

Lighting The Road To The Future

New Orleans

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Data News Weekly On the Scene

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ACORN Under Fire

What Does it Mean for the People?

Shaniece B. Bickham, Ph.D
Managing Editor

One of the nation's largest grassroots community organizations has found itself under harsh criticism after months of being targeted by right-wing activists and conservatives. Staff of the Association of Community Organizations for Reform Now, known formally as ACORN, was recently caught on camera advising activists disguised as a pimp and a prostitute on ways to start a brothel and evade taxes.

As a result of the videotaped meeting, Congress has moved to cut funding to ACORN, which was founded in 1970 and has a membership of over 500,000 families. This scandal is the most recent of controversies sur-

rounding the organization, which was accused of voter registration fraud during the 2008 U.S. Presidential campaign season. With the increase in scandals and cut in federal funding, how will ACORN's overall mission to "help those who have been historically locked out" be affected?

In an official ACORN statement on Sept. 15, the organization said that when the ACORN staffer, Tresa Kaelke was approached by the disguised activists in their provocative costuming and with their outlandish scenario, she could not take them seriously. The staffer responded to the activists' outrageousness with her own personal style of outrageousness.

"They were not believable," said Kaelke. "Some-

what entertaining, but they weren't even good actors. I didn't know what to make of them. They were clearly playing with me. I decided to shock them as much as they were shocking me. Like Stephen Colbert does – saying the most outrageous things with a straight face."

ACORN's CEO Bertha Lewis admitted in an official statement from the organization that the issues in the video did need to be addressed, however.

"As a result of the indefensible action of a handful of our employees, I am, in consultation with ACORN's Executive Committee, immediately ordering a halt to any new intakes into ACORN's service programs until completion of an independent review," said Lewis.



All photos: www.acorn.org

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Lewis also said in her statement that an independent auditor and investigator would be named to thoroughly review ACORN's systems and processes. The reviewer's recommendations would then be made to her and the ACORN Board.

"We enter this process with a commitment that all recommendations will be implemented," Lewis added.

ACORN kept its word and announced on Tuesday, Sept. 22 that former Massachusetts Attorney General Scott Harshbarger would spearhead the independent inquiry into the organization's processes. Though there isn't a designated timeframe for completion of the investigation, ACORN says that the review will be "aggressive, thorough, and far-reaching." Harshbarger has also expressed his commitment to the review process.

"I have been asked by the leadership of ACORN to conduct an independent and comprehensive inquiry and review of the management of its service delivery to communities. The CEO and Board have also asked me to make a full report, including rec-



ommendations for restoring ACORN's full capacities to carry out its mission on behalf of low- and moderate-income families," said Harshbarger.

During the investigation, ACORN has suspended accepting new clients into its service programs for working-poor families including tax preparation, housing assistance programs, and benefits screening until the independent review is completed. The



organization has not suspended its community organizing and advocacy work, however.

The decision by Congress to suspend funds to the organization did not sit well with ACORN leaders. Lewis said in a Sept. 17 statement that the organization gets most of its support from its members and other supporters, so the lack of federal funds won't have a huge impact on overall operations.

"We're disappointed that the House [of Representatives] took the rare and politically convenient step of attempting to eliminate federal funding for a single organization, one that has been the target of a multi-year political assault stemming variously from the Bush White House, Fox News, and other conservative quarters, said Lewis.

President Barack Obama, while serving as a community organizer, represented ACORN in a lawsuit against the state of Illinois in 1995. Some believe that ACORN is unfairly targeted by those who don't support the President because of his former ties to the organization.

In an interview with ABC's "This Week" on Sept. 20, Pres. Obama said that the actions he saw on the video with ACORN were certainly inappropriate and needed to be investigated, but admitted that he had not been following the situation closely.

Before all of the scandals, ACORN made tremendous strides in several areas to assist low-to-moderate income families. Notable ACORN campaigns

according to www.acorn.org are:

- **Affordable Housing:** Through this program, ACORN demanded more rehabilitation programs aimed at developing affordable housing and increased production of affordable housing.
- **Better Schools:** ACORN members believe that parents' hard earned tax dollars are used to finance the public school system, so their offspring should reap the benefits.
- **ACORN Fair Housing:** ACORN Fair Housing is an independent organization federally funded through the Office of Housing and Urban Development's (HUD) Fair Housing Initiatives Program (FHIP) grant. The mission is to prevent and eliminate discriminatory housing practices.
- **Fair Tax Fees:** For approximately two years, ACORN has waged a campaign against refund Anticipation Loans (RALs). These loans have triple-digit interest rates that are marketed extremely aggressively to low-income families. ACORN has attacked this issue in several ways including directly targeting tax preparers to change their practices, conducting door-to-door outreach to warn families about the high costs of RALs, operating sites that offer free tax preparation, and working for legislation on the city, state, and federal level to protect consumers.
- **Foreclosures:** Beginning in the 1980s, ACORN has fought against redlining and discrimination and for greater community investment. The organization also fights against predatory lending that eventually leads to foreclosures.



- **Gulf Coast Recovery:** ACORN has assisted with organizing New Orleanians to rebuild the city on its own terms. With its headquarters in New Orleans, ACORN staffers continue to work for the city's recovery.
- **Utilities:** ACORN won reforms of utilities service practices nationwide in 2006, which helped low-income customers pay their bills and avoid service disruptions. ACORN also works to impose moratoriums on shutoffs, so that families are not left without heat in winter or refrigeration in summer.

NORD Director Accepts Job with Children's Defense Fund

Larry Barabino Jr., who served as the Director of NORD since 2006, step down as head of the city's recreational department to accept a position with the Children's Defense Fund, a national non-profit agency that advocates for health, education, and children's moral and spiritual foundation. Barabino's departure was effective Sept. 18.

"Of all of the critical positions we had to fill after Hurricane Katrina, the Director of NORD was exceptionally challenging. I knew that whomever was to lead NORD had to have a unique skill set. They had to be part project manager, part FEMA negotiator, and still maintain a full-time focus on establishing quality programs that would help our children in their adjustment as they returned home after the most tragic event of their young lives. Larry has



NORD Director Larry Barabino, Jr. Photo Credit: www.cityofno.com

been an exceptional NORD leader and motivator." said Mayor C.

