stage in honor of the celebrated tenor Placido Domingo Stage. Domingo, who will perform during the theater's opening week, appeared with the New Orleans Opera Association in nine performances from 1962-1971. He appeared again on March 4, 2006 for the single largest operatic event ever in New Orleans.



Philip Manuel

His support secured the immediate future of the opera company following Katrina and Rita.

"The restoration of New Orleans Opera's Mahalia Jackson Theater is a symbol of new life for the city following the devastation



Kermit Ruffins

of 2005, but in these difficult economic times it is also a symbol of hope and of faith in the future on the part of a forward-looking artistic organization," he said.

On January 10, the New Orleans Ballet Association and the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra will collaborate to create An Evening of Music and Dance, which will feature the critically praised New York City Ballet principal dancers Wendy Whelan and Albert Evans and dancers from the illustrious San Francisco Ballet, as well as legendary violinist Itzhak Perlman.

"We are honored to be one of the first companies to perform at the Mahalia Jackson Theater for the Performing Arts since its renovation following Hurricane Katrina," said San Francisco Ballet Executive Director Glenn McCoy. "We hope, in our own way, that this performance demonstrates the respect and admiration we hold for the city of New Orleans."

The theater will again serve as the venue home for the New Orleans Ballet Association, the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and the New Orleans Opera.

The Mahalia Jackson Theater's Grand Opening Celebration!!

The City of New Orleans announces the grand re-opening of Mahalia Jackson Theatre!

Join us for a full week of great performances!

The New Orleans All Star Review

Thursday, Jan. 8, 2009, 7p.m.

Featuring: Preservation Hall, Rebirth, Kermit Ruffins, Irma Thomas, Marva Wright, Jeremy Davenport, Ingrid Lucia, Phillip Manuel, Michael Ward and Freddy Omar

Free Concert – Tickets required (limit 4 per person) – Tickets available at Ticketmaster Outlets: Major Video, 3020 Veterans Blvd., Metairie and Major Video, 400 Lapalco Blvd, Gretna.

An Evening of Music and Dance

Presented by the Louisiana Philharmonic Orchestra and the New Orleans Ballet Association

Featuring Itzhak Perlman, San Francisco Ballet and Stars of the New York City Ballet

Saturday, Jan. 10, 2009, 7 p.m.

For tickets, contact the LPO at (504) 523-6530 or NOBA at (504) 522-0996

Or visit: www.lpomusic.com or www.nobadance.com

Family Day in the Park

Sunday, Jan. 11, 2009, 12 Noon

Yaya, KidsMART, Ashe Cultural Arts Center, Congo Square Drumming Circles, Kids Activities and more!

Immediately followed by

Family Day in the Theatre

Sunday, Jan. 11, 2009, 1:00 p.m.

Featuring: NORD/NOBA Center for Dance, Crescent City Lights Youth Theatre, GNOYO

Beethoven & The Blues

Tuesday, Jan. 13, 2009, 6:30 p.m.

Featuring a special performance by Allen Toussaint

Tickets \$10 - \$65

Tickets available at Ticketmaster by calling 1-800-982-2787 or online at www.ticketmaster.com. Tickets may also be purchased at LPO by calling (504) 523-6530 on online at www.lpomusic.com.

Louisiana Philharmonic Special School Performance

Thursday, Jan. 15, 2009, 10 a.m.

An Evening with Irvin Mayfield and Yolanda Adams

Friday, Jan. 16, 2009, 7:30 p.m.

Featuring Yolanda Adams, A New Orleans All Star Gospel Choir and the New Orleans Jazz Orchestra – Featuring Irvin Mayfield

Tickets \$10 - \$35

Tickets available at all Ticketmaster outlets or by calling 1-800-982-2787

The New Orleans Opera Association presents Placido Domingo

Saturday, Jan. 17, 2009, 6:30 p.m.

For Tickets call NOOA at 529-3000 or online at www.neworleansopera.org

Rev. Dr. Marshall Truehill, Jr. dies from heart attack

New Orleans loses an advocate for justice

New Orleans Agenda

Reverend Dr. Marshall Truehill, Jr. founder and Executive Director of Faith In Action Evangelistic Team, Inc., and Pastor of First United Baptist Church, both of New Orleans, died at the age of 60 after suffering a heart attack.

While an advocate of the recently passed Master Plan charter amendment, Truehill was also a vocal critic of HUD's plan to destroy the "Big Four" housing developments following hurricane Katrina. Truehill doubted that the units would be replaced with housing for the underserved.

"I'm extremely skeptical that anything will be replaced," said Truehill, an opponent of the demolitions who grew up in B.W. Cooper (then called the Calliope), served on the City Planning Commission, and oversaw social work in the city's 10 public-housing projects for all of his adult life... "There is a deadline of 2010 to have those things completed," he said. "But we're already on the cusp of 2009, and we haven't seen a single pile driven." - Times-Picayune

One of Rev. Truehill's last public appearances was before the New Orleans City Council in December where he expressed his concerns about the conduct of the body and its relationship with the citizens of New Orleans, particularly the African-American community.

Rev. Truehill was a native New Orleanian and was educated in the public schools of New Orleans. He received a Bachelor of Science degree in Music Education from Xavier University in 1973. He received the Bachelor of Theology Degree from Christian Bible College in 1979, the Master of Divinity Degree from New Orleans Theological Seminary in 1986, and the Doctor of Ministry from New Orleans Baptist Seminary in May 1990. Dr. Truehill's doctoral project is entitled Reclaiming Young Adult, Urban Black Males into the Life and Work of Faith In Action Baptist Church. He was currently a Doctoral Fellow at the University of New Orleans in the Department of Urban Studies. His doctoral dissertation was entitled, The Role of the Church in Ameliorating Societal Ills: Developing and Implementing a Comprehensive Grassroots Disaster Plan for the City of New Orleans.



Rev. Dr. Marshall Truehill

He was known for his expertise in ministry in public housing projects. Since 1973, he ardently pursued his vision to improve the quality of life in the projects through the application of biblical principles. Dr. Truehill served as a consultant to the Home Mission Board of the Southern Baptist Convention in the area of Multi-family Housing and led training seminars across the country on Ministering in Public Housing Projects.

Additionally, Dr. Truehill served as Chairman of the Board of Multi-Family Missions Ministry of Louisiana, Assistant Director of the Institute for Resident Initiatives at Tulane University, Vice-Chairman the Board of the New Orleans Jobs Initiative, and a member of the Board of Commissioners of the Desire-Florida Public Benefits Corporation appointed by Mayor Marc Morial. Dr. Truehill also served on the Metro Vision and Ritz Carlton Workforce Development Task Forces.

Dr. Truehill was appointed by Mayor Morial to the City Planning Commission in 1998. He used his knowledge of planning and public policy with firsthand experience of New Orleans neighborhoods and its people to promote economic development and commerce while preserving the character and integrity of the city's historic neighborhoods.

Dr. Truehill has been honored as a U.S.A.A. All American Scholar, and listed in Who's Who in the South and Southwest, 1988; Who's Who in Religion, 1992; Who's Who of Emerging Leaders in America, 1991; Men of Achievement, 1989; and others.

He is survived by his wife Miranda Farr Truehill, three daughters and two sons.

Southern University System approves budget reduction plan

In response to the state's impending budget shortfall, the Southern University Board of Supervisors met in December to approve a budget reduction plan that would reduce the Southern University System's budget by \$6,957,331. The plan, which calls for the reduction to be shared by the Board and System and each campus within the System, is preliminary and seeks to protect the core mission of the University as much as possible from the negative effects of budget cuts.

