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New Orleans

Data

News Weekly

"The People's Paper"

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Idris Elba
Stars in
"Obsessed"

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The Spotlight Returns to Local Artists as Jazz Fest Celebrates its 40th Anniversary

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

It was four decades ago when Quint Davis had a vision to create a festival that would showcase talent from New Orleans and the surrounding areas. Today, the New Orleans Jazz and Heritage Festival has grown to be one of the premiere festivals in the world with people coming from around the globe to experience two weekends of amazing music, arts, crafts and food.

This year's festival promises to be another great extravaganza with music from Earth Wind and Fire, Erykah Badu, and Frankie Beverly and Maze, to name a few. In addition, there will also be performances from New Orleans greats such as the legendary Allen Toussaint and The Neville Brothers, who closes out the fest and always gives a rousing performance.

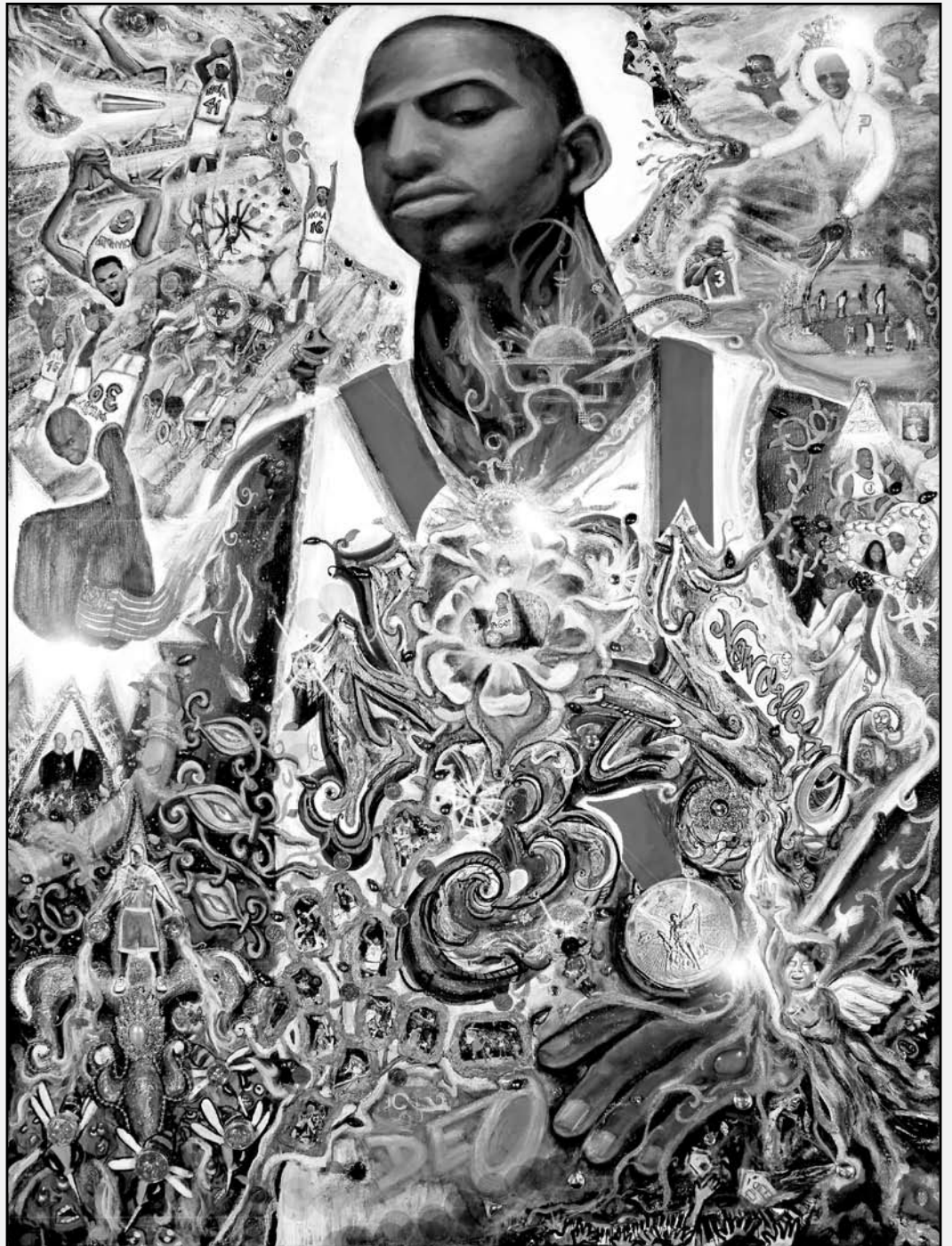
Also, several of the city's local brass bands will perform including the Hot 8 and The Rebirth Brass Band, led by founding member Phil Frazier. The exciting musical virtuoso Trombone Shorty, whose image dons one of this year's festival posters, and New Orleans Queen of Soul and Grammy Award winner Irma Thomas will also hit the stage during this star-studded event.

"I am excited and honored as always to be performing at Jazzfest. It is a great venue to showcase talent from the area and to be seen by people from around the world," said Irma Thomas.

Music is a big part of the festival, but the arts, crafts and food are huge draws as well. Paul Deo, a local artist who now resides in Brooklyn, New York, will be there during the second weekend. "It feels wonderful to come home and be a part of the fest," said Deo. Like many who are now living in other cities after Hurricane Katrina, this is a homecoming for Deo. "This event has become like a family reunion as people come from all over the country to celebrate Jazzfest, to see all their family and friends," he said.

Another visual artist whose work will be on display during the second weekend is Lionel Milton, who was raised in the Lower Ninth Ward. Milton's artistic talent has garnered him praise and acclaim giving him the opportunity to travel to many countries sharing his gift with the world. He is like many of the creative people from the Crescent City—unpretentious and down to earth,

"I love being part of Jazzfest, it's a great New Orleans



This piece is one of the original artworks of Paul Deo, a local artist who now resides in Brooklyn, NY.

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tradition," said Milton. "And with this one being the 40th Anniversary, I feel like being there, I will be part of history."

Milton talked about the future of the artistic life of the city as many of the creative persons of the city are still residing in other cities post Katrina.

"I would love for all the creative people to come back and make the city what it was, but I know that will not happen. What I am encouraged about is that more people are getting exposed to New Orleans artists in other cities," said Milton.