Ray Nagin.

In the summer of 2006, Barabino answered the call to lead the rebuilding of the City's recreation department. Barabino's charge was to work alongside the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) staff, and the City's Capital Projects and Recovery staffs in their efforts to immediately stabilize facilities, restore FEMA parks to the department, and to rebuild damaged facilities. He was also charged with redeveloping youth, senior

and adult programming. The City estimates the Hurricane and flood damage to NORD recreational facilities exceeds \$60 million.

To date, under Barabino's tenure, NORD has:

90 playgrounds and play spots are open and operating

23 active, recovery projects are in progress

10, open, federal and state compliant swimming pools.

Year-round swimming programs Serviced an average of 11,000 children and families weekly

Under Barabino's leadership, NORD re-established year round programming and center activities ranging from sports, to education and cultural awareness for community usage, servicing an average of 11,000 children and families weekly. NORD continues to experience substantial growth averaging weekly totals of 2,500

participants in 2006; 7,000 participants in 2007 and 11,000 participants in 2008. This past summer, more than 5,000 youth participated in camp programs, and NORD currently has 2,500 participants signed up for the fall football season.

"After Hurricane Katrina, the importance of play for the children of New Orleans was never more relevant. Right from the outset, Larry Barabino played an integral role in helping facilitate numerous playground projects with KaBOOM! all across the city as bringing safe places to play for the children of New Orleans became a top priority of the New Orleans Recreation Department." said Alejandro Cardemil, Associate Director, Client Services, KaBOOM! "Thanks to Larry's dedication and commitment to the cause of play, so many children now have a

Newsmaker, Continued on page 6.



LEADERSHIP FOR A CHANGE

ED MURRAY
FOR MAYOR

ED MURRAY has 18 years of experience in Louisiana government, providing unique and invaluable advantages for the betterment of our city. He is aware of funds available to our city through grants and government programs and can put those funds to work quickly and efficiently. Ed Murray is poised to be the driving force for a greater New Orleans.



AS MAYOR, ED MURRAY WILL:

- Tackle crime head-on with a new chief of police
- Restore blighted housing back into commerce
- Improve medical facilities through newly acquired funds
- Work to ensure the best possible flood control systems
- Create a true community for growth among area businesses
- Encourage cooperation between government entities so that common goals can be achieved
- Establish a Mayor's Office of Education



State of Louisiana Approves \$13.9 Million for Five New Libraries in New Orleans

The state of Louisiana has approved \$13.9 million for the construction of five new libraries in New Orleans, allowing the City of New Orleans to access federal Community Development Block Grant funds needed to implement the project.

The approved library projects are as follows:

- * \$3 million for the New Orleans East Regional Library at 5641 Read Blvd.
- * \$3 million for the Algiers Regional Library at 3014 Holiday Drive.
- * \$2.9 million for the Nora Navra Library on a vacant lot located on A.P. Tureaud Avenue and N. Prieur Street.

- * \$2.5 million for the Robert E. Smith Library at 6301 Canal Blvd.

- * \$2.5 million for the Norman Mayer Library at 2098 Foy St.

The funding comes from the Long Term Community Recovery Program, a \$700 million pool of federal disaster-recovery money set aside by the Louisiana Recovery Authority and Office of Community Development to help local governments rebuild and implement long-term recovery plans.

LRA Executive Director Paul Rainwater said, "By using disaster recovery funding, these libraries will be rebuilt better than they were before the storm - not only because of expanded space

and additional services, but also because they will be protected against future damage. Hardening these structures will facilitate the libraries' rapid recovery from potential flood events, in keeping with the state's goal of rebuilding smarter, safer and stronger."

FEMA will demolish the structures, which have been shuttered since Hurricane Katrina, but only pay for the replacement costs of the damaged facilities. The CDBG disaster recovery money will be combined with the FEMA funds to build larger and stronger libraries at the same locations - with the single exception of the Nora Navra Library, which will be built on a larger, vacant parcel within

one block of its previous site.

Prior to Hurricane Katrina, the New Orleans Public Library system served 484,684 individuals with about 0.5 square feet of library space per capita, which placed the city in the bottom 25 percent of comparable cities. The City's Public Library Master Plan recommends doubling the space for reading, computer use, educational programs and community meetings, which will boost the per capita library space into the top ten percent of comparable cities.

The state's LTCR program supports implementation of local governments' long-term recovery plans in the most heavily im-

pacted communities in the state. In 2008, the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development approved LRA's request to reallocate \$500 million in CDBG dollars to the program, bringing to \$700 million the total amount of long-term recovery funding available to the parishes. Funds are distributed among the parishes through the LRA/OCD according to a formula based on estimated housing and infrastructure damages inflicted by hurricanes Katrina and Rita.

In total, the LRA has allocated \$410,720,016 of CDBG funding to the city of New Orleans for LTCR projects.

N.O. City Council Advocates for Intercity Rail Project



Photo credit: www.nocitycouncil.com

The project supports a rail system between New Orleans and Baton Rouge.

The New Orleans City Council recently passed a resolution urging Gov. Bobby Jindal and the Louisiana Department of Transportation and Development (DOTD) to submit an application to the Federal Railroad Administration (FRA) for development of the High-Speed Rail Corridor between Baton Rouge and New Orleans.

The resolution, which the entire council co-authored and unanimously passed on Sept. 17, advocates DOTD begin the process of attempting to develop the Intercity Rail Project between New Orleans and Baton Rouge by submitting the application to the federal government, due Oct. 2.

FRA holds an \$8 million pot of money for states with identified critical high-speed rail corridors. The funds would go to capital infrastructure improvements for those selected projects.

"This is a great opportunity for Louisiana that does not come along often and our state officials need to take every step possible to ensure we do not get left at the station," said Council President Arnie Fielkow. "I understand the state has some concerns about finding funds for the eventual operation and maintenance of a high-speed rail project, however, it is important to throw our hat in the ring and attempt to develop creative financing solutions over the next year so that we don't miss another opportunity."