The Southern University System along with the other higher education systems were required to make budget adjustments by Jan. 1, 2009 through the end of the fiscal year, which equates to an annual budget reduction of approximately \$14 million for the

Southern System.

"We are all taken by surprise at the magnitude of the reductions in our budgets, but nonetheless, we must begin the difficult process of identifying where the reductions can be made," said SU System President Ralph Slaughter.

President Slaughter has outlined several areas for the System and campuses to take immediate steps in reducing expenditures including - reductions in travel; freeze hiring, filling vacant positions and issuing new professional service contracts, except as essential; reduction in the number of adjunct faculty; requesting faculty to assume unpaid voluntary teaching overloads; increasing class sizes, consolidating summer school sessions; reducing

the number of temporary and part-time faculty and staff; reductions in expenditures for supplies and operational expenses; and increasing institutional cost sharing for critical services.

"While we have already adopted measures to reduce energy use and conserve resources, we will be looking at ways to further reduce these costs on each of our campuses," added Slaughter.

The University will also be conducting a thorough review and assessment of programs, offering early retirement incentives for employees as well as asking employees to bear a greater workload. It may require qualified administrators to teach courses.



Delgado

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Northshore-Slidell, 985-646-6420



Justin Nicholas,
General Science,
SGA President



Mychal Bell, who received much attention as part of the Jena 6, shot himself in the chest on Monday, Dec. 29. News of Bell's shooting came days after reports that he was arrested on shoplifting charges on Christmas Eve. Initial news stories reported Bell's shooting as being accidental. Bell's attorney and family members later issued statements suggesting that the negative media attention may have prompted the shooting, however.

City mails property tax bills

Property owners should have received bills by Dec. 31

Property owners in the City of New Orleans should have received their 2009 Real Estate and Personal Property Business tax bills. The bills were mailed over the past several days.

Taxpayers are encouraged to pay their property tax bills online by visiting www.cityofno.com. Property owners must have their tax bill number and a valid checking account or debit/credit card to complete the transaction. Tax payments also may be mailed to: City of New Orleans, P.O. Box 60047, New Orleans, LA 70160-0047.

Walk-in customers may go to City Hall, Bureau of Treasury, Room 1W39 for assistance. Office hours are 8:45 am – 4:40 pm, Monday through Friday. This option is not encouraged due to potential long lines.

To ensure most efficient posting, the tax bill stub should be enclosed with payment. If no bill stub is available, taxpayers should write the tax bill number on the face of their check or money order. Payments must be payable to the City of New Orleans.

Property owners who do not receive a tax bill for each parcel of realty and/or business property they own by December 31, 2008, should call 1-866-493-7407 to obtain the information they need to pay the bills in a timely manner. Property owners should provide the tax bill number for any property about which you are requesting information.

Failure to receive a tax bill will not excuse property owners from delinquency interest and penalties if the payment is not received on time. Property taxes become payable upon issuance of tax bills and will become delinquent on Feb. 1, 2009.

Data News Weekly Moves into 2009 With New Initiatives



Shaniece B. Bickham, Ph.D.
Data News Managing Editor

Data News Weekly also plans to cover issues that are plaguing the African-American community from an in-depth perspective. Some of these topics include but are not limited to, domestic violence, crime, poverty, and education. Each issue, you will find something new to ponder about during the course of your week.

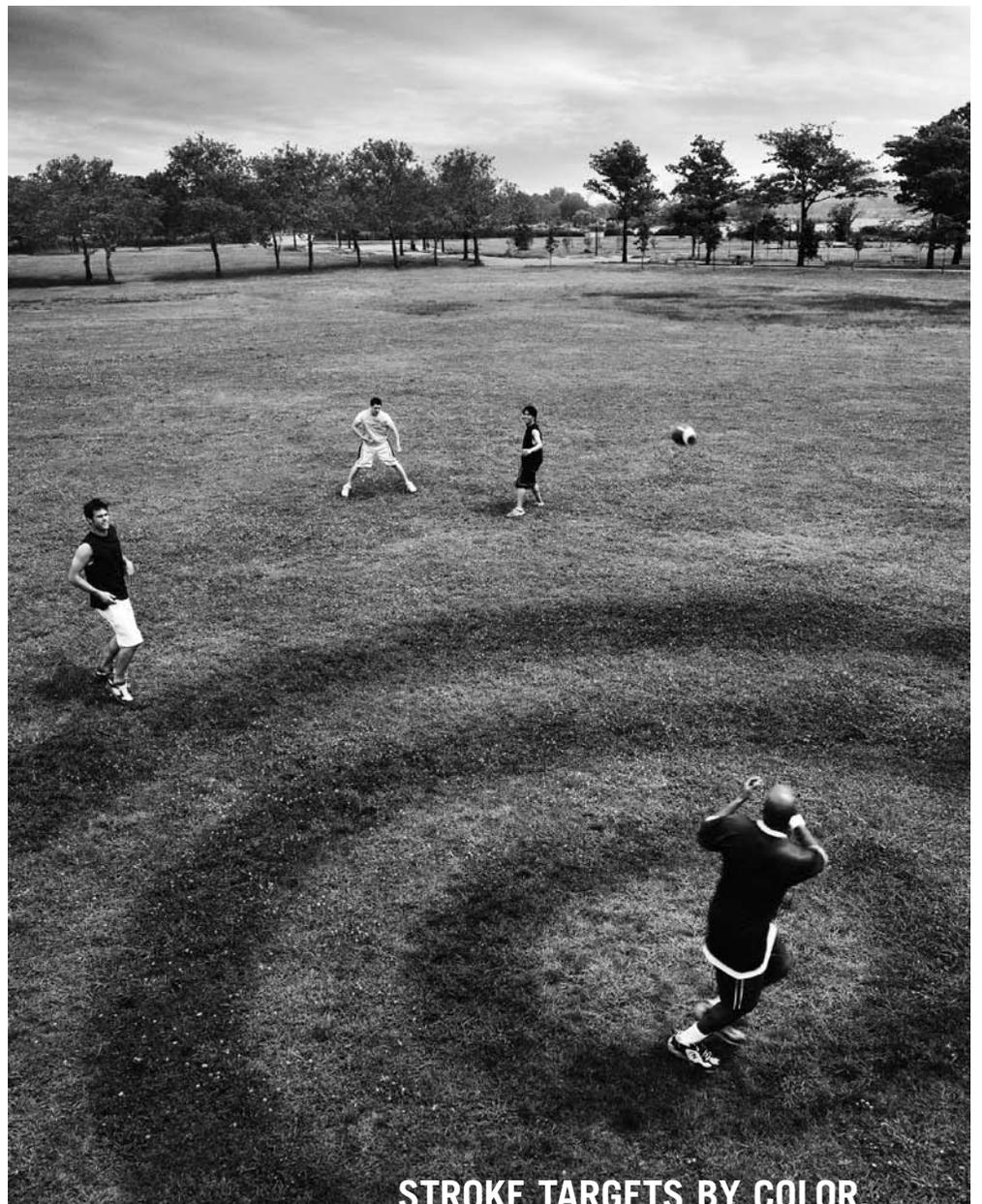
On a lighter note, Data News Weekly will continue doing what it loves to do most...showcase you—our readers. Starting next issue, we will launch a special section entitled: Shoot Data With Your Best Shot! This section will be dedicated to featuring photos submitted by photographers and readers that place a spotlight on everyday life, parties, births, christenings...you name it. Shoot Data With Your Best Shot belongs to you!

You can also expect Data News Weekly more visibly in the community. Our newspapers will soon be available in more places and in bright newsstands that will definitely be eye-catchers. In addition, our future plans include hosting community events that will allow our readers an opportunity to become more familiar with us and our initiatives.

