

Business group plans political activism

By Brenda Kirkpatrick
Special to Sentinel-Voice

In November, 1996, R. J. Jarvis, president and founder of the Nevada Black American Business Group conceived of the idea to increase the viability and stability of black-owned businesses in Nevada.

A major focus of the group is to educate its members about politics, get them involved in political issues and to encourage its members and the greater community to register to vote. Identifying those political candidates who have

the interests of business people at heart is important to the NBABG and electing these candidates is a major goal. becomes a critical issue.

"Black businesses in Nevada represent the proverbial sleeping giant," Jarvis said.

Of the 1300 black-owned businesses in 1995, only 7.9% were in transportation and public utilities; 7.0% owned construction businesses — while 6.6% were doing business in finance; insurance and real estate; 14.0% were in

retail trade.

Service companies accounted for a whopping 54% while 10% of black-owned businesses were in manufacturing, mining, agricultural services and unclassified industries, according to statistics provided by the NAACP's Community Development Resource Center.

Blacks had average sales of \$51,855; Hispanic \$89,082; Asian \$147,519. Clearly, blacks have a long way to go — a point not overlooked by

the Nevada Black American Business Group.

Some of the terminology often heard at NBABG meetings are leadership, empowerment, inclusion, sharing, enlightenment, action and the American Dream.

The language reinforces their goal to measurably advance the economic growth of black business owners in Nevada and to influence the legislative process to obtain a higher quality of life for black Nevadans

Although non-partisan, the

group has recognized the need for a direct response to the necessity for leadership in the political arena, Jarvis said

Issues are more imof the moment than are politicians themselves. "The NBABG exists to assure accountability — that the political process as well as the bills that are introduced, the votes politicians cast and the degree to which promises are made on the campaign trail are kept," Jarvis said.

"Justice centers on the basic premise that politicians must

**Nevada Black
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Group
General Membership
Mixer
Monday,
April 21, 1997
at 6 p.m.
Safari Club
Guest speaker:
Bill Johnson of the
Merrill Lynch Group
Topic:
"Accumulating
Wealth"
\$5 donation**

Disappearing black farmers call for April 23 protest

By Ken Morgan
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Black farmers from across the country will demonstrate outside the U.S. Department of Agriculture, April 23 to protest continuing foreclosures, lack of money to plant and business as usual at USDA.

"We need everybody's support on April 23 and beyond. We are fighting for all minority farm owners as well as small farmers. This is a civil rights issue," said John Boyd, president of the National Black Farmers Association.

Boyd called for the protest at a two-day meeting last month on the plight of African-American farmers held in Enfield and nearby Tillery, NC.

According to reports, blacks are losing land at a rate of 9,000 acres a week. Between 1920 and 1987, there was a drastic shift in the proportion of black farmers — going from one in seven, to one in 67 — that is about one percent of all American farmers.

"If the land loss continues at the same pace, all black farmers will be wiped out by the year 2000," said Phillip Barker, an Oxford, NC farmer.

The farmers say that the USDA policies have been directly responsible for the loss of Black-owned land. [The reason] "Why black farmers lose land at a rate of 9000 acres a week is directly linked to discriminatory practices of the Farm Home Administration of the United States Department of Agriculture," said Marcus Tillery, co-chair of the conference.

Last Dec. 12, the farmers protested outside the White House, to highlight the USDA's documented practice of denying loans to Black farmers through its locally-run Farm Home Service Agency (FHS) offices as well as the agency's thousands of uninvestigated discrimination complaints.

Responding to the issue in a Feb. 29 press conference, Secretary of Agriculture Dan

Glickman announced the appointment of Pearlie Reed to deal with the backlog of complaints and implement recommendations from the USDA's recent civil rights report.

The "Buck will always stop with me, but Pearlie is my enforcer," Glickman said. Acknowledging the "widespread problems in the department" he said, it is "time to heal" and we "can and will set a new course for this department."

However, the Secretary's promises have met with skepticism from farmers including Boyd who said, one of the report's main recommendations, a six month moratorium on farm foreclosures, was being ignored. And, no remedies have been provided for the tens of thousands of unjust foreclosures that have already taken place, he said. "It's still business as usual."

Further, farmers dispute USDA figures that put pre-existing complaints at 270. "We want them to open up their books so that we can see their records of what has happened to black farmers," said Eddie Slaughter, who farms in Georgia.

African-American farmers say they are frequently denied private loans, and are forced to

turn to the USDA as a last resort. However, many say they are also often denied operating and capital loans from the agency, and so are unable to plant and ultimately pay their bills. The result is often foreclosure. Wealthy white farmers, sometimes with connections to their FHS "like vultures swoop down and take the land at one half or less market price," one farmer said.

The group has the full support of several members of Congress, including Cong. Bennie G. Thompson (D-Miss) who said, "...after their last protest outside the White House, this organization has clearly decided to take their case straight to the source of their problems — the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA).

"...The message that they are sending is loud, clear, and it will not be brushed under a rug or silenced by empty promises African-Americans will no longer allow nepotism and good networks to perform an institutional lynching on the honest, hard-working black farmers who have dedicated their lives to feeding and clothing ALL Americans."

According to Cong. Eva M. Clayton (D-NC), who held a listening session with Secretary Glickman and local farmers in

her home state, "I believe that change on the part of the USDA is definitely required."

Gary Grant, head of the Concerned Citizens of Tillery, and co-conference chair, said discrimination is not new to black farmers who have experienced this vicious cycle for decades.

And over the last 30 plus years, numerous reports have found the agency to be riddled by discrimination. A 1990 Congressional Committee on Government Operations "identified the FHA as one of the key causes of the drastic decline in black farm ownership." And in 1982 a report found the "Farmers Home Administration (FHA) had not placed adequate emphasis on dealing with the crisis facing Black farmers." Some 12 years earlier a 1970 internal USDA report found insensitivity towards civil rights and that nepotism and cronyism were often found regarding service delivery. And in 1965 the Civil Rights Commission found discrimination problems in program delivery.

For more information contact the National Black Farmers Association at 68 Wind Road, Baskerville, VA 23915, or call (804) 447-7825. The Concerned Citizens of Tillery can be contacted at (919) 826-3017.

keep their word and obey the laws of the land," Jarvis said.

"When the deals are cut, they are cut on behalf of the politician's constituency; those of use who believed the campaign words, voted and helped to elect these politicians," he said, "not just the handful of their friends who traditionally benefit."

For the 1997 calendar year, the Nevada Black American Business Group has focused on two timely issues, the Southern Nevada Enterprise Zone and the welfare reform legislation of 1996.

The group publishes a newspaper, whose editor is Dr. Deloris T. Clark; the Governmental Affairs Committee is headed up by Philip Alleyne; Tony Browne chairs Public Affairs; Jerry Lindsey is in charge of Media Matters and Membership; Rev. Willie Davis is the Advisory Committee Chairman; Terri Greathouse is the special events chairperson and treasurer and Grace Boldon is the group's special assistant.

This political action committee has enjoyed a Super Bowl party, had a silent auction, conducted a raffle, held seminars, business mixers, networks and celebrated St. Patrick's Day at the Safari Club.

Jarvis measures success, "by fear of failure and of course, by financial rewards.

"These rewards are basic, but of greater importance to me in measuring my success is that I am able to help others achieve their goals by sharing with them insight, sources and information with them of which they may be unaware," Jarvis said.

Membership in the Nevada Black American Business Group is open to all who are interested in increasing the viability and stability of black owned businesses in Nevada. The group meets the third Monday of each month at 6:30 p.m. at the Safari Club, at 2797 S. Maryland Parkway.

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