Fielkow also authored a resolution passed Thursday that urges the U.S. Congress to amend federal Medicaid rules to account for the aberration in personal income statistics following hurricanes Katrina and Rita. Louisiana soon will confront a significant increase of its match rate to the federal government for Medicaid - from 28 percent to 37 percent. The match increase resulted from inflated per-capita income statistics in the greater New Orleans region from the post-Katrina building boom, and also from federal rules which count insurance settlements and Road Home grants as personal income.

"Our city and our state have been dealt many financial blows since the 2005 storms and our citizens still have many unmet needs, with healthcare topping the list," Fielkow said. "This additional strike to the state's budget is one that is unjust and easily corrected. With this resolution, we are urging federal legislators to make our match fair and accurate."

Six Louisiana Schools Earn Blue Ribbon Distinction

Six Louisiana public schools have earned the coveted distinction of being named a National Blue Ribbon school. The prestigious honor, which is awarded by the United States Department of Education (USDOE), recognizes public and private elementary, middle and high schools that are either academically superior, or have made dramatic gains in student achievement and have helped close gaps in achievement among minority and disadvantaged students. The six Louisiana schools were among 314 on the 2009 list released by the USDOE today.

Louisiana's 2009 Blue Ribbon Schools are Sherwood Middle School, East Baton Rouge Parish; Ben Franklin High School, Orleans Parish; L. J. Alleman Middle School, Lafayette Parish; French Settlement Elementary School, Livingston Parish; DeRidder Junior High, Beauregard Parish; and Vidalia Junior High, Concordia Parish.

"We want to congratulate these schools and districts for earning this exemplary status," State Superintendent of Education Paul Pastorek said. "All of these schools are classified as high poverty, and yet they are beating the odds. The administrators, teachers, staff, students and families in these school communities are to be commended for their outstanding effort and success." The Blue Ribbon Schools Program recognizes schools based on two criteria:

(1) schools with at least 40 percent of their students from disadvantaged backgrounds that dramatically improve student performance to high levels on state tests; and

(2) schools whose students, regardless of background, achieve in the top 10 percent of their state on state tests or, in the case of private schools, in the top 10 percent of the nation on nationally-normed tests.

The level of poverty in the six Louisiana schools ranges from 47 percent to 100 percent. Their 2008 School Performance Scores (SPS) range from 94 to 107. The aim for schools is to earn a SPS of 100 or higher; the state average is 86.3.

"These schools are raising student achievement despite very challenging circumstances, and we are very pleased to celebrate their success," Board of Elementary and Secondary Education President Keith Guice said. "We want to thank the administrators, teachers and staff in these school communities for their dedication and work, which are clearly benefitting their students."

A ceremony honoring all 2008 Blue Ribbon schools will be held Nov. 3, 2009, in Washington, D.C. Each school will receive a plaque and flag signifying their Blue Ribbon status.

Local Businessman Cuts Through Red Tape and Opens Fourth Business

As developers, retailers and city officials continue to drudge through the logistics necessary to advance the agenda for growth in New Orleans East, a community vital to the city's recovery as a whole, one gentleman is putting his investment dollars where his heart is. Kurte Pellerin, accompanied by State Representative Cedric Richmond and a crowd of festive and enthusiastic local residents, ceremoniously cut the ribbon to his fourth New Orleans-based business on Saturday, Sept. 19.

Citing "the deep desire to see his city restored to its original charm and splendor" as his motivation, Pellerin admits that the daunting task of navigating



Pictured from Left to Right: Cedric Richmond, Kurte Pellerin and Debbie Baham Photo courtesy of Russel Robinson of M and M Murals

or this city, that I love so much, was never even considered," declares Kurte.

Fueled by the overwhelming support he received from others with a vested interest in seeing New Orleans East rebuilt, Kurte said he feels optimistic that New Orleans will once again be a city of great prominence. He views the opening of yet another local business as a progressive step in that direction, and encourages other business owners to consider New Orleans East as a place to do business. He says that "City Councilwoman Cynthia Hedge-Morrell and The Regency Park Board of Directors understood his vision and eagerly provided him the support and resources necessary to bringing

and became proactive." And that is precisely what he did, by completely renovating and then opening the beautiful Pellerins Reception Hall, located in Mid City, in May of 2006, followed by the acquisition of Uptown's charismatic Le Roux Supper Club, Kurte Pellerin vigorously undergirds his personal philosophy that the city will be rebuilt "one small business at a time" with real action.

During Saturday's ceremony, Representative Richmond spoke fondly of his memories of BBH Leather, one of Pellerin's earliest entrepreneurial endeavors. "I recall as a young boy being proud and inspired by Kurte's business ownership every time I walked pass BBH and Ebony

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New Orleans East residents gather to celebrate the opening of Regency. Photo courtesy of Russel Robinson of M and M Murals



Kurte Pellerin and Rep. Cedric Richmond. Photo courtesy of Russel Robinson of M and M Murals

the maze of permits, licensing and other bureaucracies was often times challenging. "But giving up on either this project

a decision to stop complaining about businesses either not returning or not willing to take the risk of opening up in this market

this effort to fruition."

The Grand Opening of The Regency Reception Hall marks his third such investment into New Orleans' recovery, since Hurricane Katrina. "Like every other citizen of this great city, I became frustrated with the lagging recovery efforts in certain areas," laments Pellerin. "I made

Square, and I continue to be impressed today by his courage, dedication and hard work." Presenting him with the City Council Proclamation, on behalf of Councilwoman Hedge-Morrell, Richmond lauded Pellerin's efforts and encouraged the citizens of New Orleans to continue to support his businesses, asserting that "Kurte's reinvestment into this community is a commendable first step, but citizen support will be what drives the success of businesses in the area."

The Regency Reception Hall, Pellerins, Le Roux Supper Club and Ebony Square, all operating under the auspices of KMP, LLC are heroic examples of one man's commitment to the restoration, rebuilding and recovery of "America's City". And though care may have once forgotten our fine city, it is heartening to know that gentlemen like Mr. Pellerin have not.

Newsmaker from page 4.

place to play all across the City of New Orleans!