So, with that being said, keep your eyes and ears open as Data News Weekly continues Lighting the Road to the Future!

As we move ahead into a new year, Data News Weekly will continue providing the same important news for the people as it has been. Data News will also introduce new and exciting columns and special sections that are sure to stimulate the minds of our readers.

January and February are of special importance to Data News Weekly as we will begin covering the historical moment of the inauguration of America's first African-American President, while also reflecting on the historical implications of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s contributions during the King Holiday. Not only that, the King Holiday and Presidential Inauguration are perfect backdrops to lead us into the celebration of Black History Month. During this month, little-known Black History facts will be highlighted in addition to Data News showcasing those African-American heroes who stood at the forefront of the Civil Rights era.



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Know where you stand. The odds are African Americans are twice as likely to suffer a stroke as white Americans.

Beating the odds isn't about winning, it's about living.

You have the power to end stroke. 1-888-4-STROKE / StrokeAssociation.org



Photographed by Sean Kennedy Santos

Louisiana Revamps Small Rental Property Program to Advance Funding to Participants

The state of Louisiana is restructuring its Small Rental Property program to offer up-front financing to existing property owners currently active in the program beginning in early 2009, Louisiana Recovery Authority Executive Director Paul Rainwater announced at the LRA's board meeting Wednesday.

"There is a critical lack of affordable housing in many hurricane-affected areas and the program wasn't getting funds to landlords quickly enough. When coupled with the current national economic crisis, it was clear that we had to make major changes to get money in the hands of landlords, which should create affordable rental units more quickly," said Paul Rainwater, executive director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. "By advancing some funds, we're hoping to infuse the market not only with incentive

payments to reduce rents, but also with cash to move construction along and create jobs in recovery areas."

Currently, the program is designed as an incentive program, meaning the state offers an award when a unit is repaired and occupied. Using program guidance in a previously approved action plan, the state will begin paying "advances" of funds to some landlords through a housing rehabilitation program that will fully launch in early 2009. As such, the change does not require a vote of the LRA and has already been approved by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development (HUD).

This new option will provide current program property owners up-front financing to cover repair and rebuilding expenses in exchange for providing affordable housing once the property

is repaired. Under the current structure, landlords receive their awards at a closing after their unit is rented.

The up-front financing is an additional option for program participants, but it will not replace the current incentive program. Those who accept this option still will be held to the Small Rental Property program requirements as well as federal regulations and requirements associated with rehabilitation programs. Program participants who have their certificates of occupancy and are waiting for closing or who have already scheduled a closing will continue in the incentive program.

Program participants will get letters informing them of the change and the state will hold closed outreach sessions in early 2009 for landlords to get information about their projects and new program options. In addition, staff

members are reviewing files to flag applicants that are prime candidates for the new program and inspectors will begin visiting rental units to determine what level of construction remains to fully repair them. Under the current program structure, inspections occur at the end of the process when it is time for a participant to get an award from the program.

Based on very preliminary reviews, the state anticipates that as many as 3,000 current program properties with awards representing almost \$270 million could be

assisted through this change, creating as many as 5,800 rental units. Many of these applicants already started their construction work, but have not been able to complete it because of a lack of funding.

In total, as of Dec. 8, the program has held 433 closings, disbursing almost \$29 million and creating 620 units. As of December 8, another 110 closings were pending, representing 215 units and more than \$9 million in awards.

Entergy Hurricane Relief Fund Announces \$700,000 in Grants to Louisiana and Texas Agencies

PRNewswire-FirstCall/ - The Entergy Hurricane Relief Fund announced \$700,000 in grants to 39 nonprofits helping victims of hurricanes Gustav and Ike rebuild their lives and communities after the devastating storms.

Louisiana groups received 20 grants totaling \$430,000 and 19 Texas agencies were awarded \$270,000 from the fund. The fund was created by Entergy Corporation and the Foundation for the Mid South in the days after the storms hit Entergy's service territory less than two weeks apart in September.

The storms knocked out power to more than 1.6 million Entergy customers. Winds and flooding damaged thousands of homes and businesses in communities from south Louisiana to the upper Texas coast.

"We targeted funding groups that will have an impact on the long-term economic health and viability of the communities hit hardest by the storms," said Patty Riddlebarger, director of corporate social responsibility.

"Too many of our customers and neighbors are still struggling to recover from Ike," said Joe Domino, president and chief executive officer of Entergy Texas, Inc. "We hope these grants will help as they rebuild their homes and their lives."

Renae Conley, president and chief executive officer of Entergy Louisiana, LLC and Entergy Gulf States Utilities Louisiana, L.L.C., said, "After two such devastating storms, one of our goals was to work with our community partners to reach out to our customers who needed the most help getting back on their feet.

"The agencies receiving these grants are doing tremendous work, and we're humbled by their determination to help those in need," she said.

The agencies receiving the grants were selected by a committee chosen by the Foundation for the Mid South. The agencies range from Habitat for Humanity in Jefferson County, Texas, to the Second Harvest Food Bank of Greater New Orleans.

Over 5,280 children were abused in Louisiana last year.

This year, you can be the voice for one.

Each year thousands of children in every Louisiana parish enter into foster care because they were innocent victims of abuse or neglect. You can be the **1** to help an abused child in **your** parish.

A Court Appointed Special Advocate-or CASA- helps an abused child by learning about his or her case and speaking up for the child's best interests. Everyday people can be a CASA.

Will you be one?

Be the **1**. Be a **CASA**.

To learn more about how to Be the **1** in your parish visit www.louisianacasa.org or call 1-888-567-2272



PIPELINE TO THE PEOPLE

by Benjamin Bates

It is the New Year and like every other it is a time when people reflect on the previous year and make resolutions and set goals for the incoming year. New Orleans Data News Weekly caught up with some people who shared their thoughts about what's in store for them in 2009.

Tamika L. Carter



I've sat and thought about my resolutions for the New Year. I would like to start by taking better care of myself and becoming more fit, which means going to the gym more often and eating healthier. Also, I am striving to work harder to advance myself on my job and hopefully purchase another home and treat myself with a new vehicle.

Kristin Dickerson



My first resolution is to continue to be the support system to my husband, family and friends. Secondly, to become more health conscious as it

relates to my diabetes that I have had for the past 18 years. I want to be an inspiration to young children that have been affected by Type 1 Juvenile Diabetes by getting involved in the Juvenile Diabetes Research Foundation as well as the American Diabetes Association. Lastly, I plan to further educate myself. One can never have enough education in life. I plan to further my education in counseling for both adults and children. I believe I have that gift of listening and providing a support system that is sometimes greatly needed.

Derek Bardell



I want to continue to strive to pursue excellence in all my endeavors and become a more spiritual and effective leader. And in my role as an educator, I hope to continue educating young minds with the hopes of producing a more civil and learned society.

Overall, we as a people need to understand that when making resolutions, [we must] make sure that the resolutions are realistic. We don't need unnecessary pressure on ourselves. I'd like to instill in others, as well as myself that as the New Year approaches, strive for a positive change, never settle, inspire and encourage someone, and always keep God first in all that you do.

Data News Trailblazer Janice Meredith Appears on Good Morning America

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

Janice Meredith's story is an inspiration, as she has persevered after Hurricane Katrina when she was forced out her home in New Orleans. Left without a home and the business she built as the owner of a hair salon, she and husband Jules Meredith, Jr. and their infant child fled to the Atlanta area. Like so many affected by the storm and the breaching of the levees, their resources soon became scant as they didn't know what their future would hold.

"We were used to doing for ourselves and it was hard thinking that the basic things we take for granted, we actually lost," Meredith said.