Deo agrees. "I feel that there is so much talent in the city that sometimes people don't know what their talent is worth," said Deo. I am finding that out now as I venture out where I have seen expanded opportunities to grow as an artist and make a living as an artist outside of the city, but New Orleans will always be my source of inspiration."

Terrence Osborne has seen his career take off



Local artist Terrence Osborne spent time in Georgia after Hurricane Katrina before returning home to New Orleans. Above is one of his artistic works.



Artwork by Terrence Osborne.

since his early days where his work was been seen on the "Real World: New Orleans," as well as a mural that stands on the side of the Hilton-Riverside Hotel. In addition, he has also worked with Nike and other companies. For the last two years he reentered the city as a man with a vision, "I wanted to take my career to the next level, and while I spent time in Georgia, my wife and I became homesick and I wanted to



Artwork by Lower Ninth Ward native Lionel Milton.

come back to the things that were familiar to me to inspire my work," said Osborne. "So we came back and I feel good about being back in the place that gave birth to my creativity and I am glad to again be part of Jazzfest."

After the storm, many of the artists have become involved in projects that are connected to rebuilding the city. Milton has worked designing the t-shirts and posters for the project with actor Brad Pitt building homes in the 9th Ward. "Right now I think the art and artists from this city and their work mean more than it has ever [meant]," said Milton.

Deo has also created a mural in downtown New Orleans called House of the Rising Sun and is slated to release two children's books. "We artists have become like ambassadors to the city. We are like a snapshot of what New Orleans has to offer. Many of the people I've met since I've been away say that my work have made them go and visit the city. That is a good feeling that my work has had such an impact,"



Artwork by Paul Deo

said Deo.

As the city rebuilds, where do the artistic community fit into it? The artists are an integral part of what makes the city a special, cultural jewel that keeps people coming back. If this is lost, the city will lose its special luster, that certain joie de vivre that makes New Orleans a perfectly flawed diamond. While many who were part of the arts community are still away and some are finding their talent taking them to new horizons, Irma Thomas said of this phenomenon, "That is good that people are being exposed to New Orleans Music and culture with our artists, and I think it could be good for the city where it wets their appetite to come to New Orleans and get more of it and support the city and its artistic community as the city rebuilds."

Community in Shock Over Kidnapping and Murders of Two Local Teens

Police now have two suspects in custody in connection with the kidnapping and murders of two 19-year-old New Orleans residents. Though arrests have been made, the pain associated with losing the loved ones have not eased, and the community as a whole is still coping with the reality of such a crime.

Fitzgerald Phillips and his girlfriend Calyisse Perkins were kidnapped early Sunday, April 19 from Perkins' Algiers apartment. The New Orleans Police Department located Phillips' car in Treme later that afternoon, and



the bodies of the two victims were found in an abandoned house in Gert Town after receiving an anonymous tip on Monday, April 20.

Phillips was a student at Southern University in New Orleans. He met Perkins while attending Southeastern Louisiana University in Hammond, La.

"To lose two young lives is an incredible blow to the community, and our thoughts and prayers are with the victims and their families," said Victor Ukpolo, SUNO's chancellor, in an official statement.

Perkins worked as a volunteer literacy tutor with Americorps. She had been assisting at Fischer Elementary since September.

"She freely gave her time, spirit, and love of learning to her students and co-workers," said Paul Gauthier, who works with the School Leadership Center of Greater New Orleans. "Though such a loss cannot be replaced, her legacy will live on through the students whose lives she touched," he added.

The suspects, Kenneth Barnes and Layman Foster, both have a criminal history, but have not been arrested in connection with any crime of this nature in the past. Police arrested Barnes after initial questioning on Sunday,

April 19, but Foster did not turn himself in until Tuesday, April 21.

Though police have indicated that Phillips might have known the suspects, there are still no definitive answer regarding any motive for the kidnappings and murders. The two allegedly demanded a \$10,000 ransom during a phone call to Phillips' cousin the night of the kidnapping. Barnes and Foster are being held on several charges included two counts of first-degree murder.

Opinion

Crime Continues to Plague Society...But Why?



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

Ever since last Sunday morning, I have been on edge. I haven't been able to sleep, think, or function to the best of my ability. One might ask why, but if any of the readers watch the news on a regular basis, they probably already know. Every morning

when I turn on the television to find out the latest happenings in my great city, I see the same old story, but just on a different day.

"An unidentified male has been found murdered Uptown," I hear one morning. The next day I hear, "An unidentified male has been found murdered in Central City." And on the next morning I hear more of the same.

And as if the dreadful news of senseless crimes each and every morning isn't enough, Sunday afternoon I watched a news story about two young teens, one a student at Southern University in New Orleans, and the other a volunteer tutor, who had been kidnapped and held for ransom. "What is going on?" I asked myself. "Are the criminals attempting to reenact something they had previously seen in a movie?" As the day progressed, the news became worse. Individuals were brought in for questioning, the kidnapped victims'

car was found and some belongings. And finally, the next day the bodies of the two teens were found in an abandoned house.

I try to tell myself that crime is everywhere. That it isn't just New Orleans; that the young generation is not lost. But even if all of the above statements are true, the horrendous acts such as the kidnap and murder of the teens and all of the murders that occur on a daily basis are not acceptable. There must be a better regard for human life. There must be a way to get people to see that they have a higher calling than what they are accepting. There must be a way to make them see that crime does not pay, and that street life is not the answer.

But what is the ultimate problem that has plagued New Orleans and many cities across the country, which has ultimately led to crime taking center stage? This is the million dollar question. And the million dollar answer is the solution to this problem.

Unfortunately, a solution cannot be found until the problem is fully understood.

In my humble opinion, I think the problem stems from a combination of issues. These issues include (1) a lack of spirituality and acceptance of God, (2) a lack of quality education, (3) a lack of bare resources that allow people to experience various aspects of life, (4) poverty, and (5) an ineffective criminal justice system coupled with an absent rehabilitation program.

Many people who commit crimes have not been exposed to life outside of the inner city. In addition, many of them don't believe that life has anything in store for them other than the way of life they already know. And oftentimes, many of them have seen so many of their friends and loved ones end up in jail or dead until they have decided that these two options are their reality as well. When a culture of thinking is so widely accepted, it has hard to provoke

Crime, Continued on next page.