This summer, Barabino initiated the redevelopment of NORD's Wilderness Program, offering summer campers the opportunity to gain environmental and survival skills, and continued the Water Awareness Program, which teaches water safety to students within the city's school systems. The NORD Jets swim team also completed a successful season under the direction of Barabino and NORD's Aquatics Coordinator, Randolph Shannon who was named Coach of the Year. Cheerleading and Tennis Specialty programs were also re-established during Barabino's tenure.

In the last three years, NORD has partnered with corporate and non-profit organizations including NIKE, the Drew and Britney Brees Foundation, Coca Cola, Operation Kids, Wal-Mart,

KaBOOM! and Lil Wayne's One Family Foundation, along with tens of thousands of volunteer to restore, rebuild and reopen NORD facilities and playgrounds. Barabino also worked with the Recovery School District, The New Orleans Hornets and player NBA player Chris Paul, NBA player Chris Duhon of the New York Knicks' Stand Tall Foundation, The New Orleans Saints, The New Orleans Police Department and the New Orleans Ballet Association (NOBA) to offer more recreational opportunities for youth.

"Larry exhibited great dedication for young people and has worked tirelessly to make sure the kids had everything that they needed for the programs," said Jason Trosclair, Director of Youth Programs for the New Orleans Saints. "Post-Katrina, he played a vital role in assisting the

Saints Youth Tasks Force, and will remain a member to continue working for programming, and in providing opportunities for youth football throughout the region. The task of rebuilding recreation in New Orleans has taken great courage, commitment, time and effort, and I know that he will continue this mission."

NORD also co-hosted the Special Olympics games, sponsored the first Morris FX. Jeff Sr. Track Relays, held its first Health and Recreation Fair and hosted the First Annual Back to School Fest, helping prepare kids for the new school year while also stressing crime prevention.

"It has been an honor to drive the rebuilding of NORD. Through

all of the challenges of a post-Katrina environment, especially the lack of recovery funding, bringing recreation back to our youth, adults and seniors in the midst of the devastation and rubble left by Hurricane Katrina, has been the greatest challenge and most fulfilling mission of my life," said Barabino. "It was my goal to re-

establish this department as a better, stronger recreational outlet, and to position NORD as one of the best recreational outlets in the nation. I believe that in this fourth year of recovery and rebuilding, NORD is well on its way to fulfilling that goal."

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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Data's feature Shoot Ya Best Shot showcases candid photos from around town. To have your photos included in the Shoot Ya Best Shot special section, email them along with the photographers name to datanewsphotos@gmail.com.



The night was festive as Irvin Mayfield performed at The Playhouse in the Royal Sonesta



Mr. and Mrs. Kermit Ruffin and Mr. and Mrs. Marlin Gusman at The Chocolate Bar.



Mr. and Mrs. Craig Mitchell at Austin's.

The Chocolate Bar always brings out the crowd.



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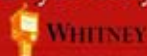
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Angola III: A Life in Solitary Confinement



Dionne Character, Author
Data News Weekly Columnist

"...I am free from Angola, but Angola will never be free of me"

As the lights dimmed to the sounds of the song, "Ship ahoy", the cast took us through time, music, events and the drama of human life behind bars.

The stage was propped by an electric chair, warden's desk, a few benches and the most prolific of them all, a prison cell which represented solitary confinement.

There were happy scenes, sad scenes and powerful words uttered from the lips of Robert Hillary King, Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace, who organized a prison protest against the depressed

conditions at Angola State Penitentiary. These inmates were later accused of the murder of a prison guard and placed in solitary confinement.

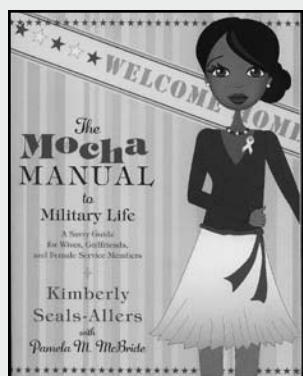
This powerful production was written by neophyte, Parnell Herbert and directed by Wayne Dehart. It was indeed a trip through the elements of time changing, people changing and how everything basically stayed the same, for men who played cards and swept floors, men who took their frustrations out on the world through constant push-ups and reading the bible, men who had to make the adjustment to a dejected life, which focused on dehumanizing all human beings, who

stroll with life-sentences through prison hallways.

This unbelievable mixed cast came together from Houston, Texas with the exception of a chosen few from The City of New Orleans. While this production ran for only one-weekend, its message to the people is to take a stand, do something in your city and get involved in the movement of life behind bars.

My spirit was lit on fire, in knowing that there ain't nothing in this world stronger than a black man with a purpose to live long enough to tell his story.

"Mocha Manual" Gives Insight About Surviving Military Life



"The Mocha Manual to Military Life"
by Kimberly Seals-Allers and Pamela M. McBride
c.2009, Amistad
\$14.99
365 pages

Terri Schlichenmeyer
Data News Weekly Contributor

Your husband lives with his uncle. It's an interesting relationship.

His uncle tells him what to do and where to go. Your husband is obviously a grown man, but he must get permission from his uncle to go almost anywhere and do practically everything. This uncle says "Jump" and your man says "How high?" And the most interesting thing is, they both think it's all good.

You haven't been married long, and

you really don't know if you can live with this uncle in the picture or not. But with "The Mocha Manual to Military Life" by Kimberly Seals-Allers and Pamela M. McBride, you and your man and Uncle Sam will do just fine.

So that man in uniform caught your eye and then he caught your heart. You're looking forward to a future together. Just you, him, and the U.S. Government.

As an MS (Military Spouse), you'll take on some challenges that will be difficult and some that will be fun. You'll learn, you'll travel, and yes, you'll be lonely sometimes. But there are things you can do to make life easier for both of you and for your future family.

Because your existence will, for expediency's sake, be tied to your husband's rank, you'll need to learn as much as you can about the Armed Forces, particularly rank, structure, and what's expected as the wife of a man in uniform. Understanding protocol is key to your sanity and your husband's career.

And on that note, just because you're an MS doesn't mean you can't have a career, too.

Be ready to gather lots of paperwork and then gather more. Understand that freebies exist in the military, but the government moves s-l-o-w-l-y. Know that being separated from your military spouse will happen more often than you

think, which means, basically, that you'll be a "single parent" a lot of the time. Be willing to take care of things yourself, be flexible, and ask for help when you need it. Learn that CP time is totally unacceptable. And those infamous moves? Yes, you'll have a lot of them but the rewards definitely outweigh the hassles.