While Meredith and her family didn't know what would transpire next in their struggle, help came when she answered an ad on Craigslist from a Donna Daily, a North Carolina woman who had a home in the

Atlanta area. Daily, who as one of many quiet heroes, offered a home she had in the Atlanta area to Meredith and taking it off the market to let the Meredith family use it as their temporary safe haven. The home would be Meredith and her extended family's home for nine months. As the Merediths began to put the pieces of their lives back together, they eventually returned to New Orleans and have rebuilt their home and business.

The two women have corresponded via email, but never met. The two finally met recently on the set of Good Morning America with Diane Sawyer. Meredith was accompanied by her husband and small son. It was a tearful meeting. The Meredith family thanked Ms. Daily for her selfless act of kindness. She says of their meeting, "I am glad we finally got to meet and I will always love her for what she did for me and my family in our time of need."



Janice Meredith appears with her family and Donna Daily who opened her home in Atlanta to them after Hurricane Katrina.

Not Easily Broken Breaks Stereotypes

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

In an age where the U.S. just elected Barack Obama its first African-American President, perceptions of what race has represented has been forever altered. In many areas of American life the still thorny issue of race plays a part in how people perceive one another in this country.

This has been evident in many areas of American life, but has been prevalent in the entertainment business. Since its inception, opportunities for African-Americans have been limited and African-American actors have been relegated to playing roles that depict them in a less than favorable light. And because of the power of these images being broadcast across various mediums, the lives and stories of African-Americans have been seen through a very narrow lens.

In the third millennium this practice has been challenged as more African-Americans are taking the reins working

helps." I think Bishop Jakes, being in the position that he is in, he has allowed me the opportunity to become the executive producer on this film and to wear more than just an actor's hat."

Speaking of how he would like to do more work behind the scenes Chestnut said, "If I get the opportunity in the future, I will do the same thing. I think that most of our friends in the industry who are working actors [are] trying to work towards that as well."

Chestnut added, "It is a very difficult industry to be in, especially when you are a minority. Just to have an opportunity such as this—you have to treasure it once it comes—and then when you have the opportunity, you have to give someone else the opportunity to go behind the scenes and produce films and do things like that."

The film is unusual for its genre in that it is told from the male viewpoint. Bishop Jakes said of the film, "In reference to the male perspective on love, the film is a derivative of the book and the book was written by a man, ... , and

in it screenings according to Jakes.

"Some people are saying it's a male version of *Waiting to Exhale*. I don't know, but what I do know is that it really touches on some issues and areas that are really significant to men."

The film is different in that it shows a male going through the full gamut of emotions, something that is seldom seen in films or in real life in a country where males are taught to suppress their emotions. "I think we do have difficulty because we've been trained not



Morris Chestnut and Taraji P. Henson star in *Not Easily Broken*.

we don't have the appropriate outlet to express who we are," said Jakes.

The story centers on a professional couple played by Chestnut and actress Taraji P. Henson and the ups and downs that tests their relationship. The film's topic is very real and passions arise surrounding the topic, and in doing a film that surrounds something so realistic there is a fragile balance between character, caricature, and stereotypes. The controversial issue of African-American women being materialistic is one of the topics that is addressed in the film. Jakes said that African-Americans should not be afraid to address these issues and others in films saying that African-Americans are not monolithic, so there should be no controversy regarding this issue.

"There is no stereotypical woman. They are very, very diverse, but we're living in a capitalistic society and a materialistic society. I don't think we should paint all black women with one paintbrush because that would be a misappropriation of truth," Jakes said.

This film is a movie about spirituality as well and holding onto faith when life becomes hard. Bishop Jakes says of the title and its meaning and significance,

"As it relates to the [title of] *Not Easily Broken*, it's taken from the book of Ecclesiastes; and it really deals with a three-fold cord that is not easily broken. The premise that we are using in the movie is to say you need something outside of a man and a woman to hold a relationship together. For us, it is our faith."



Morris Chestnut



TD Jakes



Chestnut and Henson appear in a scene together from *Not Easily Broken*.

in front of, as well as behind, the camera to produce a more balanced portrait of the African-American community. On Jan. 9 Bishop T.D. Jakes along with executive producer and film star Morris Chestnut will release *Not Easily Broken*, a film about relationships and the redemptive power of love.

Chestnut, who has been an actor in front of the camera, and is now working behind the scenes, said he feels good about how this project portrays African-Americans and says it is because controlling the images is an essential part of that.

"I think us being in control definitely

it was written from a male perspective, that is, from the character of Dave, who Morris Chestnut plays."

Jakes said that this is done not just for entertainment sake but is instructive as well.

"We did it precisely because so many women today really do not know how men feel about relationships—how they really feel about them—because traditionally most love stories, romantic stories are written from a woman's perspective. We thought it might be interesting to do it from a male perspective," he said.

The movie has received rave reviews

to share our emotions. The first time a boy falls off his tricycle, his father runs out there and says 'Stand up, be a man, don't cry.' You're telling a three-year-old to deny his emotions. When he is on a football team or a little league as a young boy, we tell him, 'Man up, suck it up, handle it, you can do it.' Over and over it's reinforced in us not to be emotional or transparent about feelings. After a while we are in a conundrum because we are unable to find the valve that opens up who we are inside, and we either implode or explode emotionally in terms of violence, domestic violence, rage, crime, or drugs because

See Not Easily Broken continued on next page.

A New Beginning for a New Year



Dr. Aaron E. Harold
Data Columnist

Hi Family, we're facing a new year. I'm excited about that, and you should be too. A new year means a brand new start in your life. A new year means a new look on life. A new year means a fresh start. Also, a new year could mean to someone that "I'm going back to school," or "I'm going back to college to get my degree."

It can mean to someone else that you've been sitting around all year worrying about things that you really don't have any control over, and you have made a decision that this new year you're not going to let the trials of life get you down anymore. It could also mean for somebody that you've decided to stop dreaming and start living your dream by starting your

own business. A new year, a new beginning could mean to someone "I'm tired about the way I look" and this year you're going to lose the weight once and for all.

The question comes to mind, "What do you want to do this New Year that you didn't get a chance to do in 2008?" Come on family, have you asked yourself that question yet? Come on, think about it people, and if you haven't asked, you should. Tell yourself, "I'm going to do better this year even though I did alright in 2008." We all should want to get better in what we do, right?

We should not want to sit around and complain and do nothing with our lives, and just let life year in and year out pass us by. Let me tell you this short story. "There was a man who planted a large crop. He was a beginner or some would call him a beginner farmer. He prepared the ground to put his seeds in for planting. After a while, he noticed that his crop was not growing the way it should have been. When he finally figured out what had happened, he forgot to fertilize the ground before he planted his seeds."

What we need to understand about the farmer is that even though he spent a lot of time and money getting

the land ready, he didn't get discouraged to give up farming. This is what he said to himself, "I'm going to let this be a learning experience to me and next year's crop is going to be great. What I'm saying to you is that we all have made some mistakes in 2008. All of us have fallen short in some area of our lives. It may have been in the area of not being the best mother you should have been to your child or children. It may have been in the area of a man and a woman who have been dating each other.

It may have been in the area of not being a good spouse. It may have been in the area of not being a good son or daughter, or employee. Family, let's not look back and feel sorry for ourselves, but let's look forward to a New Year and a new beginning. Donnie McClurkin sang in his song, "We fall down, but we can get back up again." The Bible tells us this in Philippians 3:13, "Forgetting those things that are behind us and move on to the future."

God bless you and have a happy and prosperous New Year. You can call me @ 504-813-5767 with your comment.

Not Easily Broken continued from previous page.

For a country on the verge of having an African-American President, Chestnut said he feels this is a great time to have a film like this in theaters to change the perception of African-American males.