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State Hires New Contractor to Assist Landlords in the Road Home Program

Two-year deal includes performance measures, potential fines to ensure contractor accountability

BATON ROUGE, La. - The state of Louisiana has signed a two-year contract, complete with performance measures, with ACS State & Local Solutions to administer the small rental assistance aspect of the Road Home program.

To ensure that landlords remaining in the program have continuous service, the state must transition Road Home manage-

ment from contractor ICF International, whose contract ends in June 2009. So far, the program has awarded \$61.1 million in grants, creating 1,312 rental units. ACS will work with the state on changes to the program, including up-front payments to participants.

"Despite having increased the number of rental units produced in this program by 94 percent in the first quarter of this year, we

do not feel that this process is moving quickly enough, so we will be relying on ACS to implement new policies and options to better assist landlords," said Paul Rainwater, executive director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority.

The state selected ACS to run the Small Rental Program through a public bidding process. ACS's contract with the state is capped

at \$37.5 million and includes eight performance-based benchmarks with clear penalties for nonperformance. ACS has been on the ground working under an agreement with the state to transition the management of the program since March, but the company will assume full responsibility for the program next week.

Adjustments or additions to the performance goals will be made

as needed, including when program policies or contract terms are changed.

To meet the continuing functions of the Road Home program as it transitions managers, the state also is negotiating contracts with private firms to run the homeowner portions of the program and to handle IT services.

City Council Sets Deadline for FEMA, State and NORD To Show Clear Path to City Playground Summer Openings

Councilmember Cynthia Willard-Lewis, directed FEMA, the New Orleans Recreation Department (NORD), and the State of Louisiana to work together over the next month towards the re-opening of more NORD facilities by this summer. A Youth and Recreation Committee meeting will be held on May 22 where the parties must account for their progress.

"Like all New Orleans citizens, I am frustrated hearing bureaucratic excuses and explanations about why many of our recreational facilities are still not rebuilt nearly four years after Katrina," said Council Vice President Fielkow.

"I have asked FEMA, NORD and the State to come back to the Council in May, hopefully ready to announce that additional parks and playgrounds will be ready by this summer."

At the committee meeting, held April 7, the following three points of progress towards expediting the re-opening of city recreational facilities were noted:

- FEMA officials will now be embedded within the city administration to expedite the reimbursement process;

- No later than June 17, 2009, FEMA has pledged to open the remaining 11 FEMA trailer park sites that were temporarily occu-

pying NORD property. FEMA has already reopened 4 former trailer sites;

- FEMA pledged in writing to work with the City and the State to ensure that the maximum federal funding is provided for each city recreation project.

Panelists at the hearing included Larry Barabino, Jr. of NORD; Cynthia Sylvain-Lear, Dr. Ralph Thayer, Julie Schwam-Harris and Bill Chrisman of the City of New Orleans; Ronnie Fairly and Bob Josephson of FEMA; and James Clark and Skip Barber (GOHSEP - Governor's Office of Homeland Security and Emergency Preparedness).

Crime, Continued from previous page

change—but we have to keep trying.

It is time to go back to the old saying that it takes a village to raise a child. We have to stop the current trend before it affects future generations. The inner city needs a united effort from parents, government, law enforcement, the community, the educators, and the church. Everyone needs to work toward the same goal of fighting crime and drugs in the community. And to take this initiative a step further, everyone needs to work together to establish

programs that actually work. We have to get proactive in this fight and not assume that it is not our problem because the crime hasn't happened in our neighborhood or to our family members.

Find out what you can do to contribute to the fight against crime in your community. Volunteer to help those in need. Introduce people to new experiences that they have never even dreamed of. Think about how you can bring about change each and every day...and then do it.

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State of Louisiana Lifts HMGP Elevation Cap to \$100,000

Baton Rouge, La. - The state of Louisiana is increasing the maximum amount of money available through its Hazard Mitigation Grant Program; and the state elevation program, which uses \$750 million in HMGP funds from FEMA to provide gap funding for those homeowners whose elevation costs exceed their available Road Home funding.

Last month, FEMA granted the state of Louisiana's request to grant homeowners three more years to complete repair and mitigation work, including home elevations, using Increased Cost of Compliance funds provided through the National Flood Insurance Program. Homeowners should contact their flood insurance companies, not the state,

about eligibility for ICC funds.

"As we have moved forward with this elevation program, met with homeowners and reviewed their individual circumstances, we discovered that many homeowners had funding gaps that far outweighed the \$30,000 elevation grant we could provide through the program," said Paul Rainwater, executive director of the Louisiana Recovery Authority. "This higher elevation grant amount and the extension of the time to use Increased Cost of Compliance funds may help homeowners who want to take the responsible action of elevating their homes, but could not afford to."

So far, the Road Home program has paid more than \$772 million to 26,680 homeowners for eleva-

tions, with another 603 homeowners scheduled to close on \$17 million in funds.

The state's HMGP elevation program, which has stricter regulations and documentation requirements than the Road Home, has processed more than \$177,000 in payments to 14 homeowners. The state is actively working more than 2,000 files, or 61 percent of the 3,366 properties FEMA has funded for the program.

Letters recently went to 3,366 homeowners in the program about their eligibility and notifying them of the change. Another 25,000 letters will be sent out by the middle of May.

French Quarter Festival Brings in Record Numbers

Bringing record crowds, the 26th Annual French Quarter Festival animated the historic streets around Jackson Square. The festival featured more than 150 musical performances on seventeen stages throughout the French Quarter over a three-day weekend. From jazz to rock, from fiddles to brass bands, there was something for every music taste in the city. Citizens and tourists enjoyed beautiful weather for all the festivities, including culinary wonders at the food and recession booths at the major stages. Kicking-off this year's festival season, French Quarter Fest was a booming success!



Above are photos of family and friends enjoying the many activities of the French Quarter Festival.

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Year Up and Microsoft, a Most Elegant Partnership

Working together to create opportunities and strengthen communities

An elegant equation is the simplest path to a solution. Microsoft plus Year Up equals unlimited opportunities. Microsoft and Year Up have come together in an effort to close the digital divide.