Finally.

Someone had the good idea to tell it real, offer advice from the trenches, gather helpful information into one bound book, and present it in a useful way. Finally.

"The Mocha Manual to Military Life" is, foremost, written for the benefit of African American wives and service members. Authors Kimberly Seals-Allers and Pamela M. McBride offer information specifically meant for women of color, and they address racism in the ranks (among other things). But don't let that deter you from using this book because the vast majority of information – including a glossary of military terms, a list of resources, and more – is useful for any new military spouse, no matter what race, and that includes men.

Be aware that much of what's here can seem daunting and a little scary, but if you need this information, get this book. "The Mocha Manual to Military Life" is one you'll salute.

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Behind the Scenes of the Angola 3

A Conversation with Playwright Parnell Herbert

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief

Parnell Herbert is a man who has dedicated his life to enlightening people through his art. His latest project is a play that centers on the Angola 3, directed by Wayne DeHart. Robert King, Albert Woodfox and Herman Wallace arrived at Angola Prison, Louisiana, as young men under various circumstances in the late 1960s. While inside prison, contact with members of the Black Panthers led to the creation of one of the only prison chapters of the Black Panther Party in 1971. The men then organized prisoners to build a movement within the walls to desegregate the prison and end systematic rape and violence. They also fought for better living conditions, worked as jailhouse lawyers helping prisoners file legal papers, and organized multiple strikes and sit-ins. Woodfox and Wallace were convicted of the 1972 stabbing murder of 23-year-old prison guard Brent Miller. King was placed in solitary confinement while under investigation for the same murder. The charges were eventually dropped, but later he was charged with the murder of an inmate.

The three men were taken out of the general prison population and were held in solitary confinement after Miller's murder in 1972. They remained in solitary confinement until former Black Panther member Malik Rahim, who later co-founded Common Ground Collective with Robert King, became involved. In 1997 Rahim, along with a young law student, Scott Fleming, discovered that these men were still locked up. They be-



A Mardi Gras Indian serves as one of the characters in the play.

mit murder charge. Herman Wallace and Albert Woodfox are still imprisoned. Wallace has been moved to Hunt's Correctional Facility and Woodfox is still at Angola. Both men remain in solitary confinement.

Their cases have gained increased interest over the last few years. Since his release, Robert King has worked to build international recognition for the Angola 3. He has spoken before the parliaments in the Netherlands, France, Portugal, Indonesia, Brazil and Britain and about the case and political prisoners in the U.S. King was received as a guest and dignitary by the African National Congress in South Africa and has spoken with Desmond Tutu. Amnesty International has added them to their 'watch list' of "political prisoners of conscience."

wright, why not write a play that I feel could be more impactful."

Herbert met with one of the Angola 3, Robert King, and told him of his intention to produce a play based on their story, "I talked to Robert King and he was very accepting and said you have my support, and said he would talk to the other two and said he is sure they will support this project because 'our story needs to be told,'" said King.

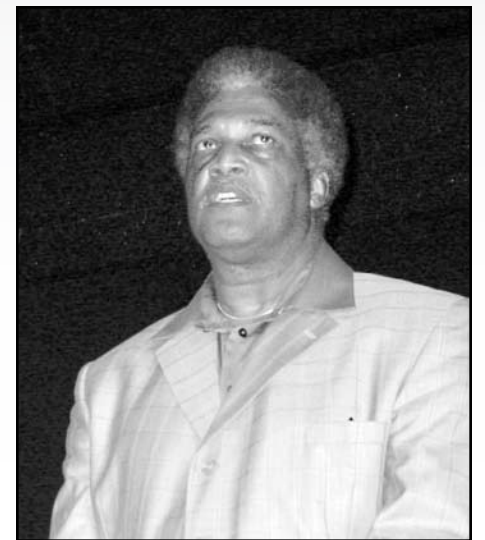
It took six months for Herbert to come up with the initial draft. And when he thought it was finished, more information surfaced, so he went on the arduous task of re-writing and revising the script. "This story kept unfolding and I continued to find out new things and started to add to the play," he says. After finally completing the script, Herbert still had an uphill battle in finding a venue to stage his production. "I am now living in Houston, Texas, so I went to one of the historically black colleges there and they said they could not do it. Then I came to New Orleans and approached another historically black college and they also said no," says Herbert.

He would not be deterred in making his production work, so he contacted Loyola University. "They said that they would stage my production and Tulane University got on board as well, but I have to say that it was my greatest challenge with doing this production," says Herbert. "And I understand with the subject matter that some of the more conservative schools may not have wanted to be associated with it, but I am just glad that it was able to be produced."

Herbert felt like it was important to

says Herbert. "If it's not the Angola 3, do something where your contribution can make a difference in the world."

The play is a powerful and poignant story where men struggle to retain their humanity and sanity behind bars in solitary confinement. It is also a musical



