

NEWS CLIPS

FIRST BLACK-OWNED TELEPHONE COMPANY LAUNCHED

When Intra Community Communications (ICC) officially launched services in Milwaukee, Wis. on Feb. 22, 1997, it became the first certified African-American owned and controlled local telephone company in the U.S. ICC was founded in 1994 by five African Americans, including Bernell L. Ross, Chairman/CEO, to provide local telephone services similar to, and as an alternative to Ameritech. ICC plans to initially open and staff local sales offices in Milwaukee, Chicago and Cleveland, as well as state offices in Michigan and Florida. Its primary goal this year is to penetrate urban, central city areas, and residential markets; to offer valued products and services at competitive prices and to offer special network marketing and affinity programs for all types of customers. With over \$200 billion in revenues, community members also have an opportunity to invest in one of the fastest growing industries in the country.

BURNED ARKANSAS CHURCH BEING REBUILT

Destroyed by arson on Nov. 18, 1995, St. Mark's Missionary Baptist Church in Tyronza, Ark., is being rebuilt in a 10-day blitz between March 16-26, 1997. This is in an effort to ensure that the congregation will be able to worship in the new church Easter weekend. This is the only burned church that will be rebuilt so quickly. Approximately 260 volunteers from throughout the country, including people of all ages and from many faiths, will help to rebuild the church as well as perform other work in the community. A small, rural, African-American church (approximately 35 members), St. Mark's has been in the community for 92 years. The church was destroyed by arson in the middle of the night in November, 1995. No arrests have been made for the crime. The congregation has been worshipping in another church for the past 14-plus months.

MINORITY AIDS GROUP OPPOSES HIV ACT

The National Minority AIDS Council (NMAC), a national HIV/AIDS organization for communities of color, opposes the "HIV Prevention Act of 1997," introduced on March 13, 1997 by U.S. Rep. Tom Coburn, (R-OK). The provisions of the bill include: The establishment of a national HIV reporting program, partner notification, HIV testing of sexual offenders, and non-consensual HIV testing of patients needing an invasive medical procedure. These measures have been unequivocally opposed by numerous organizations representing public health officials, health care providers and behavioral scientists, as well as by civil rights and AIDS organizations, nationwide. The National Medical Association (AMA) is in support of the act while other medical groups, like the American Nurses Association (ANA), the American Public Health Association (ALPHA), the Association of State and Territorial Health Officials (ASTHO) and the American Psychological Association (APA), have expressed opposition.

NATIONWIDE REACHES \$13 MILLION SETTLEMENT

Nationwide Insurance will invest more than \$13 million in up to 10 communities and change some of the ways it underwrites and markets homeowners insurance to ensure that minority neighborhoods get equal access to insurance, under an agreement reached recently with the Justice Department. The agreement filed on March 10, 1997 in the U.S. District Court in Columbus, OH, resolves allegations that the fifth largest provider of homeowners insurance in the nation made homeowners insurance unavailable or available on less favorable terms in minority neighborhoods. It stems from cooperative discussions initiated by Nationwide during a Justice Department investigation, and for the most part incorporates insurance practice reforms already planned by the company. Under the agreement—the most comprehensive settlement ever reached with an insurance company under the federal Fair Housing Act—Nationwide will: Not place any geographic restrictions on homeowners insurance in minority neighborhoods; increase insurance coverage through targeted advertising and community outreach and train its employees about the need to treat applicants without regard to race and monitor their performance through testing. State Farm, Allstate and American Family Insurance previously changed these policies following complaints under the Fair Housing Act. "Insurers should make decisions based on risk, not race," said attorney general Janet Reno.

NAACP calls for hotel boycott

Special to Sentinel-Voice

In what amounts to a national vote-with-your-dollars campaign, the NAACP is boycotting Holiday Inn, Best Western and other leading hotel chains, assailing the lodging industry's record in the hiring and promoting of African Americans.