Partnerships such as the one Microsoft shares with Year Up are made possible through Microsoft's Unlimited Potential grant. Through this grant, Microsoft and its partners provide hands-on technology skills training to people within the community. The Microsoft Unlimited Potential grant aims to deliver the benefits of relevant, accessible and affordable software to the five billion people who today are without access to technology or the opportunities it affords.

Year Up is a one-year, intensive training program that provides urban young adults, ages 18-24, with a unique combination of technical and professional skills, college credits, an educational stipend and corporate apprenticeship.

"Year Up has achieved excellent results," said Tynesia Boyea Robinson, the executive director of the Washington, DC program. "91 percent of our graduates go on to further their education or obtain well-paying jobs."

A recent Annie E. Casey Foundation report estimates that "4.3 million youth in this country have not progressed beyond a high school diploma and are neither employed nor enrolled in post-secondary education." (KIDS COUNT Data Book, 2006) Microsoft realizes that many of America's youth are woefully unprepared for and lack the skills needed to succeed in today's workforce. They are hindered by the inequities of what Year Up calls the Opportunity Divide – where young people who are in need of higher education and career opportunities are isolated from institutions, people and opportunities that can help them make a successful transition into adulthood and economic

wellbeing.

For years Year Up has worked with Microsoft to broaden access to jobs through information technology education and training. Microsoft has provided dollars, software and training materials to support Year Up's efforts. The company's partnership with Year Up is just one avenue the company has pursued to help close the digital divide.

"Microsoft and Year Up are working to reduce the barriers in our knowledge economy," said Donna Woodall, Microsoft's director of community outreach for the Mid-Atlantic region. "Through this partnership, we are preparing the next generation for economic success through the power of technology."

Year Up participants like Jasmine Anderson are able to apply the skills they learned in the program in real-time. Anderson, a Baltimore resident, leaves home at 5:30 in the morning to arrive on

time at the Brookings Institution, where she's been assigned. This early riser has found her experience as a Year Up apprentice invaluable.

"Year Up has given me a lot of job training. The program has helped me with my professionalism and has laid a foundation for the technological skills that I have now," Anderson says.

Year Up provides a high support, high expectation environment that encourages young adults to reach their full potential. One hundred percent of students who complete the training portion of the program are placed in apprenticeships. Through Year Up's apprenticeships, young people gain real work experience at leading area companies and organizations. Microsoft is also one of over 80 corporate partners that host Year Up apprentices.

Herbert Gay, Microsoft apprentice, said "My mother told me about the program, but see-

ing is believing. It wasn't until I attended a friend's Year Up graduation that I realized that I had to seize the moment and apply for the program. I'm glad I joined the next class of students. The skills I've acquired in the program have given me a head start in my career."

Perhaps the most elegant of equations is the outcome of success when preparation meets opportunity.

"With the help of companies like Microsoft, we're helping students to envision the careers they can have if they apply themselves diligently during and after our program," said Robinson, "I can think of no greater return on our investment than students leaving Year Up and realizing they are assets not just to the companies that they work for but to their communities at large."

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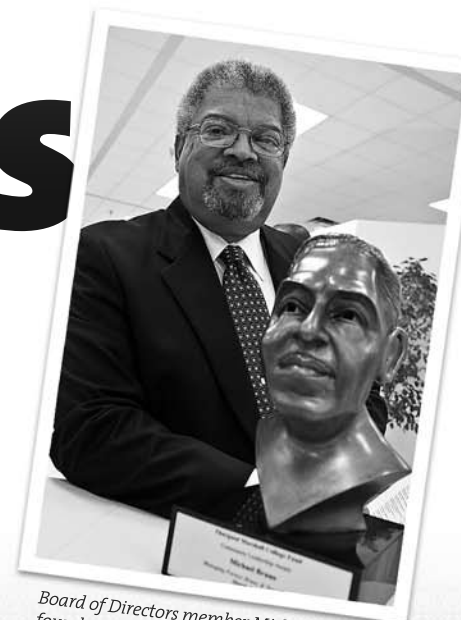
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Idris Elba Stars in New Film 'Obsessed'

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

Fresh off the heels of an amazing performance as Etta James in "Cadillac Records," the beautiful and multi-talented Beyonce Knowles stars in a new film entitled "Obsessed." "Obsessed" is a suspense thriller in which Knowles plays the wife of Idris Elba, who is best known for his roles in "Daddy's Little Girl," and "The Wire."

The film centers around Elba (Derek Charles) and his wife Sharon, played by Knowles. They are living a comfortable middle class life and Elba's character has just received a big promotion as an asset manager. His company then hires a temporary worker turned stalker, Linda Sheridan, played by Ali Larter.

"I got involved with the movie working with Screen Gems. I've worked with Sony Screen Gems



a few times, and this is one of the projects they had earmarked for me," said Elba. "I love working for Sony because they are very loyal, and they work hard, and every time they make a film, they get better and better at what they're trying to do. So that's how I got involved with 'Obsessed'."

Of working with Knowles Elba said, "Beyonce was a phenom-

enal person to work with, unbelievably dedicated, focused, [and] very gracious." In his clipped British accent, he continued speaking of his lovely co-star saying "You know, for someone so sort of well known in her world, her real world is very small and isolated from the rest of us. But she was very open, and we needed to have, you know, a good rapport

in order to convincingly place man and wife on screen, so it was great working with her."

"Obsessed" is starkly different from many films that feature black actors. It is one that focuses on fully developed characters who live a middle class lifestyle, and stereotypes are refreshingly absent. It is one that shows a balanced and positive portrayal of

African-American life. Elba said these things are more possible in the U.S. vs. the U.K., where he is from.

"I feel that, in England, you know, understanding that Afri-Caribbeans make up maybe 5 percent of the populous there, the stories in films and depiction of Afri-Caribbean life are much, much slimmer than, say, here in America where African-Americans are a much bigger majority of the population. Therefore, the stories can reflect and will reflect African-American culture more here. There's more room for that," he said.

Continuing Elba said, "I feel that, in England, growing up, you know, our culture wasn't represented. There was definitely work for Black actors. Otherwise, I wouldn't be here, but there wasn't so much of a representation of our culture, but more representation of one

Black man in the scene or one Black family in a story, so that's the major difference. I feel like the history of African-Americans in this country is obviously bigger, longer, and so, therefore, the stories are bigger and stronger."