"I think image is extremely powerful. Just having an African-American man as the president of our country, and people seeing that over and over again, time and time again, I know it won't erase that color barrier, but hopefully it will make it more common and more familiar to people who really are not used to seeing men of color in power," said Chestnut.

In this age it is a time to challenge stereotypes using art to show the diversity in the community, according to Jakes.

"Now more than ever, we need art to give a more total comprehensive reflection of who we are as a people, not only as African-Americans, not only as people of faith, but the great thing about this movie is that the cast is diverse," said Jakes.

Continuing his thought and talking about the multi-racial cast in the film Jakes said, "So it brings the Caucasians to the table as well and says 'Why can't we work together, why can't we be friends, why can't we hang out at the gym together, why can't we approach crises together, ride around in the car and listen to that music?' In the movie you've got two black guys riding around in a car with the white guy who is playing hip hop. How American is that? It's really a diverse opportunity for us to find out how to better get along with one another."

New Orleans Producer Darius 'Deezle' Harrison Nominated for Three Grammy Awards

Producer Helps Make 'Tha Carter III' One of 2008's Top Albums of The Year

One of New Orleans' best kept secrets, producer & vocal engineer Darius "Deezle" Harrison is smiling due to the three Grammy nominations for his work with Lil Wayne this past year. Deezle has been nominated for one (1) Grammy as a Songwriter for Best Rap Song of the Year "Lollipop" and for two (2) Grammys as a producer and mixer/engineer for Album of the Year "Tha Carter III."

Known for his innovative and distinct sound, Deezle earned a tag as the "go to producer" after producing seven tracks on Wayne's latest album including fan favorites "Mrs. Officer" and the mega hit "Lollipop" which was the most downloaded ring tone for 2008 according to Nielsen Soundscan. The chemistry between the duo is noticeable to any fan; so much so that Lil Wayne name drops Deezle on the track "Let The Beat Build," which he co-produced with Kanye West.

"I've worked so hard to get to this point in my career. This is the key that will open many doors to what I see is the start to what God has planned for me," states Deezle. "Working on this album was a great experience and I'm honored to be nominated for my work on Tha Carter III."

In addition to his Grammy nominated work on Lil Wayne's Tha Carter III, Deezle has produced songs for Cash Money, Yung Joc, Huey, Teena Marie and even jazz artist Donald Harrison. Deezle also worked on Lil Wayne's first two Carter albums which released to rave reviews. He has engineered tracks like Destiny's Child "Soldier," featuring Lil Wayne, "Crying Out for Me," by Mario, the "Just Fine" remix by Mary J. Blige and Lloyd's "Girls around the World," also featuring Lil Wayne.

A classically trained dancer as well as an accomplished vocalist and musician who plays the guitar, drums, bass and saxophone, Deezle is currently growing his DRUM MAJOR Music label and brand. He says the DRUM MAJOR Music movement will be strong, with a sound easily recognizable, but difficult to copy.

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Photographed by Sean Kennedy Santos

Darkest Before Dawn



Gary L. Flowers
Data Columnist

sonal income paid the bills for most; American jobs were in America; school children had classes such as art, band, and drama as educational options; and the world community actually liked the president of the United States.

And then the lights went out. What a difference eight years makes. The 2000 presidential elections were so illegitimate that only one other time in American history had the winner of the popular vote lost the election; and the loser won (Hayes/Tilden Compromise, 1877). The deal in the election of 1876 was that Rutherford B. Hayes would be declared the President in consideration for the removal of federal troops in the south who were dispatched, in part, to protect newly freed African-Americans by the Reconstruction Congress, following the American Civil War.

Like 1876, the 2000 elections would portend bad times. Within eight months of the Bush Administration (August, 2001) the national treasury had been drained to the extent that the \$230 million dollar national surplus of a year before had become a deficit. Half way around the world, and to their credit, on September 7, 2001, an international delegation met in Durban, South Africa at the World Conference Against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance.

That delegation agreed to shed light on

terrorism - wherever evidence led to such; and address reparations for indigenous people, oppressed and exploited by governments. Four days later, the Conference's light dimmed by the unbelievable events of September 11, 2001 in New York.

Soon, the Bush Administration attacked the sovereign nation of Iraq without provocation, occupied it, and declared war without end - The War on Terrorism.

As bombs lighted the legendary land of Abraham, innocent people, including children, died in the darkness of destruction and dispossession. None other than a journalist known as the Prince of Darkness met criticism of the war by American diplomat with the exposure of his wife's secret identity as a CIA agent.

At home, bombs dropped on Iraq, exploded in American cities with drastic reductions in domestic programs such as health benefits for veterans, The National Endowment of the Arts, education budgets, infrastructure construction projects, and emergency responders. As global lights lowered, so did brilliance of the American Presidency. The White House pushed the passage of the Patriot Act (1 and 2) by Congress, resulting in the suspension of Constitutional protections of personal privacy.

Federal surveillance of private citizens was approved and purchased from American telecommunications companies. In

short, the near decade of darkness was governed by a dim-witted White House that subverted the intent of laws, while not enforcing laws as they were intended. And an Iraqi journalist threw shoes at an American president for the orphans and widows of his war, to boot (pun intended).

But joy comes in the morning. Since the dawn of civilization on African horizons the Winter Solstice - December 21 - records the yearly date when the sun is at its lowest point in the southern sky and seems to remain still for three days. On the fourth day, December 25, the sun appears to rise in the sky until the vernal equinox - March 21 (I know, enough with astronomical facts).

As we bury the Bush Administration, a new day is dawning in America, with a new light for the world provided by the enlightenment of a new son - President Barack Hussein Obama.

While it is true that the darkness yields to light over time, and the sun takes many minutes to rise, we must be patient and keep our heads to the heavens as the sun rises. In the words of poet Maya Angelou, let the "yet-to-be United States of America" be the light of the world.

Gary L. Flowers is executive director and CEO of the Black Leadership Forum.

Too Many Bowls, Too Few Black Coaches



George C. Curry
NNPA

An oversaturation of bowl games is not my No.1 complaint against college football.

Rather, it's the fact that approximately half of the players are African-Americans yet only 3.4 percent of the college football coaches are Black. That's four among the 119 major division coaches.

According to the Institute for Diversity and Ethics in Sports at Central Florida University, that's the fewest Black coaches in 15 years. As recently as 1997, there were twice as many African-American coaches as there are now.

Evidently, the football sidelines suffer from the same on-field racial stereotypes of the past. For years, they said Blacks were excellent players but didn't have the intellect to play the so-called "thinking positions" - quarterback and middle linebacker. Of course, that was pure hogwash. For years, Grambling, Florida A&M and Tennessee State were football powerhouses and it wasn't because they played 10 men on each side of the ball - or without a coach on the sideline.

And if there were any lingering doubts about the Black gridiron intellect, they were removed by Washington Redskins quarterback Doug Williams' MVP performance in Super Bowl XXII and when two Black head coaches, Tony Dungy and Lovie Smith, paced the sidelines in Super Bowl XLI.

Of the 32 NFL coaches, seven are Black,

largely because the league adopted the Rooney Rule requiring teams to interview at least one person of color for all head coach vacancies. If African-Americans can coach in the pros, they certainly can succeed at the college level.

In addition to the failure to interview an ample number of top-flight Black assistant coaches for openings, many universities are still more willing to recycle failed White coaches than take a chance on a promising African-American. Two examples immediately come to mind.

Auburn University hired Gene Chizik as its new head coach after he went 5-19 over two seasons at Iowa State, including 10 straight losses. Meanwhile, the University of Tennessee, eager to get back on the winning track after forcing out Phillip Fulmer, hired another losing coach, Lane Kiffin, formerly of the Oakland Raiders. Kiffin was fired by the NFL team after compiling a record of 5-15.

