

## BUSINESS

# Internet used to keep company in step

By Lawrence Ross

Special to Sentinel-Voice

For Jamila White, a Howard graduate living in Washington D.C., her Brothers and Sisters website at <http://www.stepshow.com> was designed to be an extension of her African-American fraternity and sorority clothing and paraphernalia business.

However, White knew that she had to create a site that was more than just a store on-line.

"You have to create a reason for people to come to your site. It is not enough for people to put clothing items on-line," she said. "Most people can go around the corner and buy the same things with much more convenience. What you must do is build trust among your customers, and build a community. That is why I didn't put up the shopping mall on my site for about a year. I instead focused on building a community among the African-American fraternity and sorority members," White

said.

And build a community she has. White has created a sounding board for African-American fraternities and sororities called "Shout Out Central" a talk forum.

Whether it is current events or just saying "hello" to each other on a regular basis, more than 200,000 people have come on-line and visited the Brothers and Sisters site.

"People come on the site to talk to old friends, renew old acquaintances and gossip with each other," she said. "I've found that this site breaks down all of the barriers between members of different groups."

But what distinguishes this site from most others on the web, is that it ultimately works for the owner. Instead of just being an unprofitable sounding board, White added her whole Greek catalog to the site. Her customers are starved for top quality Greek items, which she delivers.

The Brothers and Sisters

GreekStore opened for business on Nov. 1, 1997, and has been doing brisk business since.

Customers are given a wide selection of items to choose from including clothing, jewelry, paddles and miscellaneous accessories. The professionally designed site is well thought-out with clear and concise information about customer service and Internet transaction policies.

The site is a very good example for those of you interested in creating a website that sells things. Allaying the fears of customers about doing business over the Internet is very important.

Remember, customers are wary about sending their personal information out over the wires. The Brothers and Sisters site does a great job in both providing the utmost in security and professionalism.

White's goals are simple. She would like to be the number one source for Greek

paraphernalia in the United States.

"It is very important for African-Americans to create businesses that reach as many people as possible," she said. "It is not just important for African-Americans to support African-American businesses, but it is also important for African-American businesses to make the extra effort to provide their customers with the utmost in quality products and service. We at Brothers and Sisters are able to do this on the website."

White is on the way to making the World Wide Web work for her, but it's not magic; it takes old fashion hard work and planning.

If you want to create a site which sells your products to the world, you can't go wrong by checking out Brothers and Sisters.

Lawrence Ross is an authority on the World Wide Web and the Internet. e-mail him at [alpha1@pacbell.net](mailto:alpha1@pacbell.net).

## Gov't has tax perks to home businesses

By Bryon Elson

Special to Sentinel-Voice

If you own a home-based business, Uncle Sam may have some special tax breaks in store for you:

1. **Automobile expenses.** If you use your car for business purposes, you can figure your expenses in one of two ways.

With the standard mileage rate, you may claim a deduction equal to 31.5 cents per mile plus the business portion of parking fees and tolls. In order to qualify for the standard rate, you must own your car.

If you're leasing a car or would rather use the actual expenses method, you may write off the actual costs of operating your car in connection with your business. These costs include gas, oil, tolls, parking, depreciation and maintenance. If you qualify for both methods, figure your deduction both ways to see which gives you a larger deduction.

2. **Meal and entertainment expenses.** You may deduct 50 percent of your business-related meal and entertainment expenses when entertaining a client, customer or employee.

### Use color, pictures, writing to liven your annual reports

By Regina Lynch-Hudson

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Q. Dear Regina: As CEO of what has become a top African-American owned company in Atlanta, I wasn't satisfied with the appearance of our last annual report, and want to spruce up the next one. Any ideas?

A: Once upon a time an annual report was a stark, boring, black and white document showing income and expenditures. Timidly,

companies began to add photographs of the chairman of the board and board members, an act that was questioned by conservatives who viewed it as unbusinesslike.

Today's annual reports are full-scale productions of captivating text, and compelling photographs in vibrant colors. More than just a tab of checks and balances, the instrument acts as a

(See Regina, Page 14)

For the expenses to qualify, the meal or entertainment expenses must be directly related to or associated with your business.

Be sure to keep accurate records of your expenses including the amount, time, place and business purpose, as well as your business relationship with the person entertained.