"Obsessed" is a film that shows that the roles for African-Americans in Hollywood are broadening in scope and depth. That this is the dawning of a new age for African-Americans in front of, as well as, behind the scenes, as the recent works of Knowles, who served as one of the executive producers on both "Cadillac Records" and "Obsessed." Showing that the era of the 21st century African-Americans as empowered in how they are presented on screen has arrived. "Obsessed" is the latest in a string of films that showcases this encouraging trend.

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The Man With The Camera: *The Unveiling of PerkOgraphy*



Dionne Character
Data News Weekly Columnist

shooting with his camera. What he gave at his "Grand Opening" was beyond anyone's wildest imagination of art.

Located in one of many historic buildings in the French Quarter, Studio 1813 is (1813 Chartres Street) on the corner of Chartres Street and Esplanade Avenue. The building was formerly known as Kingway Studios, a recording facility used by many artists such as The Neville Brothers, Pearl Jam, Sheryl Crow, and a host of others, who chose this par-

He is just a man with a camera who uses his lens to show the world beauty, highlights, mid-tones and shadows in all forms of colors. For he has found his passion; and he delivers it consistently. He places eye to lens, capturing the edge of life with a tasteful glow.

Brian Perkins, the eyes behind PerkOgraphy, was reborn 10 years ago when he starting

ticular structure because of its unique ambience, which still lingers throughout the walls.

As the breeze from Chartres



Photo Credit: Ride Hamilton

Continued on page 13.



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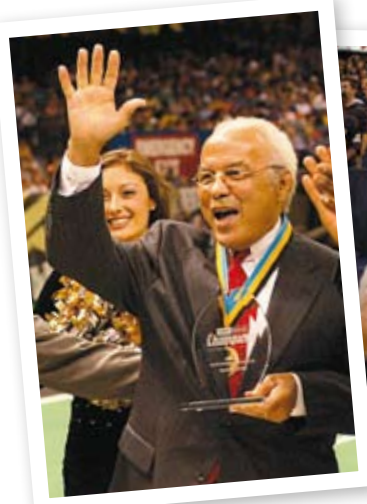
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Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

He is a man who has shot for the moon and caught many stars and his life story is one filled with accomplishments. He is an inspiration that exemplifies that hard work can pay off. Sean Hunter hails from the rough streets of Detroit, Michigan where opportunities and aspirations were in short supply, but he would not let that stop him from reaching his ultimate goal.

Today, he leads the Louis Armstrong Airport as Director of Aviation. Recounting his climb he said, "I am a young man who grew up with a dream of getting into aviation and flying airplanes. I managed to go to college, joined the military and I saw an opportunity in 1993 to come to New Orleans to work at the airport. I started out at the bottom and worked my way up to the top."

Hunter said he is committed to New Orleans and its future. "I look at young men and I want them to see someone who came from similar circumstances like them and know that they can aspire and be whatever they want to be if they work hard, and realize that it does pay off in the end," said Hunter.

In addition to being the Director of Aviation at the Louis Armstrong Airport, Hunter serves on several business and civic boards. One board in particular that holds a special place in his heart is the Dryades YMCA. "It is about building for tomorrow, and we need to have a solid foundation for our young people and be a good example to follow," said Hunter.



Sean Hunter

Staying involved in the community and being part of solutions are important to Hunter. "Wherever there is a need to do something, to help be part of the solution to some of the things that ails the city, I want to be on the front line," said Hunter. "I want to be a positive force for change in any way I can."

Hunter's story shows that dreams can come true and even though a person might not be able to see it, that doesn't mean that it can't be. "For me, it was

me dreaming beyond my doorstep. I didn't know anyone who was involved in aviation, but I knew it was something I wanted to do," he said. "I had the desire to do it, so I learned everything I could and found a way to make it happen for myself. It is within the grasp of a lot of our youth. You just have to believe it, and then you can achieve it."

He is a dedicated family man and father of two who says his family is what keeps him inspired everyday. "When I get up I know that this is my purpose—to be a good husband, father, and provider to my family," said Hunter.

Hunter's life has been one that has been blessed, for he is wise beyond his years and understands what it means to have a full life. "When I was young, a lot of my friends always talked about they wanted to be rich. Well I understand that, but being rich goes beyond just material things. Today, I look at myself and no, I haven't become rich, but I am enriched knowing everyday that I can help better a young person's life or a community and leave my mark on society as a decent man."

Sean Hunter is a man who has taken his life and soared above the clouds. He is proof that if you sacrifice and stay committed and determined, your dreams can come true. Hunter continues to inspire excellence with his example, and today Data News Weekly wants to recognize him for his accomplishment by naming him our Trailblazer for the month of April.

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Empowering Today's Generation to Change the World

Partnerships are key to creating opportunities and strengthening communities



By Tynesia Boyea Robinson
Executive Director,
Year Up, Washington, D.C.

Rising unemployment has hit the African-American community especially hard. For many, the job search is complicated by a lack of education or technical skills.

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First 100 Days: Key Civil Rights Leaders Give Obama 'A', With 'Incompletes' on Grassroots Economics

Hazel Trice Edney
NNPA Editor-in-Chief

WASHINGTON (NNPA) – This Sunday, April 26, will mark the 100th full day since the inauguration of America's first Black president. January 20 was a day marked with tears of joy and painful reminiscing. But it will be most remembered for the overwhelming glory of the historic moment.

President Barack Obama's initial accomplishments have included:

- His immediate confrontation to the nation's failing economy amidst which he now sees "glimmers of hope";
- The reversal of a string of anti-union executive orders issued by the Bush Administration;
- The establishment of the Middle Class Working Families Task Force;
- The closing of the controversial Guantanamo Bay lockup for alleged terrorists;
- His tour of Europe with First Lady Michelle Obama, which raised good will for America abroad during the G-20 economic conference;
- His trip to Mexico with hopes of stopping violent drug cartels and preventing them from entering the U. S.
- His reaching out to Cuba for the renewed relationship, supported by the Congressional Black Caucus.
- A new commitment to pour millions of dollars into the prevention and awareness of HIV/AIDS in America.

But, specifically, how is the new president doing on issues pertaining to African-Americans from a civil rights perspective? Pointing out that 100 days is simply not enough time to tell, some civil rights leaders give him an A so far; most also noting an 'incomplete' on the grassroots economy.