These two losers were hired while promising African-American coaches were ignored, some of whom had turned around losing programs. For example, Turner Gill took over a program at Buffalo that had not won five games in a season for nearly a decade. Within three years he turned it into Mid-American Conference champion and this year had a record of 8-5.

When Auburn selected Gene Chizik over Gill, one of its most famous alums, Charles

Barkley, was livid.

"I think race was the No. 1 factor," said Barkley. "You can say it's not about race, but you can't compare the two resumes and say [Chizik] deserved the job. Out of all the coaches they interviewed, Chizik probably had the worst resume."

How do we put an end to this nonsense?

One approach would be to adopt a college version of the Rooney Rule. Some have suggested calling it the Robinson Rule, in honor Doug Williams' former coach, Eddie Robinson of Grambling. For that to work, however, penalties must be assessed against universities that fail to cooperate.

A sure-fire way of forcing change would be for star high school players and their parents to spurn athletic programs that spurn Black leadership. If players refuse to enroll in universities that have never hired a Black head coach in any sport or an African-American athletic director at any time, universities would finally get the message. What I like about this approach is that it empowers the athlete and does not rely on the so-called good will of schools eager to exploit Black athletes.

George E. Curry, former editor-in-chief of *Emerge* magazine and the NNPA News Service, is a keynote speaker, moderator, and media coach. He can be reached through his Web site, www.georgecurry.com.

Basketball's "March Madness" has nothing on the college football bowl frenzy - 34 games over a 19-day period spanning the last month of the old year and the first month of the new one. Let's face it, not all 68 teams deserve to be in a bowl. Some - including North Carolina State, Kentucky, Bowling Green, Southern Mississippi, Northern Illinois, Notre Dame and Vanderbilt - got invitations after winning only 50 percent of their games.

Even worse, nine teams - including Florida Atlantic and Memphis - went to bowls after accumulating losing records. Unfortunately, bowl games are no longer rewards for an excellent season. Now, it's all about the money. And the more bowls, the more money.

The Greatest Gift of All at Christmas and In the New Year



Rev. Barbara Reynolds
NNPA Columnist

mega-lies, cronyism, unbridled greed, corruption have destroyed our economy, tarnished our image around the world and at the very worst cost the lives of thousands of our own soldiers and Iraqi civilians needlessly.

Today with the election of President Obama we see the re-birth in the American character of the blessings of hard work, integrity and the pursuit of excellence as realities rather than storybook fantasies.

I see the torch passing, not just from Dr. Martin Luther King Jr, to Barack Obama, but from our African slave ancestors to every living soul with a vision, a dream, a legacy to be built and to pass on.

I first noticed that foreigners were looking at African-Americans differently, perhaps as an extension or a reflection of a rejuvenated spirit, when I was touring Egypt this summer along with a group from the Howard University School of Divinity. Other tourists, not only from Africa, but European countries were smiling and waving at us calling us "Obamas," which based on past experiences abroad I found surprising.

Now as the entire world looks at African-Americans differently because not only is one of our own the leader of the most powerful government on Earth but also the new face or symbol of a professional excellence and morality.

Nevertheless there is still a demand for a change in our culture to embrace this new global reality. The greatest gift we can

give to our first Black President is to put forth our best efforts on all fronts: the best parents, the best students, the best politicians, and the best caretakers of our senior citizens.

For those who believe in miracles, there are a few more we need. Barack cannot fix all our problems; some solutions must come from above.

For example, my Christmas wish is that a lightning bolt hits the Supreme Court building and knocks Justice Clarence Thomas to the floor, and miraculously revives him as a principled Black man. He continues to be an embarrassment.

The latest scandal is how Uncle Thomas took up the cause to deny Barack Obama his history-making presidency based on the stupid challenge that he was not a "natural born" American, which would forbid him from becoming president under the Constitution.

None other than Republican Alan Keyes, who had parachuted into Illinois to run against Obama for president, teamed up with Thomas to press the case even after other Justices ignored it. The argument was that since Obama was born in Hawaii and his father was a Kenyan national, Obama had dual citizenship at birth, which disqualified him from the presidency. Happily on December 8, the Court rejected the case. Only a lightning bolt from heaven could release Thomas of his inbred self-hatred, which he bitterly projects on other Blacks.

Second on my wish list that we can't expect President Obama to fix is the obsession with thug culture. The spectacle of so many "credible" adults standing and applauding Lil Wayne at a recent BET event was typical of why so many of our young people are drugging, gang-banging and busting through the charts with HIV/AIDS.

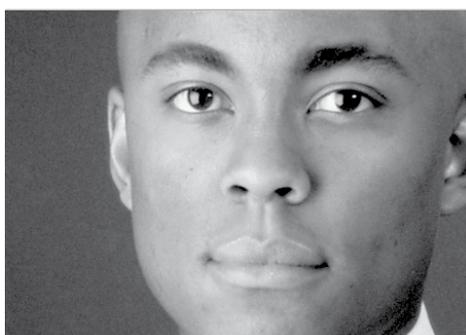
Dwayne Michael Carter, Jr. (Lil Wayne) has a CD on the charts called, "The Lollipop." While the lewd lyrics are too pornographic to be quoted here, I assure you the lollipop Little Wayne is encouraging our boys and girls to lick is not candy. Yet, respectable adults who appear to be in their right minds stand and cheer this pornographic rapper with his pants down showing his underwear.

Lil Wayne, who is up for several Grammy awards, is a hero to many young people partly because of his thug credentials, which includes several arrests for possession of drugs and guns.

The rappers and the thug culture are creating a homicidal environment for our young people as more Blacks die in Black-on-Black violence than soldiers killed in a declared war in Iraq. Again, as HIV is pandemic in our community, those who sing about rampant sex are cheered instead of denounced.

If we can elect a Black president surely we can achieve the next miracle of creating a culture where a Supreme Court Justice to a pornographic rapper can stop projecting values that kill and destroy.

Navigating the Road Ahead



Farrah Gray
NNPA Columnist

of the game at the start with a bundle of natural skills for a particular subject. That's when you're likely to take too many uncalculated risks and enter a minefield ill-equipped.

Study your chosen profession. You can acquire that knowledge in school or in life. Mentors and teachers come hugely in to play here. These are the people who can give you the information you need to move forward, especially at the start line. They often make for great cheerleaders, too.

Even the cream of the crop has coaches, teachers, and mentors. Famous singers have singing coaches. Olympic athletes have coaches. Actors have acting teachers. Bestselling authors have editors.

Professionals like lawyers, doctors, and scientists have mentors — those senior to them who know more through more experience, and can inspire new ways of thinking and problem-solving. We all need someone who can take our raw talent and transform it into polished talent. We also need people who can challenge our thinking, and get us to acknowledge a different perspective from time to time.

Trouble is, as witnesses to (and for some, envious admirers of) others' success we typically see the end result rather than a progression of practice, practice, practice.

When we watch a star perform on the

stage or a runner dashing to the finish line at the Olympics, we forget to consider all the manufacturing that went into that single, winning moment. We skip over the hours upon hours of missed attempts and fine-tunings that helped usher out that now dazzling performance of talent. We are in awe of the outcome but fail to acknowledge and appreciate all the in-come leading up to it.

For example, every singer has a sound check before any performance. So will you before you go out and do whatever it is you're intended to do.

For those who need more structure and a process to handling decision-making, let me share with you my A.H.E.A.D. methodology. It can help you track your options mentally and stay in tune with yourself.

