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March 10 - March 16, 2012 46th Year Volume 41 www.ladatanews.com



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Phenomenal Women of New Orleans

Data News Exclusive Interviews

Written and Edited by Edwin Buggage

The history of the African-American woman is embodied in the title of the great poet Maya Angelou's seminal work *Phenomenal Woman*. Throughout the history of our sojourn in America it has been Black women who have been the backbone of the struggle for equality, holding it down on the frontlines and the home front. From Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad, to Sojourner Truth and their prominent roles in the abolitionist movement, or the poet Phyllis Wheatley being the first African-American woman to publish her poems bringing voice to the Black woman on the printed page. And in contemporary times many amazing women stand on the shoulders of these pioneers. In the month of March, which is Women's History Month Data News Weekly would like to recognize some of the City's Phenomenal Women. They are a mix of native born New Orleanians and people who have come to the City with one goal and that is to better the City of New Orleans.

Sybil Morial: Dedicated to a Lifetime of Service

Sybil Haydel Morial is the matriarch of New Orleans most prominent political family. Although known as the wife and mother of two New Orleans Mayors, Sybil Morial has forged a place

in the history of the fight for equality in her own right. Morial's lifetime involvement with human and Civil Rights dates back to the 1950s, when she became an active member of the Urban League of Greater New Orleans and the League of Women Voters; she was also a founder of the Louisiana League of Good Government, a non-partisan, interracial women's organization devoted to civil liberties and full participation in government for all Louisiana citizens.

Mrs. Morial life's work has been centered on improving the quality of education and healthcare for minorities. She's served as Executive Producer of *A House Divided*, a highly acclaimed documentary about the desegregation of New Orleans, and worked for many years as an administrator at Xavier University of Louisiana. Throughout her life she's been involved in many civic activities. These include the Metropolitan Area Committee, the United Fund, the New Orleans Council of Arts for Children and the Amistad Research Center. Her community involvement has merited many awards, including the Torch of Liberty Award of the Anti-Defamation League of B'nai Brith, the Martin Luther King Lifetime Achievement Award, the Whitney M. Young Brotherhood Award and the National Council of Jewish Women's Hannah Solomon Award.

Mrs. Morial was recently honored as New Orleans Feeding Dreams Out-



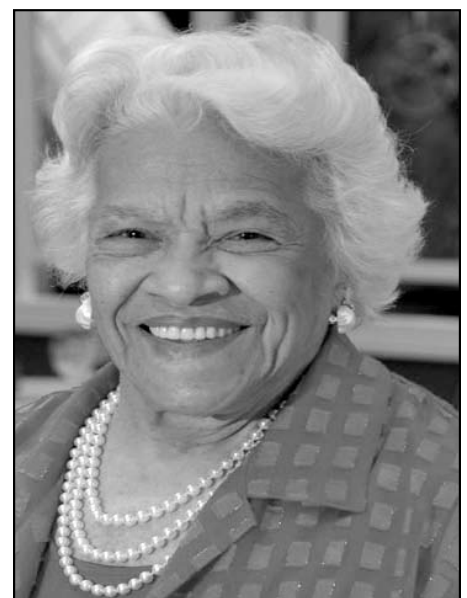
Vera Warren Williams



Eileen Johnson



Sybil Morial



Leah Chase

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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standing Mom for 2011-2012. In her role as mother she is of course known as the mother of Marc Morial the former Mayor of New Orleans and now CEO of the National Urban League; but all her children have become successful carving a niche for themselves guided by the caring hand of Sybil Morial. Her eldest daughter Dr. Julie Morial Cruz is Medical Director of the Baton Rouge Peoples Health Network; son Jacques Morial is a respected businessman and Political Consultant; daughter Cherie Morial Ausberry, serves as Vice-President of CRA and business development at Capitol One Bank in Baton Rouge; and youngest daughter Monique Morial was recently elected Judge of First City Court in New Orleans.

Latoya Cantrell: Fighting for the Heart and Soul of Broadmoor

Latoya Cantrell is a woman who has become a voice to be reckoned with and is well respected throughout the City of New Orleans. Ms. Cantrell is employed as Manager of the Greater New Orleans Education Foundation and has over a decade of non-profit management experience. Coming to New Orleans from her native Los Angeles, to attend Xavier University of Louisiana; after graduating she decided to stay in New Orleans making it her home. She is committed to volunteer service and giving back as President of the Broadmoor Improvement Association and Broadmoor Development Corporation. She has led her community to bring back her neighborhood that was slated to become green space after Hurricane Katrina. Cantrell has been recognized in her post-Katrina recovery efforts as a Restore America Hero by the National Trust of Historic Preservation and as a Role Model 2007 by the Young Leadership Council; she has also been included in New Orleans Magazine "People to Watch 2006," and Gambit Weekly "40 Under 40."