"There are some A's and a couple of incompletes," says the Rev. Jesse Jackson in a phone interview from Thailand. "I think the position against torture, an A; the G-20 conference, putting a credible face on America's foreign policy where he has trust capital and Bush had trust deficit disorder."

Jackson also listed Obama's reaching out to Cuba, Venezuela and the overture toward Iran as all A's along with his dealing with the student loan industry, which Jackson described as a "\$95 billion a year rip off."



President Obama at his Inauguration in January 2009.

But, the incompletes – mainly in the area of economics – are clear, he says.

"There's an incomplete on the stimulus because it must be more targeted to get to the bottom. As the states get it, they're using the term shovel ready. But, shovel-ready for those who don't have a shovel because of the lack of capital and lack of credit means they may not be ready. That could be seen as boot straps without the boots."

To be fair, Jackson conceded that the President could only demand that the money gets out of Washington.

"But, we must demand that the states get it down to where the people are," he said.

"We have to be certain that it gets down to the most unemployed the most in need of training, the most in need of business development. That's an ongoing struggle there."

As Black unemployment surges toward 14 percent, National Urban League President Marc Morial agrees.

On a scale of 1-10, Morial gave the President a 9 for his first 100 days. In the Black community Morial cited a need for greater civil rights enforcement and the need for help with job development.

"The creation of an agency task-force to assist African-Americans in securing construction jobs and

green jobs; and the hiring of African-Americans in subcabinet positions at Education, HUD, Labor and Health & Human Services," Morial says.

Like Jackson, he says African-Americans must press local and state government to do right by stimulus money.

"We need to remain engaged and hold mayors, governors and local school districts accountable for the stimulus dollars to ensure that African-Americans are included in its benefits," Morial says.

Morial also praises Obama for getting off to a fast start with the passage of the stimulus bill, the expansion of the State Children's Health Insurance Program (SCHIP) and the appointment of Attorney General Eric Holder.

Harvard law professor Charles Ogletree also applauds the President's appointment of Holder, America's first Black attorney general and lists a string of observations that have impressed him within the first 100 days, including "his symbolic and substantive decisions evince a level of maturity and calm judgment rarely seen by someone so early in their term as President."

He gave Obama a 10 for adopting a stringent ethics code for his administration and for suspending the prosecution of suspected terrorists who have been detained, but not charged with offenses for

nearly seven years; for outlawing water boarding as an interrogation tactic and for appointing former rival and new York Senator Hillary Clinton as the Secretary of State.

However, Ogletree's wishes for the next 100 days are just as strong as he also points to the need to connect with those at the bottom of the economic ladder.

"I would like the President to do a tour of America and ascertain the extent and the causes of poverty in America and seek a bipartisan set of proposals, comparable to a modern day American Marshall Plan to rebuild America and energize its people from the bottom up," Ogletree says. "Furthermore, I would hope that President Obama will continue to work with HBCUS to create our next generation of leaders in business and industry."

While civil rights leaders across the board applaud the new president, they almost consistently stopped short of the highest rating of 10, noting the incomplete on the issues pertaining to grassroots African-Americans.

"President Obama has tackled some of the critical issues affecting this country, reversed some of the wrongs of the previous administration and has offered hope for all Americans," says NAACP President and CEO Benjamin Todd Jealous. But, he quickly notes criminal justice issues that need work.

"Forty percent of the prison population is African-American while African-American's only make up 13 percent of the country's population," Jealous says. "We would like to see the President pass a series of laws that would do away with racial profiling, eliminate the excessive use of force by law enforcement and enforce strict guidelines on prisoner treatment."

Like other leaders, Jealous also strongly points out economic deficiencies in the Black community.

"Our citizens are losing their homes at a rate we have never seen before, small businesses are folding and more Americans are losing their jobs every day. President Obama needs to address these issues and address them fast," Jealous says. "The housing crisis is crippling our country and the administration needs to call for a moratorium on foreclosures on homes. Further, President Obama needs to implement smart

policies to stop the exponential job losses and put an end to the hemorrhaging in the small business community."

Jealous concludes, "We cannot mortgage the lower class to invest in the middle class. With millions of African-American's out of work, the President needs to address the issue of poverty. A large number of American's live on Main Street, however a large number of African-American's live on Back Street, and the President must continue to offer hope to those aspiring to be in the middle class."

While many say it's far too soon to realistically rate the President, they are quick to say what they want more of.

John Payton, director-counsel of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund, applauding Obama's appointment of Holder, also wants more attention to the impoverished.

"Many inner city communities are in economic and social distress," says Payton. "Their public schools are failing to graduate many, in come cases most, of their students. Public housing is in an equally distressed situation. Jobs are being lost; health providers and health insurance are being lost. The criminal justice system is playing an inappropriate

role in many of those communities. We need comprehensive programs to address these critical problems."

Payton says social and civil rights groups must propose policies for corrective action and not stand by and watch.

The greatest help for the administration must be everyone's patience says Wade Henderson, president and CEO of the Leadership Conference on Civil Rights.

"I don't think you can judge someone after only 100 days. That said, he's accomplished more in his first quarter than most presidents achieve in their entire first term. He's focused on creating jobs where we need them and has signed into law a number of backlogged civil rights bills," says Henderson. "We didn't get in the morass we're in today overnight and we're not going to get out of it in 100 days or 200 days or even in a year."

Perhaps Jackson put it in the most succinct nutshell. "We're better off than we were before he was inaugurated."

Somalia Piracy and the Untold Story: Connected to Toxic Dumping, Illegal Fishing

Saeed Shabazz
Special to the NNPA from
The Final Call

UNITED NATIONS (NNPA) - The head of the UN's body charged with combating piracy has advocated establishing a UN force to fight the piracy problem off Somalia's coast—but the problem may be more complex than simple banditry on the high seas.

According to the UN secretary-general's spokesman's office, Secretary-General of the International Maritime Bureau Efthimios Mitropoulos said the Gulf of Aden, the gateway to the vital Suez Canal, and the eastern coast of Somalia rank as the world's top piracy hot spots.

The Gulf of Aden accounted for a third of all attacks on ships in the first nine months of 2008, said Mitropoulos. Thousands of cargo ships and tankers pass through on their way to Mombasa port in Kenya or destinations in southern Africa.

While the hijackings have been described as the work of criminals, officials admit the problem

of waste dumped off the coast of Somalia may be a reason why ships have been commandeered.