A: Assess risks from an educated standpoint. Do the research necessary to learn all the potential risks involved in a pursuit. Don't overlook any of them.

H: Hear what enters your mind. Don't underestimate the power of gut instinct when weighing pros and cons and taking an honest look at risks.

E: Evaluate thoughts and potential solutions to problems. You'll likely be problem solving from the day you ask yourself those critical three questions. Take your time thinking through what you need to do in

order to move forward. Think through every step and direction you decide to take. Consider other options along the way. Be open to circumstances that change your surroundings.

A: Act based on experience and self-examination. Make calculated moves. Like the game of chess, see if you can act with your third move in mind.

D: Discern between what's working and what's not working to continue forward. This is when you need to perhaps plan a new direction.

We all hit walls once in a while. That doesn't mean we have to stop. We turn around and find another way onward. We have to be willing to let go of ideas and pursuits that clearly aren't working. They should be placed in the desire category instead of the known-skills category. If you hit a wall, there's an open road to be taken elsewhere with another set of skills innate to you.

Farrah Gray is the author of *Get Real, Get Rich: Conquer the 7 Lies Blocking You from Success* and the international best-seller *Reallionaire: Nine Steps to Becoming Rich from the Inside Out*. He is chairman of the Farrah Gray Foundation. Dr. Gray can be reached via email at fg@drfarrahgray.com or his web site at www.drfarrahgray.com

The Legendary Eartha Kitt Succumbs to Colon Cancer

Special to the NNPA from the St. Louis American

(NNPA) - Legendary singer, dancer and actress Eartha Kitt passed away from colon cancer on Christmas Day at the age of 81. Her career began with dance icon Katherine Dunham and resulted in a career that spanned more than six decades and included dance, film, television and music.

She was born in South Carolina, but left as a young girl to live in New York City with an aunt. It was in New York that Kitt auditioned for the Katherine Dunham Dance Troupe on a dare and landed a spot as a featured dancer and vocalist.

Kitt would soon become famous for her raspy voice and her role as Catwoman on the "Batman" television series as well as for being the original vocalist on the Christmas Classic "Santa Baby."

During her career, Kitt was nominated for three Tony awards, two Grammy awards, won two



Eartha Kitt

Emmy awards and was honored with a star on Hollywood's Walk of Fame in 1960.

She had just taped a PBS special six weeks ago in Chicago, which will air in February. Her single "Santa Baby", originally recorded in 1954, was certified gold last week.

Information from CNN.com, and people.com contributed to this report.

Allstate Invites America to Put Its "Good Hands®" to Use on Martin Luther King, Jr. Day and Beyond February

Allstate Insurance Company announced it is designating Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 2009 as Allstate Beyond February Give Back Day, to be observed in Atlanta and cities across the country on Jan. 19, 2009.

As part of the company's commitment to the African-American community and continued commitment to volunteerism, this special initiative will further the ideals and vision of Dr. King in his hometown and nationally by inspiring people to donate their time to worthy causes in their own communities on January 19th and throughout the entire year.

"Beyond February Give Back Day reinforces the importance of giving back to your community in the spirit of my father and everything he fought for," said Bernice King, Dr. King's youngest daughter. "But an even greater tribute to my father's legacy is evidenced by the people who demonstrate the passion and the commitment to serve their communities throughout the year, not just on MLK Day or during Black History Month."

To kick off Allstate Beyond February Give Back Day, Allstate has partnered with The King Center in Atlanta to host a volunteer rally after the annual ecumenical service honoring Dr. King at Ebenezer Baptist Church on the

morning of January 19. During the event, Allstate and King family representatives will encourage the thousands of people in attendance to put their good hands to good use by visiting BeyondFebruary.com to learn about volunteer opportunities they can sign up for in their communities.

During the rally, more than 1,000 volunteers, organized locally by Allstate, will spread out across Atlanta to donate their time and efforts to a variety of charities and non-profit organizations, including the 100 Black Men of America, 100 Black Women of America, the Ryan Cameron Foundation, the Atlanta Tool-Bank, and several public schools, in honor of Dr. King.

Allstate is encouraging all consumers to visit BeyondFebruary.com to find out how to find volunteer opportunities in their zip codes on Beyond February Give Back Day (January 19, 2009). This interactive Web site highlights Allstate's commitment to the African-American community and links to VolunteerMatch, an online search engine that promotes volunteerism and civic engagement by matching volunteers with charitable organizations and non-profits.

Because Allstate believes in supporting the African-American

community well beyond just the month of February, Beyond February was established in 2007 as an ongoing initiative that creates, supports and sponsors programs that empower and enrich African-American communities across the United States. The program is highlighted by the interactive Web site, which, in addition to providing access to information on volunteer opportunities for Beyond February Give Back Day, also highlights the various programs and events Allstate supports throughout the year via an artistic and visual mural.

"At Allstate, we want to make it easy for people to put their good hands to work for the betterment of the community," said Anise Wiley-Little, assistant vice president and chief diversity officer for Allstate. "Beyond February and Allstate Beyond February Give Back Day will empower people to embrace volunteerism while providing them with the resources to carry on the spirit of Dr. King throughout the year."

Highlights of Beyond February since its inception in October 2007 have included sponsorships of the Tom Joyner Family Reunion, the American Black Film Festival, State of the Black Union, the Gospel Superfest, and more.

Plaintiff Happy With Settlement in \$225 Million Race Discrimination Suit Against NASCAR

Jenna Fryer

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (NNPA) - The former official who filed a \$225 million racial discrimination and sexual harassment lawsuit against NASCAR is very pleased with her settlement and looking forward to moving on, her attorney said.

Mauricia Grant reached a confidential settlement with NASCAR following 12 hours of mediation in December in New York. The session was suggested by U.S. District Court Judge Deborah A. Batts after the first court appearance in what was expected to be a lengthy court fight.

Grant claimed she was referred to as "Nappy Headed Mo" and "Queen Sheba," by co-workers, was often told she worked on "colored people time," and was fright-

ened by one official who routinely made Ku Klux Klan references. Grant also alleged she was subjected to sexual advances from male co-workers, two of whom allegedly exposed themselves to her.

"We thought it was in the best interest of our client not to drag this out two to three years," said her lawyer Benedict P. Morelli of New York-based Morelli Ratner PC. "She needed closure. She's a young woman, and when you make the sort of allegations she did, it's difficult to move forward and get on with your life."

Settlement terms were confidential, and neither side admitted liability or wrongdoing.

"She's very, very happy with the resolution," Morelli said. "And I don't think NASCAR wanted to

leave it out there."

Grant worked as a technical inspector responsible for certifying cars in NASCAR's second-tier Nationwide Series from January 2005 until her October 2007 termination. In the federal lawsuit she filed in June in New York, Grant alleged 23 specific incidents of alleged sexual harassment and 34 specific incidents of alleged racial and gender discrimination during her employment.

NASCAR chairman Brian France denied Grant ever complained to her supervisors about anything listed in her lawsuit. But an internal investigation into her claims ultimately resulted in the firing of two of the 17 officials named in her suit.



Mauricia Grant

NAACP Report Shows TV Industry "Seriously Short" in Achieving Diversity

BALTIMORE (NNPA) - Threatening political action if the situation doesn't improve, the nation's largest civil rights organization has blasted the television industry for falling "seriously short" in achieving diversity by not increasing minority representation on programs and in decision-making positions.

Benjamin Jealous, president and chief executive officer of the NAACP, said, "At a time when the country is excited about the election of the first African-American president in U.S. history, it is unthinkable that minorities would be so grossly under-represented on broadcast television.

Jealous was responding to a 40-page report released on Thursday by the NAACP Hollywood Bureau titled "Out of Focus, Out of Sync - Take 4."

