

Community leader dies

By Alice Key

Special to Sentinel-Voice

On the day she was to accept an award honoring Nevada's "First Black Pioneers," Gwendolyn Weeks Rahner suffered a severe heart attack. Three days later, on Feb. 17, at age 75, the Altantic City, N.J. native affectionately known as "Tootie" died from a heart attack.

Rahner went to New Jersey Avenue Elementary School and graduated from Atlantic City Vocational School. She followed in her mother's show business footsteps — and began a singing career in and around Altantic City. (Her mother had been a dancer).

Soon, late band leader Louis Jordan caught wind of her talent and hired her as band vocalist for the famed "Louis Jordan Tympany Fine."

Rahner exited show biz when the late Harry Rahner, her fiancé, moved from the East Coast to Las Vegas where he was an executive at the Stardust Hotel. They were an interracial couple, thus they had to go to California to be wed.

Rahner established herself as a pillar of the community beginning in 1953, later becoming a Deputy Registrar of Voters and ardent advocate



Gwendolyn Weeks Rahner

of blacks exercise their voting rights. She once traipsed through West Las Vegas rousing residents out their beds to needing them about registering to vote. She recognized the power of the black vote long before unions and other political organizations did.

She founded and led the Democratic Women's Club West, a formidable political entity coddle by every Democratic candidate for a local, state or national and actively participated in the local chapter of the National Association of Colored People.

She was the civil right's organization primary lobbyist at the state legislature for an Equal Housing Law. An Equal

Housing Statute subsequently was signed into law.

Rahner was the first of only two black women to be elected president of the Clark County Democratic Women's Club and served on the election campaigns of Sens. William Bible, Howard Cannon, Harry Reid and Richard Bryan and the gubernatorial campaigns of the late Grant Sawyer, Michael O'Callaghan and Richard Bryan.

She also contributed to the successful 1996 re-election bids of Gov. Bob Miller and District Court Judge Michael Douglas.

But Rahner concentrated most of her civic energies on the Regional Committee on Employment for the Handicapped, a committee she was appointed to by former County Commission Chairman, Thalia Dondero. She chaired the agency from 1980 to 1988, which, today, is called the Committee on Employment for People with Disabilities.

Not straying too far from her love of music, Rahner worked with the Las Vegas Jazz Society. She was a jazz buff and scoured the city to hear the relaxing melodies.

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Documentary explores battle, birth of the Klan

By John T. Stephens III

Special to Sentinel-Voice

After three agonizing years, director and film producer Stan Armstrong has clipped the wings of a stubborn bird: he recently finished his documentary titled "The Battle of Fort Pillow and the Birth of the KKK."

"I'm relieved," said Armstrong when asked his feelings about completing the project. "I feel happy and excited."

His excitement warmed during a Feb. 22 showing at the West Las Vegas Library Theatre. A throng of about 200 filed in to see the documentary of Nathan Bedford Forrest and the rise of the Ku Klux Klan.

The film begins with the arrival of Africans pilfered from their homeland and taken to America. Twenty black men, women and children came to America under the guise of indentured servitude. As the years passed, an estimated 635,000 Africans were relocated to America and indentured servitude masked the fact that these people had become slaves; property to be bought and sold.

Black slaves, a commodity in the pro-slavery South, catapulted the region into the throes of wealth. The South became a vital agricultural region thanks to the free labor.

Forrest was born in 1821. He had very little education and no skills at any trade. So he earned a living off slavery.

He joined the Confederacy at age 39 as a private. Within two years, he became a general, a military distinction only he can claim. Though he had scant education and no prior military training, he proved a genius at creating strategic fighting tactics and waging war.

He is most famous for always bluffing the

enemy. He would lie about men, supplies and forces to trick his enemies into surrender. He wrote himself into military history through his cunning. The Fort Pillow massacre nearly erased it all.

Armstrong dubbed Fort Pillow, the "Blackman's Alamo." During the battle, many freed African slaves were murdered.

After the Union's victory in the Civil War, former slaves began rising above the rank and file citizen and assuming positions of power. This infuriated many prideful Southerners and sparked the creation of the Ku Klux Klan in Giles County, Tennessee in 1866. General Forrest became the group's first Grand Wizard.

The Klan's purpose, it said, was to protect and preserve the rights of white Southerners. The group harassed, intimidated and assaulted both blacks and whites. Forrest asked the group to disband after three years at the helm, claiming its ways too radical and its purpose lost.