The boycott is the first step in a broader effort to maximize black buying power in corporate America, NAACP President Kweisi Mfume said recently.

"African-Americans spend more than \$4 billion annually on travel and lodging, with much of this going to the lodging industry," Mfume said. "The lodging industry has an abysmal record of including African-Americans in all aspects of its operations."

Mfume urged people "to immediately exercise personal responsibility and use our consumer guide" when planning business trips and vacations. He further emphasized, "A selective boycott—yes. It means exactly that. Punish, quite frankly, our enemies."

In Richmond, Virginia's NAACP executive director Linda Byrd-Harden said Mfume plan is the "first unified effort in the country to get African-Americans to understand their spending power."

She said the Mfume plan enhances the group's ongoing policy of researching companies before doing business with them.

"We ask for statistics in areas of employment, minority contracting, internship programs, advertising and

community involvement, she said. "If a company does not want to give their EEO information, that's not a company that wants our business bad enough," she said.

Management of the Richmond Marriott, where the state and local NAACP hold major affairs—including the Richmond Branch's Freedom Fund Banquet—said the downtown hotel is strong in minority participation.

"In our little world here at 500 E. Broad St., we are well represented with African Americans," including at least 25 percent African American representation in its management ranks, said Bill Walsh, general manager.

Like Walsh, other hotel representatives in response to

questions, defended their company's record on hiring African Americans, and said they were not enemies of the NAACP.

A majority of the 10 targeted chains had declined to cooperate with the group's survey of black employees and managers.

Craig Smith, a vice president for Holiday Inn public relations, said the refusal to give detailed information about hotel operations had nothing to do with a lack of commitment to equal opportunity.

"We support the work and spirit of the NAACP but politely declined to give them that data," Smith said. "We don't provide data on our operations to anyone."

"We have a good story to tell," said Anne Curtis of the Choice Hotels International.

"The NAACP is hurting people they say they want to help," said Ann Rhode of Doubletree Hotels, Inc.

Mfume said the call for a boycott was supported by 55 primarily black organizations and represent a membership of more than nine million. They include the Congressional Black Caucus Foundation Inc., the National Urban League and National Council of Negro Women.

Sixteen national companies were sent a four-page questionnaire seeking general information such as the number of properties, number of rooms and number of black employees. (See *Boycott, Page 4*)

Delegation says Nigerians welcomed elections

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Three high-level delegations representing Black America's press, clergy, legal and activist communities, who monitored recent multi-party elections in Nigeria, said thousands eagerly welcomed the chance to vote.

"People were extremely enthusiastic. We observed young people voting for the first time and others lining up for hours in the hot sun to vote," said Dorothy R. Leavell, president of the 210-member National Newspaper Publishers Association, at a press conference following the group's return from the west African country. Mrs. Leavell was part of the Americans for Democracy in Africa delegation.

Local elections were held

in some 774 municipalities in 36 states in Nigeria on March 15. According to officials other elections will take place in the coming months, culminating in presidential elections in 1998.

Other delegations represented the American and National Bar Associations and included former Agriculture Secretary Mike Espy, congressman Mervyn Dymally and the civil rights organization Congress Of Racial Equality (CORE), headed by Roy Innis. They visited 11 of the 36 states involved in the electoral process and also shared their observations with Nigerian President General Sani Abacha.

The broad-based union of African-American groups is reissuing a call to the Clinton

administration to respect the electoral process in Nigeria and apply a "Fairness Doctrine" to the way it deals with Africa's most populous country.

"You have to remain engaged with a country to work together to solve all the problems there are to be solved," said the Rev. Maurice A. Dawkins, chairman, National Coalition for Fairness in Africa Policy.

The coalition is protesting "the double standard which gives Most Favored Nations Status to China and certifies Mexico for anti-drug cooperation, while sanctioning Nigeria and decertifying her on anti-drug cooperation," Rev. Dawkins said.

In an attempt to force a policy change by the U.S. (See *Nigeria, Page 12*)

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