"Perpetrating the situation is the fact that the few African-Americans in higher positions in that industry lack power to green light new series or make final creative

decisions, which has translated into a critical lack of primetime programming by, for, or about people of color," added NAACP Hollywood Bureau Executive Director Vicangelo Bulluck.

According to the report, the number of minority actors in prime-time shows has remained flat or even declined in recent years, decreasing from 333 in the 2002-03 season to 307 in 2006-07. The number of minority writers working during the 2006-07 season was 173, a drop from the 206 employed during the previous season, the report said.

Perhaps one bright spot in the television industry is reality programming which, typically, has reduced employment prospects for White as well as minority actors and writers. But on some shows like "Survivor" and "American Idol," the cast is likely to be more diverse than most scripted series, the NAACP noted.

The report said that the shortage of minority faces on prime-

time television can also be traced, in part, to the "virtual disappearance" of Black programming since the merger of UPN and WB networks into The CW network. Before, Black-oriented shows such as "Moesha" and "The Steve Harvey Show" were prominently featured.

CW's lineup now includes many White-oriented shows such as "Gossip Girl" and "90210," although it also airs the Black sitcoms "Everybody Hates Chris" and "The Game."

Despite the NAACP's dissatisfaction with the overall industry, the report noted that the four major broadcast networks have made "important strides" in increasing diversity - but not enough.

The NAACP report called for the creation of a task force with network executives, educators and other advocacy groups similar to a coalition formed several years ago with Asian American, Hispanic and Indian groups. The goal would be to create best prac-



NAACP President, Ben Jealous

tice standards throughout the industry.

The "Take 4" report called on networks to revisit a 2000 agreement to diversify the ranks of actors, writers, directors and executives.

The report raised the possibility of political action if progress isn't made, including a boycott against an unspecified network and its major advertisers or class-action litigation against the networks and parent companies.

Back on Their Feet: Former Inmates Thankful for New Life

Leiloni De Gruy

LOS ANGELES (NNPA) - With the help of a program designed for their needs, people whose backgrounds make it difficult to find work receive a second chance at starting a career.

La-Shell Lewis first went to prison for drug possession in 1988. After her release, she was clean for two years. But a relapse sent her back in 1996. Two more years of sobriety were met with another relapse and another visit to prison in 2000.

But prior to her release in 2001, Lewis' life was changed when Bishop Noel Jones, pastor of City of Refuge, visited the women's detention center and gave her the message she so desperately needed.

Lewis began working with mentally disabled children, then in 2003 she went back to school to get her high school diploma.

Now eight years sober, the mother of six, two of whom are deceased, is a medical file clerk for Lynwood-based Barbour & Floyd Medical Associates.

Approximately four months ago, her life took another turn when she passed by Shields for Families main office and noticed



La-shell Lewis had been incarcerated several times before turning her life around in 2001. A graduate of the Shields for Families program, she now works as a medical file clerk.

men and women carrying ladders and working on telephone poles. Her curiosity caused her to inquire. It was then that she made the decision to expand her skills by joining Shields' vocational certification program, which would certify her in fiber optics and telecommunications.

"I learned fiber optic cable wiring, telephone jacks ... just doing the basics such as punching down, learning how to do video sound and network," said Lewis, who had no prior skills in the area. "My office has a telecommunications room ... so by looking into the [program], I was [able to see] this is the same stuff and I love doing things with my hands.

... Say our phone lines go down at our company I am [now] able to help see why the phones don't work. ... I can go into our telecommunications box and see what's the problem, whether it's the telephone jack or the phone [itself]."

Shields for Families, in partnership with the county Department of Children and Family Services, has been providing career opportunities in medical billing, fiber optics and telecommunications for residents like Lewis, many of whom have prior drug and criminal records.

In addition, Shields provides community workshops, vocational services, legal services and linkage and referral resources

to all persons. Currently, Lewis is receiving legal services from Shields in order to get her record expunged.

Dawn Warrington, who also graduated from the program's first class Nov. 13 and received a certificate in fiber optics and telecommunications, has had her own road to recovery.

The mother of two lost her job as a florist three years ago when she went to prison. "I never wanted to be away from my children again," she said.

It was then that she began looking to enter a drug rehab program that would allow her to have both of her children with her. After a long, in-depth search, she found Shields and for the past 14 months has been in its Exodus Day Treatment Program, which helps women with substance abuse and mental health problems and those at risk for homelessness.

Four months ago, she too became aware of the organization's Vocational Certification Program and began the 12-to-14-week class designed to give people the skills they need to find jobs, be self-employed or perform additional tasks at their current job.

"We learned everything from ladder control to fusing the fiber

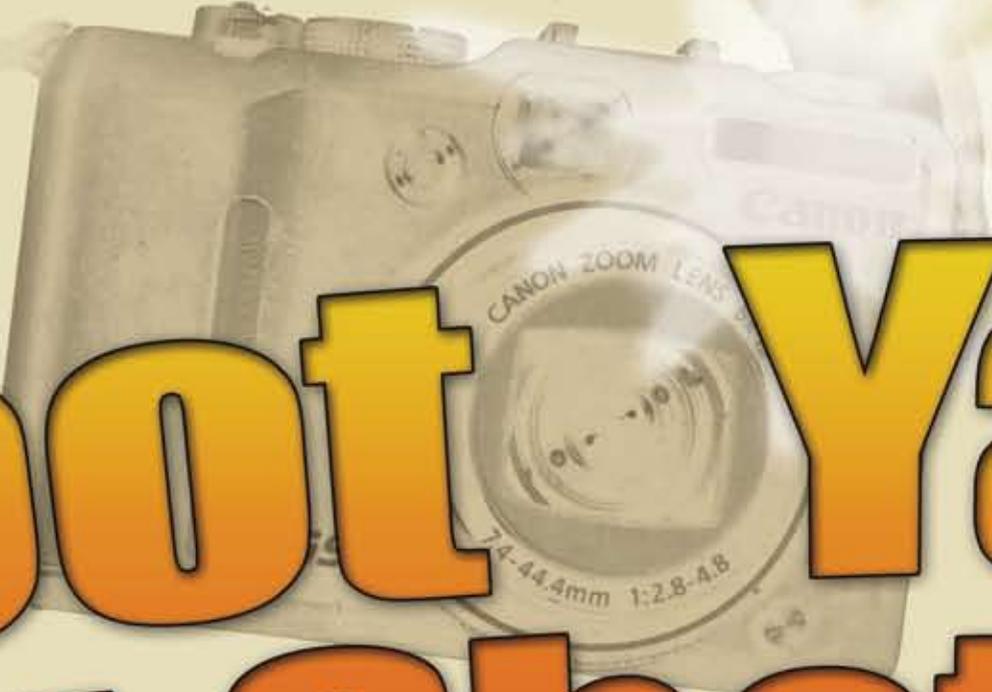
together. We learned so much, I mean I got certified in fiber," Warrington said. "We learned how to climb the poles, we learned how to hook up cable, how to do telephone lines by installing them from the pole, from the hub, all of that. It was a great class."

With three months left to go in the recovery program, Warrington is excited about the possibilities of employment.

"I have gotten so much out of it," she said. "I have learned how to stand on my own two feet. I've been unable to work so that has humbled me as far as finances but I am presently on aid. I am learning how to stand on my two feet without having to break the law to get it and I've learned to be a better parent," she said.

"I'm learning how to live without the use of drugs. My life is good today. This program is just awesome. They help you in every aspect of your life. I am working now on getting my high school diploma through Shields for Families. ... They have life skills classes, relapse prevention, anger management and I have my two children here. ... I know good things are going to come."

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