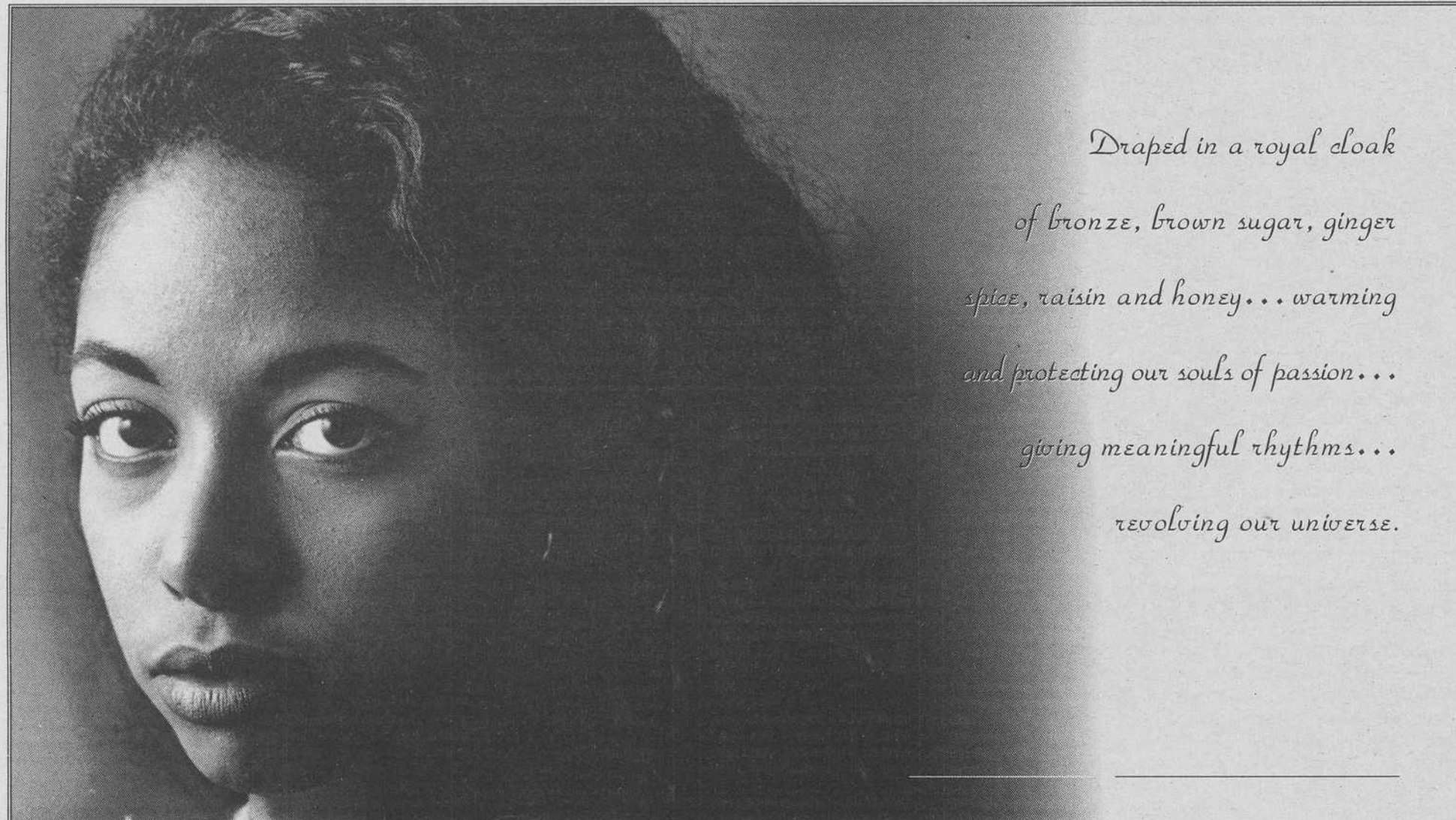
Armstrong, a UNLV graduate with a bachelor's degree in communications, learned about the Fort Pillow massacre by his Ethnic Studies professor Dr. Roosevelt Fitzgerald. Armstrong is currently working on his next film project, "Blacks in the Confederacy."

According to the audience, there's definitely a market for Armstrong's product.

"I thought it was very informative," said Ann Lamplly, a retired accountant.

Audience members said the film is a must-see for high schoolers and suggested it air on KLVX Channel 10, a public television station.

Armstrong hopes the History Channel will air his film.



*Draped in a royal cloak
of bronze, brown sugar, ginger
spice, raisin and honey... warming
and protecting our souls of passion...
giving meaningful rhythms...
revolving our universe.*

The Regional Transportation Commission of Clark County and Citizens Area Transit celebrate the African American Image.