3. **Home-office maintenance.** You may deduct certain expenses for operating your home-office if you use it regularly and exclusively as your principal place of business or a place where you routinely meet your customers or clients. To claim these deductions, you must file Form 8829, Expenses for Business Use of Your Home.

4. **Equipment costs.** You may deduct up to \$18,000 in qualifying property in the year you purchased the property, rather than depreciating the cost over a period of years. If you need new equipment, consider the benefits of immediate expensing. Be aware, however, that this deduction phases out once the cost of the property exceeds \$200,000 during the year.

For more information, visit the web site: [www.dollar4dollar.com](http://www.dollar4dollar.com).

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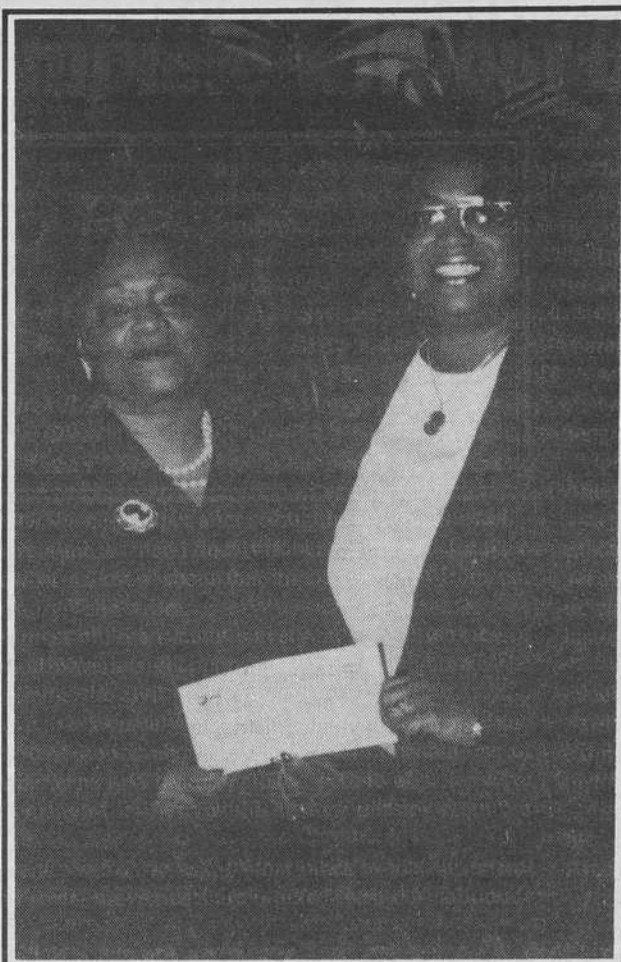
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### AT&T donates to NNPA

Carolyn Odom Steele, (left) AT&T Corporate Affairs director, presents a \$35,000 check to Yvonne Cooper, executive director of the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA). The grant will help develop the association's telecommunications capabilities. Projects will include a new, comprehensive web site. AT&T also donated four computers to NNPA's national office in Washington, D.C.

## TRANSPORTATION WORKSHOP NOTICE

Resort Corridor Technology Selection Report  
And Preliminary Engineering Plans

### Purpose of the Workshops:

The Regional Transportation Commission is presenting to the public the Resort Corridor Technology Evaluation Report and preliminary engineering plans for a fixed guideway system. RTC staff and their consultant team will be on hand to answer questions at the "open house" style workshops.

### WHEN and WHERE:

**Saturday, March 14 and Sunday, March 15**, at the Belz Factory Outlet Mall, 7400 Las Vegas Boulevard South, Burger King Food Court; Saturday from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m. and Sunday from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m.

**Saturday, March 21 and Sunday, March 22**, at the Meadows Mall, 4300 Meadows Lane, first floor near Sears; Saturday from 10 a.m. until 7 p.m. Sunday from 10 a.m. until 6 p.m.

### Transportation Fairs:

In addition to learning about the Resort Corridor project, the public can find out more about other major Las Vegas Valley transportation projects, including the Spaghetti Bowl, US 95, Las Vegas Beltway, and the Citizens Area Transit (CAT).

### For More Information:

Call the RTC Resort Corridor Staff at 455-4481.

A Spanish-language interpreter will be on-site for the workshops. A sign language interpreter can be made available by contacting 455-4481, or TDD 455-5997, no later than five days before each workshop. CAT services the workshop locations. Call CAT-RIDE (228-7433) for route and schedule information.