Dr. Beverly Wright: Saving the Environment

Dr. Beverly Wright is a leading Scholar, Advocate, and Activist in the environmental justice arena,

tackling issues of environmental racism and working to raise the profile of environmental issues in poor and minority communities nation-wide. The Deep South Center for Environmental Justice (DSCEJ) is one of the few community/university partnerships that addresses environmental and health inequities in the Lower Mississippi River Industrial Corridor, commonly referred to as Cancer Alley. Since Hurricane Katrina, Dr. Wright has led the charge doing much of the work at the DSCEJ focusing on research, policy, and community outreach, as well as on assistance to and education of displaced African-American residents of New Orleans. Most notably of her accomplishment, after 200 sites around the City were identified as having elevated lead and arsenic levels, Wright forged a unique partnership with the U.S. Steelworkers to launch a proactive pilot neighborhood clean-up project, "A Safe Way Back Home," which trained more than 60 small businesses and contractors, as well as hundreds of volunteers in hazardous waste removal and mold remediation. For her work she's received many recognitions for her selfless dedication, in 2003, she was awarded the Distinguished Alumni Award from State University of New York at Buffalo, and in 2006, she was the recipient of the Robert Wood Johnson Community Health Leadership Award. In 2009, she was named one of ten recipients of the Heinz Awards, administered by the Heinz Family Philanthropies, which recognized ten outstanding individuals for their commitment to the environment.

Leah Chase: The True Flavor of New Orleans

Leah Chase is a woman who has become synonymous with the food and culture of New Orleans and recently becoming the inspiration for Princess Tiana and Mama Odie in Disney's Animated feature the Princess and the Frog. Her real life Cinderella Story began on January 6, 1923, in Madisonville, Louisiana. She was sent to New Orleans in 1937 to live with her aunt attending St. Mary's Academy for high school. Her first job out of school was at the Oriental Laundry in the French Quarter. A week later, Chase was hired by the Colonial Restaurant on Chartres Street.

She has been in the restaurant industry ever since.

In 1945, she met and married Musician Edgar "Dooky" Chase II, whose parents owned the Dooky Chase Restaurant. At first, Chase spent her time raising her children and sewing, but once the children were old enough to attend school, she began to work at the restaurant three days a week. She changed the menu to serve hot meals at lunchtime to Black men who were beginning to work in offices. She started out as a hostess, but she was soon redecorating the restaurant and working as Chef. During the Civil Rights Movement it was a place where leaders gathered to strategize in the fight for freedom. Chase's Restaurant is the place that attracts locals to celebrities and heads of state including current President Barack Obama.

Chase has received many awards both for her culinary genius and her community service including: the coveted New Orleans Times Picayune 1997 Loving Cup Award, the Weiss Award from the National Conference of

Christians and Jews, the Torch of Liberty Award, the University of New Orleans Entrepreneurship Award, the Outstanding Woman Award from the National Council of Negro Women, and numerous honors from the NAACP. She serves on many organizational boards including the Arts Council of New Orleans, the New Orleans Museum of Art and the Urban League. Chase is a frequent guest on many of the televised cooking shows and was visiting Culinary Professor at Nichols State University in 1996. She has four children, sixteen grandchildren and four great-grandchildren.

Eileen Lumar-Johnson: A Spiritual Connection

Eileen Lumar-Johnson is a woman dedicated to her community. She is also a woman fueled by her spirituality. She is the Director of Community Relations for the Audubon Institute where she coordinates many of the ini-

tiatives for outreach into the community. She is also an ordained Minister through Household of Faith Family Worship Church in New Orleans and the Founder of a faith based support group Confront and Conquer, which offer services to families of children with special needs. She has won many awards in the areas of journalism and public relations and sits on many boards dedicated to helping those less fortunate.