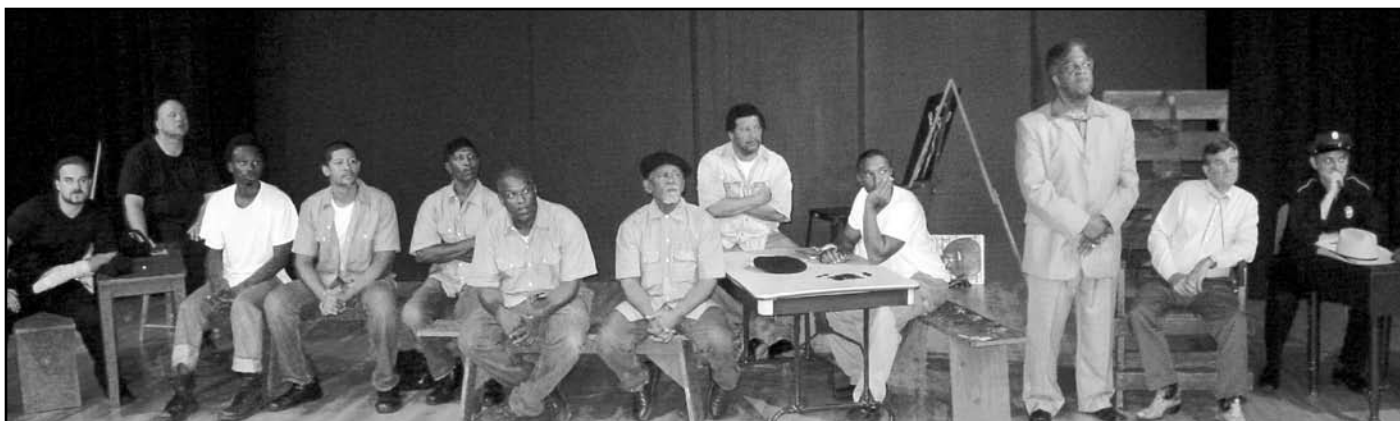
Parnell Herbert

journey through the period from the 1960s into the present day. It also takes you into the heart of the New Orleans tradition with an amazing performance by Chief David Montana, nephew of the late Big Chief Allison "Tootie" Montana.

"I felt it was important to have a scene paying homage to Chief Tootie," says Herbert. "I was one of the people that organized the meeting we had in the chambers of the city council where he died." He says of the traditions of a city and people, "This is who we are and I felt the world needs to see that our experience is unlike anything anywhere. I felt it was necessary to put that scene in the play where they reminisce about their lives in New Orleans."

Herbert says Robert King has become one of his best friends and he truly admires his courage. "Robert saw the play and was happy with what we did. He said, 'you captured our story,'" says Herbert. Herbert, who financed this project himself, hopes that he can continue producing the play. "I want more people to see it and know that the Angola 3 are only a few of the many political prisoners that are housed in prisons across the U.S. and around the world." I wanted to see this vision come to life and will continue through my art and community work to fight for justice.

Information from http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Angola_3 included in this report.



The cast of Angola 3.

gan investigating the case, questioning the facts of the original investigations at Angola and raising questions about their original trials.

Robert King was released after 29 years in solitary confinement after his first conviction was overturned and he pled guilty to a lesser conspiracy to com-

"I became interested in their story by watching a documentary on them, and I as well as others was astounded by it," says Herbert. "We talked about how we could get more people to see the film. I personally thought it was a bit repetitious and maybe couldn't hold people's attention, so I thought since I am a play-

stage this at a college because he wanted young people to become aware of the Angola 3 and their plight. "I have been an activist for most of my life and it I think it is the spirit of the young people that bring about change, so I felt it was essential that young people get a chance to see the play and become involved,"

Dr. Doris Roche-Hicks

A Principal's.... Principle

Edwin Buggage
Editor-in-Chief



Dr. Doris Roche-Hicks is a woman who has lived her life to serve people. Presently, she is the principal of Martin Luther King Jr. Charter School located in the Lower Ninth Ward. It lies as a beacon of hope among barren streets in what was once a bustling vibrant community. "This was a neighborhood full of people before Hurricane Katrina and it will be once again," says Roche-Hicks.

Raised in the Ninth Ward she always had a desire to serve her community. "Growing up I always felt that I wanted to work in the community in some capacity," says Hicks. For over three decades she has made children a priority, making herself available and impacting the lives of young people. She has been a vigilant advocate pushing young people to pursue excellence. She says now after the devastation education is of even greater importance and

ed to be done," says Roche-Hicks. Adding with passion ringing in her voice, "We know the kids of the Lower Ninth Ward deserve a quality education and we were going to make sure they received one by any means necessary."

Outside of education she is a voice for change in her devastated community as a board member of the Lower Ninth Ward Neighborhood Council. "One of our victories was to get the school re-

opened, and we are working to get resources for the people in the neighborhood and get information about where to go to access certain things that can help them in rebuilding," says Roche-Hicks. She understands the power of working together, so she has been reaching out to other neighborhood groups to create a united front.

Roche-Hicks has been featured in the Atlantic, Essence, CBS News and many other media outlets. She has also been given an award for her community service by People Magazine for the work she is doing in the Lower Ninth Ward. She says although she is glad that her efforts are being recognized, it is a joint effort between her and her dedicated staff.

"It hasn't been me, it is the entire staff. We never set out to do what we are doing to be recognized. We are doing what we do because we know it need-

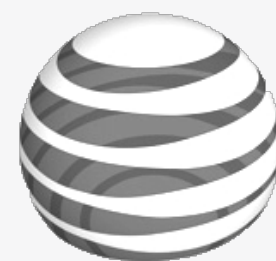
opened, and we are working to get resources for the people in the neighborhood and get information about where to go to access certain things that can help them in rebuilding," says Roche-Hicks. She understands the power of working together, so she has been reaching out to other neighborhood groups to create a united front.

She says her spirit to serve comes from her family and she truly believes the adage 'It takes a village to raise a child.' "I was always around people who served. I had family members who were active in the community whether it was through education, the church, etc. I grew up with a desire to give back and I will continue in that tradition to help inspire the next generation," says Roche-Hicks.

"The Lower Ninth Ward is a true community where people are genuinely concerned with one another and are trying to rebuild," Roche-Hicks says of her neighborhood. "There is a lot of help needed, and we are not giving up. We are continuing to move forward with rebuilding our homes and our lives. I realize that everyday is a struggle, but I always see a bright spot when people are fixing on their homes or parents coming into the school to let us know they are back. That inspires me and I would go anywhere else this is my home."

Dr. Doris Roche-Hicks is a woman on a mission; a principal with principles who lives to give back. Data News Weekly recognizes her contribution and is proud to name her our Trailblazer for the month of September for her continued dedication and service to her community.

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Fight Heats up over Discriminatory Housing Laws in St. Bernard Parish

Jordan Flaherty
Data News Weekly
Contributor

Alice Walker, Oprah Winfrey, and President Obama are pulled into local battle

Rebuilding efforts in St. Bernard Parish, a small community just outside New Orleans, have recently gotten a major boost. One nonprofit focused on rebuilding in the area has received the endorsement of CNN, Alice Walker, the touring production of the play *The Color Purple*, and even President Obama. But an alliance of Gulf Coast and national organizations are now raising questions about the cause these high profile names are supporting.