In September, a Ukrainian freighter with Russian tanks on board, anti-aircraft guns and heavy weaponry was seized by Somali pirates and ransom negotiations are ongoing.

A spokesman for the pirates, who reportedly use the autonomous region of Puntland as their base, told Al Jazeera some of the ransom money will be used to help clean up waters off the Somali coast ravaged by years of toxic waste dumping. The ransom demand is a means of "reacting to the toxic waste that has been continually dumped on the shores of our country for nearly 20 years," the spokesman said.

Ahmedou Ould-Abdallah, the UN special envoy for Somalia, said the world body had "reliable information" that European and Asian companies are responsible for the dumping. The United Nations has also been told that some Somali pirates claim to act as "coast guards," protecting their country's waters, he added.

"This is not something new, the accusation that toxic dumping is happening off the shores of Somalia, it is amazing though that it is now coming out," said Sadia Aden, president of the Somalia Diaspora Network. "Opinions are mixed on the pirates. Some of the people are saying the pirates are defending our territory," Aden told The Final Call.

A political solution in Somalia would solve the piracy problem, said Aden. "We need elections. We need a central government," she argued.

Somalia has not had a central government since 1991 when late President Mohamed Siad Barre was ousted.

Analysts said the chaotic state of the Transitional Federal Government has meant no binding trade measures are in affect and Somalia has not signed the Basel Convention or the Bamako Convention, which ban the import of hazardous waste to African nations.

"While I know the subject of this interview is waste dumping in Somalia, I must say that toxic

dumping is an issue all over West and East Africa," said Nii Akuetteh, executive director of Africa Action, a member of the Scholars' Council at Trans Africa Forum and founder of the Democracy and Conflict Research Institute in Accra, Ghana.

"The Somali toxic waste dumping issue is of great concern to me because it spills over to other African nations," Akuetteh said. "Did you know that when the Islamic Courts Union was in charge of Somalia, piracy had come to a virtual halt? But thanks to the Bush administration and Ethiopia after the ouster of the ICU in 2006, the phenomenon returned," said Akuetteh.

In early October, the UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1838 (2008) which determined "that the incidents of piracy and armed robbery against vessels in the territorial waters of Somalia and the high seas off the coast of Somalia exacerbate the situation in Somalia which continues to constitute a threat against international peace and security."

In a Final Call interview, Pro-

fessor Abdi Ismail Samatar, of the geography and global studies department at the University of Minnesota, observed, "The UN must monitor more closely the toxic waste issue; and there doesn't seem to be any mention of that in Resolution 1838."

While the media is covering piracy, there needs to be coverage of the plundering of Somali resources by rich companies and rich governments, said Prof. Samatar. "They are destroying the coral reefs—breeding grounds for the fisheries—destroying the livelihoods of Somalis, taking the food out of the mouths of the poor."

According to Aden there are 3.5 million Somalis facing starvation. East African waters, particularly off Somalia, have huge numbers of commercial fish, including the prized yellow-fin tuna. Observers say the Somali coastline once sustained hundreds of thousands of people as a source of food and livelihoods.

PerkOgraphy, Continued from page 8.

Street blew up the flight of stairs, whisking you to sign your name and email in the guest book, one could feel the flow of the original artwork of PerkOgraphy, which was perfectly placed. As the music played and the sun shined through the bare windows, some sipped imported wine, while enjoying various cheeses and perfectly dipped chocolate covered strawberries. You could hear footsteps on the beautiful 1800 year old hardwood floors, as you witnessed vibrant smiles on faces, while many gathered beneath their favorite pieces of art. Giving a glimpse into the window to his spirit and soul, allowing all who visited to take a deep breath to the unveiling of life through the eyes of a man with a camera, Brian Perkins is an entrepreneur, who has taken his dream and intertwined it with the Spirit of New Orleans.

Three stories of art and balance made this "Grand Opening" appealing to all who were invited and those who stopped by including Actor, Hill Haper, along with many others who were traveling

to and from the French Quarter Festival.

Some of the collections featured were Spirit and Soul, Women In Wine, and Glamour Row, which introduced eclectic nudes, The Aftermath of Katrina and Classy, Sassy Ladies of the South.

If you missed the Grand Opening of Studio 1813, you can stop by every first Saturday of the month, starting May 1 to creatively see life through the lens of Brian Perkins. For more information email perkography@gmail.com.

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Lorillard Tobacco Company Supports Regulation But Opposes FDA Oversight

The Lorillard Tobacco Company issued a statement earlier this month with regard to the passage

of a bill by the House Committee on Energy and Commerce that would force the U.S. Food and

Drug Administration (FDA) to regulate the tobacco industry.

"The Lorillard Tobacco Com-

pany opposes H.R. 1108 – legislation that would force the FDA to regulate tobacco. While Lorillard fully supports reasonable federal regulation of the tobacco industry, the FDA already is overworked by Congress and is the wrong agency for the job. The challenges facing FDA are well documented. Adding a new industry for the FDA to oversee when it is struggling to fulfill its core mission is misguided. It will only compromise the health and safety of millions of Americans.

"This legislation also has fundamental problems. It would codify a 12-year-old FDA regulation that is blatantly unconstitutional,

providing competitive advantage to our larger rivals. In addition, it makes the development and marketing of safer tobacco products impossible while providing no guidance to the FDA as to how to carry out this new regulation.

"It is important to note that FDA Commissioner Dr. Andrew von Eschenbach has made it abundantly clear that he does not believe FDA should be the agency to regulate tobacco. Tobacco is not a drug or device that should be regulated by the FDA. Forcing the FDA to depart from its core mission to regulate a product that is inherently dangerous is simply wrong."

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CHILDREN SHOULD NOT SMOKE

The FDA is Clearly Overwhelmed

The Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is supposed to approve new medicines, monitor the safety of those already on the market, and keep our food safe.

But, currently the FDA is not doing a good job. In early 2008, a blood thinner manufactured in China which the FDA let into the US was contaminated by a mysterious ingredient and caused 81 deaths.¹ Summer 2008 brought a salmonella outbreak, blamed first on tomatoes and later on hot peppers, that infected 1,442 people and resulted in at least 286 hospitalizations in 43 states.² Just this winter, salmonella in peanuts killed six people, made 486 people sick and led to the recall of more than 2,800 foods with peanut ingredients.³

It's clear that the FDA is already overwhelmed. Should they be given the authority to regulate the \$80 billion tobacco industry, too?