Vera Warren-Williams: Leading Through Reading

Vera Warren-Williams is the Owner of the Community Book Center, which grounds the south end of the quaint Bayou Road cultural and commercial corridor began, 25 years ago in a living room in the Lower 9th Ward. In the early 80s, Vera Warren-Williams was a substitute Teacher in the public schools and it struck her that none of the books she used in the

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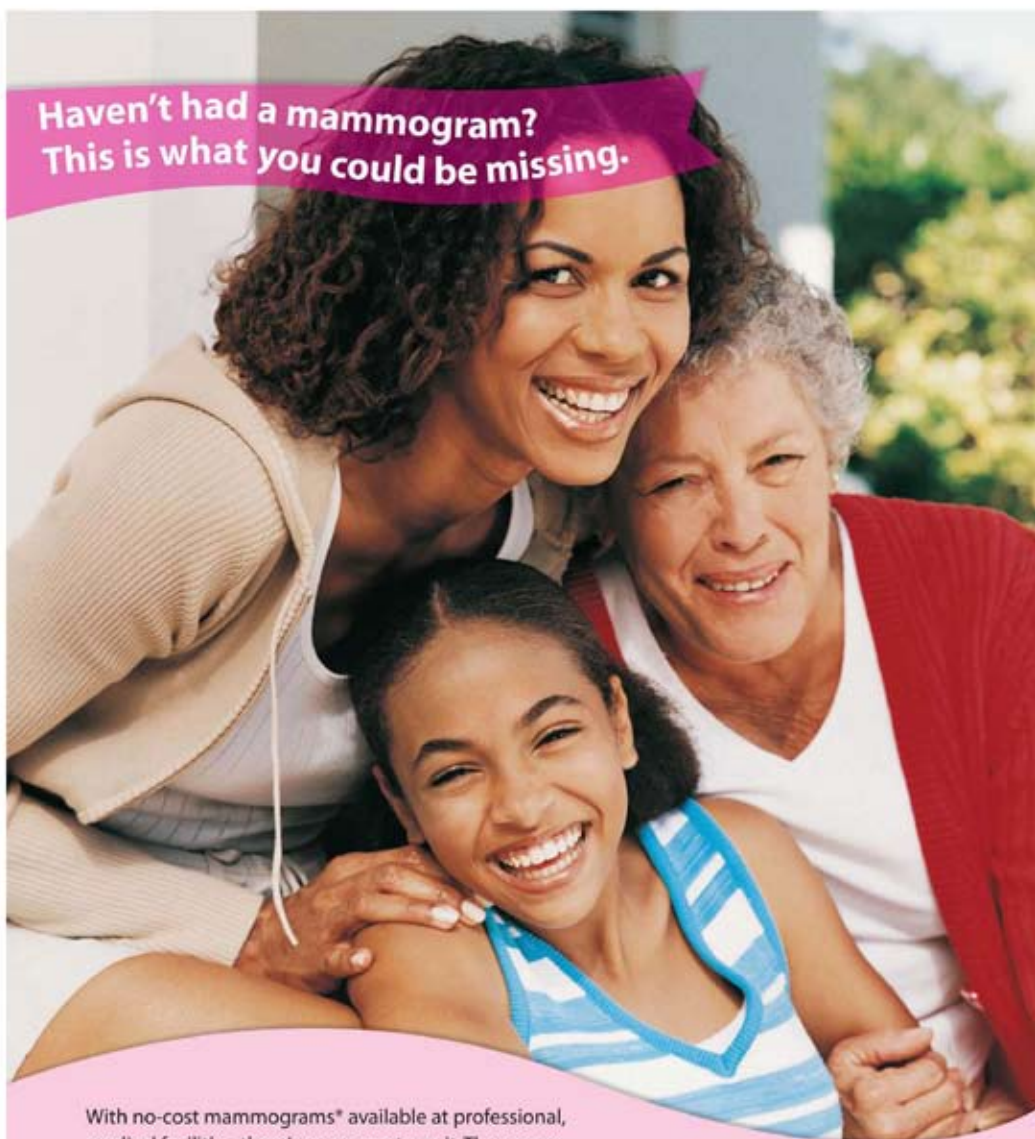


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Black Pages Magazine Honors Women Community Leaders



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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Audubon Zoo Soul Fest



If you have photos of parties or events you would like to run in DATA, please send to datanewsad@bellsouth.net for inclusion.