The dispute focuses on the responsibility of relief organizations to speak out against injustice in the communities in which they work. Since September of 2006, St. Bernard Parish has been aggressive in passing racially discriminatory laws and ordinances. Although these laws have faced condemnation in Federal court and in the media, rebuilding organizations active in the parish have so far refused to take a public position.

Racial discrimination has a long history in St. Bernard politics. Judge Leander Perez, a fiery leader who dominated the parish for almost 50 years, was known nationally as a spokesman for racial segregation. The main road through the Parish was named after Perez, and his legacy still has a hold on the political scene there. Lynn Dean, a member of the St Bernard parish council told reporter Lizzy Ratner, "They don't want the blacks back... What they'd like to do now with Katrina is say, we'll wipe out all of them. They're not gonna say that out in the open, but how do you say? Actions speak louder than words. There's their action."

The action Lynn was referencing is a "blood relative" ordinance the council passed in 2006. The law made it illegal for Parish homeowners to rent to anyone not directly related to the renter. In St Bernard, which was 85 percent white before Katrina hit, this effectively kept African Americans, many of whom were still displaced from New Orleans and looking for nearby housing, from moving in. The Greater New Orleans Fair Housing Action Center sued the

Parish, saying the ordinance violated the 1968 Fair Housing Act. A judge agreed, saying it was racially discriminatory in intent and impact.

The story doesn't end there. St. Bernard's government agreed to a settlement, but the illegal ordinance was followed by another, blocking multi-family construction in the Parish. Last month, U.S. District Judge Ginger Berri-gan found the Parish to be in contempt of court, saying, "The Parish Council's intent...is and was racially discriminatory." An editorial in the New Orleans Times-Picayune agreed, saying, "This ruling strips off the camouflage and reveals St. Bernard's actions for what they really are: an effort to keep lower-income people and African-Americans from moving into the mostly white parish."

Relief Work Questioned

St. Bernard Parish was heavily damaged by flooding in the aftermath of Katrina. Thirteen percent of households lived below the federal poverty line, and every home took in water. Many organizations and volunteers have come through to volunteer time and donate money, including United Way, Salvation Army, and the Greater New Orleans Foundation.

An organization called the St. Bernard Project, which was founded in 2006 by two transplants from Washington, DC, has become one of the most high profile organizations active in the region, with millions of dollars in corporate and individual donations and thousands of volunteers.

This has been a big couple of weeks for the St. Bernard Project. On August 29, President Obama mentioned them in his weekly address, saying, "The St. Bernard Project has drawn together volunteers to rebuild hundreds of homes, where people can live with dignity and security." Last week, the touring production of the Broadway show *The Color Purple*, produced by Oprah Winfrey, announced that they will be raising money for the organization, and that author Alice Walker will be personally participating in the fundraising. Last year, CNN named co-founder Liz McCartney its Hero of the Year.

But this national acclamation has only increased criticisms of the work happening in the Parish.

Lance Hill, the executive director of the Southern Institute for Education and Research at Tulane University, first raised his voice on the issue in 2006, after the ordinance was passed. Hill is quick to point out that he is not against rebuilding work in the Parish. However, he adds, "If they chose to rebuild homes that Blacks and Jews would be barred from, at a minimum they have a moral obligation to inform volunteers of the policies of the Parish. To not do so is to mislead volunteers and donors and to become complicit with racism."

Hill is also one of the signatories of an open letter, released this week, which expresses deep concerns over rebuilding efforts in the parish. "Regrettably, many relief and volunteer organizations chose not to respond to the 'blood relative' law, remaining silent on this issue," the letter states. "With the benefit of hindsight, we now know that St. Bernard Parish officials interpreted silence as consent, which has now emboldened this rogue government to pursue other means to defy the Fair Housing Act."

Organizers say that the letter is intended to pressure organizations to think about larger issues of injustice as they work in the region. "It is time that we take a stand against housing discrimination in St. Bernard and throughout the Gulf Coast," the letter states. "And make clear what the moral imperatives are for all organizations that seek to rebuild the Gulf Coast as a fair and just society." Among the signers of the letter are human rights organizations like the National Economic and Social Rights Initiative, regional groups like Moving Forward Gulf Coast, and local initiatives like MayDay Nola, which works on housing in New Orleans.

Zack Rosenberg, the cofounder of St. Bernard Project, is angered by the complaints of

Hill and others. "We are not an advocacy group and we're not commenting on that," he told me, referring to the laws of the Parish. "We're helping people get home." Rosenberg added that at least 30 percent of the families they have worked with have been African American, and he asked me to "think about the Black families who are living in FEMA trailers and want to move home, before writing this piece...try to build things up instead of pulling things down."

Lance Hill and other advocates claim that working on relief without challenging systemic injustices actually exacerbates the problem. They point out that the number of houses rebuilt for African Americans in the community – perhaps two hundred at the most, if you include all nonprofits working in the area – pales in comparison to the thousands that have potentially been excluded by the laws of the parish. "The main

reason that these relief groups have had to disproportionately rebuild Black rentals," explains Hill, "is because the Parish is tearing down or blocking construction of affordable housing faster than the relief groups can rebuild."

"This is why this issue in St. Bernard has troubled me so much," adds Hill. "Exclusion is at the core of the injustices of Katrina. The deliberate efforts to prevent people from returning and the denial that these policies and practices were in place has been the central issue. The exclusionary ideology that was widespread in the white community in New Orleans became law in St. Bernard."

Organizers hope that the multiple levels of pressure will ultimately challenge elected officials in St. Bernard Parish to make the area an example of rebuilding with justice for all. "Our silence doesn't help anybody," says Hill. "It destroys more than the relief groups can ever dream of building."

Data News Weekly

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Number of African-American Males Enrolled in HBCUs Increases

African-American male admissions, enrollment and retention rates at public Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs) have increased in both undergraduate and graduate disciplines according to the Demographic Report, produced by the Thurgood Marshall College Fund, released Sept. 14.

The study reports that overall African-American male graduate degrees conferred have increased by 36 percent for all Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) fields over the past ten years. Additionally, Hispanic males in STEM have doubled.

