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"THE TRUTH SHALL SET YOU FREE"

First black chief appointed

By Lee Brown
Sentinel-Voice

Call it premonition, but Joey Tillmon knew he had the stuff to lead a police department.

"I figured I would have the chance at some point," the 17-year North Las Vegas Police Department veteran said.

That day came last Friday when Tillmon was named North Las Vegas' new police chief. With the designation, he became that city's and the state's first African-American police chief.

"When it first happened I was surprised because I was the youngest (of the candidates) and had less time in (the department)," the new chief said. "But I wouldn't have tried if I didn't feel I was qualified."

Tillmon heads a department with 241 employees, including 150 commissioned officers.

He beat out four other applicants for the \$84,000-\$86,000 annual position. Applicants were judged on a slew of criteria including experience, education, training, communication skills, social interaction and supervisory ability.

After four years in the Air Force, Tillmon joined the North Las Vegas Police Department in 1980. Since then, he has worked as a patrol officer, undercover narcotics officer, field training officer, police academy instructor, SWAT officer, patrol unit supervisor and special response team supervisor.

The 44-year-old father of three has also received several law enforcement awards. But he is most proud of his work at the Donna Street substation.

As the station's former supervisor, he was recognized for spearheading a neighborhood project that decreased the saturation of drugs. Tillmon and several co-workers were named 1991 Police Officers of the Year.

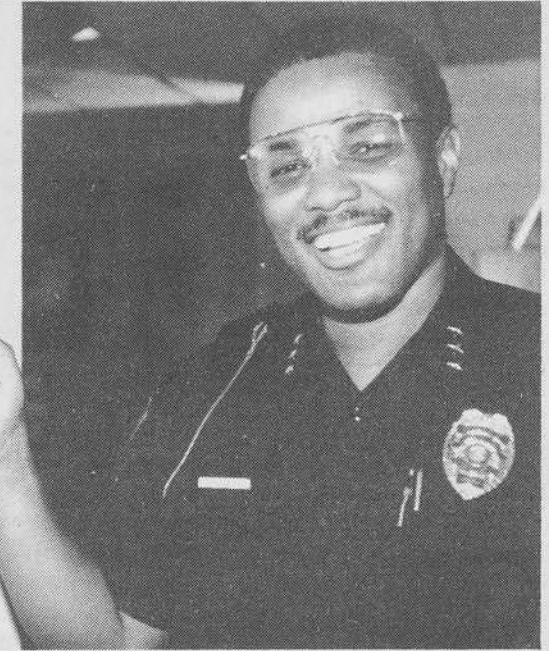
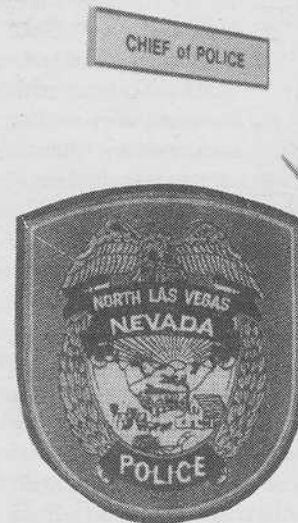
"When we started the Donna Street substation, we improved on it every week and it was very successful in the area — and it still is," Tillmon said.

Tillmon inherits a position whose reputation has been muddied by the two most recent former chiefs.

In March, then-Police Chief Alan Nelson, a 25-year department veteran, was arrested on misdemeanor DUI charge while using a city vehicle. He later announced his retirement.

Then, late last month, acting Police Chief Jose Troncoso was cited for "failing to use due care" after being involved in a single-car accident, also in a city-owned vehicle, on state Route 322, nearly 200 miles northeast of Las Vegas. Troncoso was accused of traveling 80 mph in a 55-mph zone when the car he was driving overturned, injuring his passenger Ken Ellingson, chief of the North Las Vegas Detention Center.

Tillmon, appointed by North Las Vegas City



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Tillmon on his hiring: "This is America. Anything can happen."

Manager Linda Hinson, said he does not expect any lingering effects from either situation. "I think that the faith the community has in North Las Vegas Police Department shouldn't be diminished at all."

He said he hopes to build up department projects like Safe Streets 2000, which put dozens

of additional police on the streets.

Tillmon admits he was somewhat surprised at his appointed. "I was just happy," he said. "I realized that it (being selected) really says something. This is America. Anything can happen. And it did, but it happened because I believe I'm qualified, not because I'm black."

Black gay men still closeted

See related stories on
pages 5, 6, 8 and 11.

By Damon Hodge
Sentinel-Voice

Scolded by heterosexual blacks and ignored by white gays, black gay men face daunting odds at gaining mainstream acceptance.

The Las Vegas Sentinel-Voice spoke to nearly a dozen black gay men, none of who agreed to go on the record, citing privacy concerns and possible repercussions.

A black gay man, who spoke on condition of anonymity, said many of his peers remain closed-mouth for fear of scorn and rejection by family and friends. The man works in the fashion industry.

It's not unusual. Black gay men are typically closed-mouth about their sexuality, according to gay magazine columnist Lee Plotkin. Plotkin, who is white, said that gays and minorities have a lot in common.

Gays can identify with blacks because both are targets of hate crimes. Despite this,



he said, "Blacks typically are not receptive to gays."

Research agrees. A 1995 study measuring black attitudes towards gays revealed that blacks, like whites, still resent gays.

For years, religious leaders have railed against gays. Some Christian ministers still call homosexuality "an abomination." In a derisive 1994 speech, former Nation of Islam National Spokesman Khalid Muhammad stirred the ire

of many gays.

This June, the religious anti-gay engine steamed into the national spotlight when the Southern Baptist Convention launched a long-threatened boycott of the Walt Disney Co. The 15 million-member group protested what it saw as Disney's acceptance of homosexuality in its employment practices and entertainment products.

But religious moorings seem to be changing, slowly.

"DNA tests prove that being gay is not a choice," Beau MCDaniels said. "Just as you don't have any more choice on the color of your skin, you don't have choice on your sexual identity." MCDaniels, a white female, is senior pastor at Metropolitan Community Church.

"God's love is inclusive of everybody," the Rev. Marion Bennett said. The pastor of Zion Methodist church said that Bible-quoting preachers who ridicule gays are taking scripture out of context. "Homosexuality is no more a sin than envy, jealousy, etc. A sin is a sin," the black minister said.

Despite the change, black gay men are still

(See Gay, Page 12)

Virginia man burned, beheaded Crime sparks outrage

By Diane Struzzi
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The U.S. Justice Department is sending a mediator to Grayson County next week in the wake of the burning and decapitation of a black man among a group of whites.

A representative from the Community Relations Service, a conflict prevention and resolution program of the Justice Department, will be in Grayson County for two days. Henry C. Mitchum said his goal during the stay is to find out if there are racial problems in the community. The office has no law enforcement or litigation authority but offers a range of services, such as mediation and cultural diversity training.

"We're like federal troubleshooters in race relations," he said from his office in Philadelphia. "We look into areas of potential tension."

U.S. Attorney Robert Crouch said he called Mitchum after reading several news articles about the slaying in which some of the victim's relatives expressed concerns because of the savage way Johnson was killed.

"But there's nothing unusual or sensational about that," Crouch said about his request. "Part of the purpose is to calm a situation or deal with the community before they become alarmed."

Mitchum's arrival will represent the third office from the federal government to become involved in the death of Garnett "G.P." Johnson.

(See Beheaded, Page 9)