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Octavia Spencer Wins Best Supporting Actress Oscar



Marc Morial
President and CEO
National Urban League

To Be Equal #9

"I'm just going to live in this moment because it's never happened before and Lord knows it may never happen again." Octavia Spencer, 2012 Academy Award — Best Actress in a Supporting Role

Octavia Spencer brought the gilded audience at Hollywood's Kodak Theater to its feet Sunday night as she tearfully accepted the Academy Award for Best Actress in a Supporting Role for her portrayal of Minny Jackson, a proud, outspoken maid in the Os-

car-nominated movie, "The Help." Ms. Spencer, whose break-out role in "The Help," comes after years of mostly small parts in dozens of films, was overwhelmed with gratitude for the honor and thanked Steven Spielberg, her home State of Alabama and her fellow cast members, including Viola Davis who was nominated for Best Actress.

Spencer becomes only the 13th African-American to win an acting Oscar in the 84-year History of the Academy Awards and just the sixth Black woman since Hattie McDaniel took home the Best Supporting Actress Oscar in 1940 for her role in "Gone with the Wind." We congratulate Octavia Spencer for her achievement. Her performance in "The Help" sheds new light on what life was like for Black women domestics in the South during the dawning days of the 1960s Civil Rights Movement. The dignity and strength of the characters she and Viola Davis

portray give new perspective to the unique struggles of African-American women, and demonstrate the overwhelming power of faith, community and sisterhood.

We are also encouraged by the Academy Award winning success of previous Black women actors, including Hattie McDaniel, Halle Berry, Mo'Nique, Jennifer Hudson, and Whoopi Goldberg, who have broken the Oscar color and gender barriers. But, this small sorority of Black women Oscar winners makes it clear that Hollywood has a long way to go in diversifying the content of its story-lines as well as the color of its characters, especially for African-American women. It might help if the Academy diversified its own ranks. More than 90 percent of its members are White, more than 75 percent are male.

While there have been several movies in recent years like "Red Tails," "Hotel Rwanda," "Malcolm X" "Glory" and "Invictus" (about



the life of Nelson Mandela), that cast Black men in heroic roles, there have been few films about Black women heroines.

USA Today film critic, Bill Goodykoontz, pointed out in a recent column that, "People of color too often find only narrow aspects of their lives and history

represented in mainstream film, if represented at all." James Braxton Peterson, Director of Africana Studies at Lehigh University added, "While we must applaud the outstanding performances by Ms. Davis and Ms. Spencer, we cannot ignore the fact that once again African-Americans are being recognized in Hollywood for playing limited...roles."

This fact was not lost on Octavia Spencer who remarked after accepting her award, "I hope it's the hallmark of more for young, aspiring actresses of color, and by color, I don't mean just African-American. I mean Indian, Native-American, Latin-American, and Asian-American. I hope that in some way I can be some sort of beacon of hope..." We applaud Ms. Spencer for her Academy Award and we echo her desire that Hollywood create more quality roles for deserving Black actors and actresses.

Thousands Of Area Youth Set To Be Entrepreneurs For A Day On May 5

Ochsner and Saints leading charge for this year's Lemonade Day

Over 6,000 youth from Greater New Orleans, the Northshore, and Lafourche Parish are expected to participate in the Second Annual Lemonade Day on Saturday, May 5th.

Ochsner Health System President and COO Warner Thomas, Audubon Nature Institute Executive Vice- President Karyn Kearney, Georges Enterprises CEO John Georges, First NBC President and CEO Ashton Ryan were joined by National Lemonade Day President Julie Eberly, the Saint-

sations, New Orleans Saints Mascot Gumbo, and dozens of youth to announce the official kick-off of Greater New Orleans Lemonade Day on May 5th. In addition to Thomas and Kearney serving as this year's City Champions for Lemonade Day, Saints Owner Rita Benson LeBlanc will once again serve as a celebrity spokesperson for this year's program.

Lemonade Day is a free, community-wide program that fosters entrepreneurship and character development among Greater New Orleans' youth by supporting them in establishing and operating their own lemonade businesses. Young entrepreneurs are

provided with a free backpack which contains detailed support materials, such as an Entrepreneur Workbook, Marketing Tips, and Caring Adult Guide, to help them establish their lemonade stand. These "lemonaders" are advised to spend a little, save a little and share a little, donating a portion of their proceeds to a local charity of their choice. After covering their expenses and paying back their investors, children are encouraged to open a youth savings account. Registration is free and all youngsters are encouraged to participate.

Fashion Week NOLA March 21 - 25, 2012



Inspired by Fashion Week New York and Louisiana's richly diverse culture, Fashion Week New Orleans' goal is to showcase the talents and collections of established and emerging fashion designers, brand houses, boutiques and retailers in a series of runway shows, fashion events & exhibitions. New Orleans and the Gulf Coast are recognized globally for the authentic cuisine, musical talent, budding film and celebrity presence & distinctive culture. It is only fitting that the unique talents of fashion designers, boutique owners, make-up artists,

hair stylists, models, and fashion enthusiasts are included in the region's repertoire of artistic talent.