The report offers a comprehensive look at the impact that public HBCUs and universities make in their local, regional, state-wide and national communities.

The study, led by Strategic Research Analysts; Olivia Blackmon and Director of Research, Dr. William Huit Blackmon is viewed as the leading source for information annually on the public HBCUs beyond the IPEDS data, the report is an in-depth, critical source for grant writing, research and studying trends for new program development.

The detailed report is organized around 15 disciplines. Some areas of note include: Enrollment, Retention and Dropouts, Student Employment, Faculty, College Cost, Financial Aid, Expenditures, Alumni Contributions, Private Support, Technology and School Reform.

A 20-year trend analysis on new areas of interest is incorporated in the report including: Admissions; Enrollment; Retention and Degrees Conferred (with special emphasis on Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) and Education). Additionally, this year's report offers perspective on progression in the areas of: Education majors, Online Learners, Study Abroad Programs, Louis Stokes Alliance for Minority Participation (LSAMP) and Going Green Initiatives.

"The data presented in this study serves as a blueprint to guide researchers, philanthropists, the higher education community and HBCU scholars on emerging trends in the HBCU arena," said Dwayne Ashley, President & CEO, Thurgood Marshall College Fund. "Most importantly, the information is designed to offer comprehensive perspective on what areas we've strengthened in as well as the areas of opportunities

to better engage our students."

Highlights from the study include:

-Member institutions are attracting and retaining African-American males; the schools have experienced an increase in applications, admissions and enrollment rates:

65% overall increase in African-American male graduate enrollment.

23% overall African-American undergraduate enrollment increase. By comparison, more men tend to enroll in full-time undergraduate and graduate coursework, compared to their female counterparts. Roughly, 85% of all males were enrolled full-time and 15% were enrolled part-time. Black and Hispanic male enrollment has increased over the last twenty years, while White male enrollment has decreased as a portion of overall enrollment.

Men composed 74% of the undergraduate engineering enrollment and 82% of the undergraduate engineering degrees conferred. Men also composed over 56% of the graduate degrees conferred, including 74% of engineering doctorate degrees.

Men outnumber women in pursuit of graduate degrees in the STEM disciplines by 19%

Member institutions are fulfilling the promise by reaching out to other minorities and students who are typically underserved. Data shows a diverse pool of students to include Hispanics, Asians and American Indians:

Over the last twenty years, Hispanic males have nearly doubled and Hispanic females have doubled their enrollment rates.

Similarly, Asian males have increased by 37 percent and Asian females have doubled their enrollment population.

Hispanic males have doubled their graduate enrollment rates and females have shout up over 200 percent over the last

twenty years.

Asian males have doubled their presence in graduate programs over the last twenty years and females have tripled their numbers.

Member institutions experienced overwhelming growth in STEM disciplines:

STEM fields have increased by 57 percent over the last two-decades.

11.8% of undergraduates have declared STEM as their major.

Engineering programs were heavily populated with males at 74 percent of enrollment and 82 percent of degrees conferred.

African-American female graduation rates have increased by 32 percent in the last decade and Hispanic females have doubled.

African-American males have increased doctoral degree programs from 8 students to 25, similarly African-American females have increased from 7 to 21 doctoral degrees.

- 79% of TMCF member institutions reported participating in an "Energy Conservation Program."

- 52,300 undergraduate admissions application increase since 2001; five member schools doubled their applications between 2005 and 2006.

- 8.7% of all Black enrollment in post-secondary education were enrolled in TMCF member institutions.

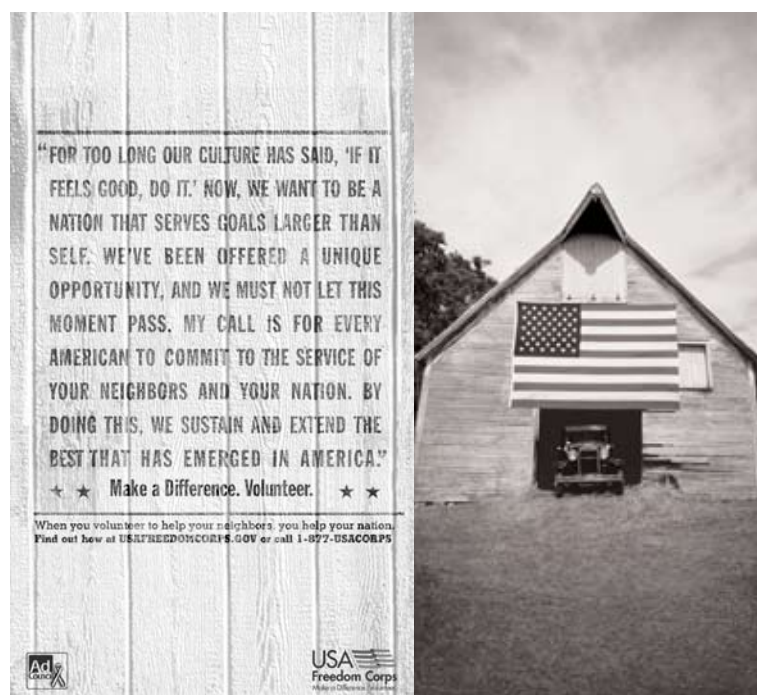
- 10% increase in graduate enrollment over the last ten years. Total graduate students enrolled was the highest it has ever been reaching 28,576 in 2006-2007.

- 63% of first-time full-time degree/certificate-seeking undergraduate students in Fall 2005 returned in 2006. Four (4) institutions reported a 100% retention rate for part-time students from 2005-2006 school year.

- 66% of all the 2-year and 4-year Title IV degree-granting institutions offered a credit-based college level distance learning course. Twenty-eight (28) universities reported offering an online degree program or distance learning courses in 10 universities responded that they currently do not have any online programs.

- Enrollment at TMCF member institutions are stable, with 199,757 undergraduates; 29,676 graduate students; and 4,252 first professional students. Data shows that undergraduate applications were up for both males and females over the previous year, while admissions jumped 22 percent.

The full report can be accessed online at: <http://www.thurgoodmarshallfund.net/v1/images/demorep/demographic-report.pdf>



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