Congress Wants the FDA to Regulate Tobacco

Congress wants to add tobacco products to the FDA's list. We think that's just wrong. The majority of Americans are losing confidence in the FDA's ability to protect our nation's food and drug supply. Recently, a national survey revealed that 61 percent of U.S. adults feel the food recall process

is only fair or poor, while 73 percent of adults say they are just as concerned about food safety as they are about war on terror.⁴

It's clear that the FDA is already overwhelmed. Should they be given the authority to regulate the \$80 billion tobacco industry, too?

Before the latest FDA blunders, a poll was conducted which found that 82 percent of likely voters are concerned that a proposal in Congress to let FDA regulate tobacco would interfere with the agency's core mission of regulating the nation's food and drug supply.⁵ This is an issue which deserves to be fully debated, and right now, that isn't happening.

The FDA is Not the Place for it

Lorillard supports additional regulation of the tobacco industry. But the FDA

is not the place for it. Today's ineffective food and drug safety programs pose an immediate threat. Therefore, expanding FDA's current role would be a health hazard all its own.

¹Harris, Gardner. "Heparin Contamination May Have Been Deliberate, F.D.A. Says." New York Times. April 30, 2008.
²"Investigation of Outbreak of Infections Caused by Salmonella Saintpaul." Center for Disease Control and Prevention. August 28, 2008. URL: <http://cdc.gov/Salmonella/saintpaul/>
³"Is the FDA a broken agency?" The Associated Press. March 3, 2009.
⁴"Food Safety: Majority of Americans Feel Industry Doesn't Do Enough." American Society for Quality. March 11, 2009. URL: <http://www.asq.org/media-room/press-releases/2009/20090311-food-safety.html>
⁵"Zogby Poll: 82% Fear Tobacco Regulation Mandate Puts FDA Core Mission at Risk." Zogby International. February 26, 2008.



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Young Environmentalists Lead Earth Day Observances in New Orleans

City of New Orleans to hold teach-ins on soil remediation and renewable energy

As the City of New Orleans observed Earth Day on Wednesday, April 22, two young City employees, part of a new generation of environmental stalwarts, took the lead in presenting programs for school children and the community.

The City hosted teach-ins at two local schools, James Singleton Charter School, 2220 Oretha C. Haley Boulevard, and Drew Elementary School, 3819 Saint Claude Ave. Danielle Purifoy, Environmental Projects Coordinator, and Zachary Embry, Energy Permitting Specialist, will facilitate the projects. The development of environmentally sustainable practices is a priority for Mayor C. Ray Nagin.

"New Orleans is fortunate to have a new generation of young people to be involved and concerned with the maintenance and sustainability of our environment. They are participating in a growing movement of individuals who desire to find solutions to the environmental challenges that we face today," said Wynecta Fisher, Director of Environmental Affairs. "In order to attract and retain this type of talent, we must work with the business community and organizations that have environmentalism as part of their business model."

Eighth grade students from the Singleton Charter School joined Purifoy from 10 until 11:45 a.m. for the re-opening of the Sunflower Project New Orleans, a pilot research garden at the corner of Oretha Castle Haley Boulevard and Erato Street in Central City. Earth Day marked the one-year anniversary of the beginning of the project, which involved planting sunflowers on the lot to phytoremediate the soil, which had elevated levels of lead in some areas. Phytoremediation is the process by which plants and flowers remediate toxins from soil. Since then, the original sunflowers have been harvested and another cycle has been planted and harvested. Lead in the soil is now well below EPA accepted levels.

During the teach-in, students helped to plant sunflowers in one portion of the lot and planted beans and peas in a portion of the lot that will become the Sun Harvest Urban Farm Collective, a kitchen garden that will provide fresh produce to nearby Café Reconcile. Dr. Lovell Agwarambo, a professor of chemistry at Dillard University and one of the collaborating scientists for the Sunflowers Project New Orleans, helped to conduct the teach-in.

Purifoy, 25, is originally from North Carolina. She said she is excited about the environmental opportunities in New Orleans.

"I want to connect local youth and the community to a growing project that focuses on work force training and urban farming," she said. "I am focusing on the next generation. It is important that local youth are exposed to other employment opportunities and this exposure can help them focus on some of these areas while they are still in school."

Renewable energy was the theme of the teach-in from 1 until 2 p.m. at Drew Elementary. Embry conducted a hands-on demonstration of wind and solar energy production, discussing the benefits of each for the environment. He also showed photographs and shared information about some of the solar energy installations he has conducted in New Orleans.

"The Obama administration is really pushing renewable energy," said Embry a 27-year-old Kentucky native. "The President wants to make sure that we have an energy independent future and my presentation will give the students a glimpse at what their future could be."

Entergy Celebrates Earth Day, Encourages 'Green' Action

New website provides customers with resources to help reduce carbon footprint

Helping the environment just got a little easier thanks to a new user-friendly Web site Entergy introduced today as the company celebrates Earth Day 2009.

Entergy's Earth Day Web site (www.entergy.com/earthday) is part of a larger effort to encourage its employees, customers and others to conduct their personal lives in such a way that Earth's environment is preserved for future generations. The site, which conveys the theme that every day is Earth Day, offers a home energy calculator, a personal "green" planner and energy-efficiency games for children.

"As responsible, caring citizens we should all work to become more environmentally conscious so that our children's children can breathe easy in a sustainable future," said J. Wayne Leonard, Entergy's chairman and chief executive officer.

The Web site was conceived as a way to share information about Entergy's environmental activities and provide tools to help others explore ways to reduce their carbon footprint. In addition, it provides a platform for visitors to share their own Earth Day activities by posting stories, photographs and videos about what they are doing to help the environment.

From major efforts such as producing clean power using nuclear energy to small solutions like encouraging customers to use energy-efficient lightbulbs, Entergy's intention is to lead and motivate others by example. Entergy's comprehensive environmental strategy includes initiatives to stabilize its carbon dioxide emissions, restore coastal wetlands, promote energy efficiency, improve communities from an environmental perspective and encourage recycling. Entergy is recognized as one of the nation's cleanest power generators and is regularly named to the exclusive Dow Jones Sustainability Index.

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