Fashion Week New Orleans presents over 35 incredible runway shows featuring retailers, boutiques, established designers, and emerging designers who participate in a Project Runway style competition vying for the prize of "Top Designer."

Fashion Week NOLA's goal is to redefine what it means to be fashionable while giving back to the community through charitable partnerships, scholarships, and a Fashion Industry Career Day. Fashion Week NOLA's 2011 charitable recipients include NO/AIDS Task Force, Dress for Success, The New Orleans Firefighter's Foundation & The Fashion Institute of New Orleans.

Construction Begins on Renovations at Tremé Community Center

City officials toured the construction site at the Tremé Community Center at 900 N. Villere Street in the Tremé neighborhood. Work on a \$4.8 million upgrade to the Tremé Center began on January 31, 2012. The two-story recreation center was severely damaged in Hurricane Katrina.

"This project is another great example of how we're building back better than before," said Mayor Mitch Landrieu. "Once complete, this important center will provide more opportunities for young people, and more resources for organizations like Tambourine and Fan, led by Jerome Smith."

Indoor repairs include replacement of the swimming pool and pool equipment, installation of a new computer lab and music room, restoration of the Greenwood gymnasium floor and electrical system upgrades. Outdoor repairs include painting, installation of new hurricane resistant doors and windows, reroofing, and installation of new playground equipment.

City Council Vice-President Eric Granderson said, "These much needed renovations at Tremé Center are essential to preserving and enriching the quality of life of the youth and seniors of this historic community."

District C Councilmember Kris-



Tremé Community Center

tin Gisleson Palmer said, "The Tremé Community Center has always been of unique importance to the community. Located across from Craig School and adjacent to Armstrong Park, this center is vital to the surrounding community of Tremé and to the culture of the neighborhood and our City. Working with the Landrieu Administration and the neighborhood, we

are excited that these upgrades are now a reality."

New Orleans Recreation Development Commission CEO Vic Richard said, "When these upgrades are complete, the children and families of Tremé will have a state of the art recreation center again. I'm really proud of the work that is being done to give this to the Tremé community."

The funding for the project comes from current and anticipated FEMA dollars, state capital outlay and bond funding. Design services were performed by Hamilton Anderson Associates of New Orleans. Construction services are being performed by Icon Construction Group of Metairie.

Construction on the gym and pool is expected to be complete by the end of June 30, 2012.

FEMA's Louisiana Recovery Office Public Assistance Division Supervisor Eddie Williams said, "As a focal point for the Tremé neighborhood, this center greatly serves the local community. I have fond memories of coming here as a teenager. These upcoming repairs will help ensure that many generations to come can also create memories here."

Deputy Mayor for Facilities, Infrastructure and Community Development Cedric Grant said, "The renovation of the Tremé Community Center is another great example of how our partnership with FEMA continues to provide significant results for our citizens."

The renovation is part of Mayor Landrieu's "committed projects."

Cover Story, Continued from page 3.

classroom reflected the lives of the mostly African-American children she was teaching. She took it upon herself to bring in her personal library of children's literature when teaching and found the effect of children seeing images of themselves in the books "profound." Soon her personal collection was in demand among school children and teachers alike, and on her mother's advice – "neither a borrower nor lender be" – Vera's book service was born. Originally intended to be

just a book service, Vera's Community Book Center began first as a presence at local book fairs then a rack at book stores around town and, ultimately, a commercial space – first on Ursulines Avenue in Tremé and then for a time at a rented space on Broad. She is now located in a building she owns on 2523 Bayou Road where she has been since 2003. She is one of a few outlets specifically catering to African-American Literature. Her store also serves as an event space. Ms. Warren-

Williams is also a member of the Belles of Bayou Road, an association of business owners on Bayou Road.

Phenomenal Women Celebrated

These women are truly phenomenal, living in the spirit of giving back. Their stories are stories of success that can inspire generations to come. And Data

News Weekly as being committed to the community of New Orleans and the preservation and celebration of our history, traditions and culture chose to bring these women into the spotlight, giving them their flowers while they are still here. With the hopes that in recognizing these women that many of the young women who are already doing amazing things become more than amazing, but in the spirit of so many who preceded them they become phenomenal.

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