

# NEWS CLIPS

## TRAINING BASE FOR TUSKEGEE AIRMEN MIGHT BECOME PARK SITE

Moton Field, the small airport that served as a training site in World War II for the all-Black air corps unit known as the Tuskegee Airmen, may become the newest addition to America's national park system. A study by the National Park Service has concluded that the airfield qualifies as a national historic site, and legislation sponsored by Rep. Bob Riley, R-Ala., is already moving through Congress to add it to the federal park system. Details of the 10-month NPS study were presented at the 27th Tuskegee Airmen National Convention Aug. 6 in Washington, D.C. Jerry Belson, NPS Southeast regional director, informed attendants that the study, conducted in cooperation with the State of Alabama and Tuskegee University, outlines four alternatives for commemorating the Airmen. Those alternatives range from a minimum effort to identify the site and provide visitor information to an extensive tourist attraction complete with a Tuskegee Airmen National Center that would house a museum with period aircraft. Under the most ambitious alternative, Tuskegee University would establish a Department of Aviation Science at the center to offer continued training to pilots and aeronautical engineers. The center would be financed largely through private donations.

## GOSPEL SINGER CONTRIBUTES \$250,000 TO BURNED CHURCHES FUND

Gospel superstar Kirk Franklin, GospoCentric and Interscope Records have announced that they will contribute a total of \$250,000 to the National Council of Churches Burned Churches Fund in anticipation of profits from Franklin's newest album, "Tha Nu Nation Project," set for release in late September. "We are grateful that Kirk Franklin and his record company are focusing attention on the continuing burning of churches and synagogues," said the Rev. Joan Brown Campbell, the council's general secretary. "By the end of 1998, the NCC will have assisted in the restoration of 156 burned churches. "However, sadly, we know of at least 20 churches at the present moment trying to figure out how to rebuild. Yet because church burnings are no longer in the national spotlight, it has been more difficult to raise money. We want to assist as many burned churches as new contributions will allow, so this kind offer comes at a most opportune moment." Franklin was raised in the church. "It is important that we support the churches and synagogues that have been burned or defaced. I couldn't help but help. Those churches are part of me," said Franklin, who has achieved enormous success in a very short time. His self-titled 1997 album is the biggest selling gospel album in history.

## SANDRA CROUCH NAMED PASTOR OF LOS ANGELES CHURCH

LOS ANGELES — Singing God's praises is no longer a part-time job for Sandra Crouch. The Grammy Award-winning gospel singer, who has worked with Michael Jackson, Diana Ross, Neil Diamond, and Julio Iglesias, was ordained as co-pastor of Christ Memorial Church by her brother, minister and gospel singer Andrae Crouch. "Jesus Christ is my boss, and I'm working for him now full-time," Crouch told the congregation Saturday. She began her new role at services Sunday. Crouch was ordained despite a ban on women ministers by the Church of God in Christ, the nation's largest black Pentecostal denomination with 5.5 million members. The church has an estimated 50 to 60 woman pastors, and ministers who clandestinely ordain women run the risk of censure by the Memphis-based denomination. But the 800-member church stands behind their new pastor. "It's a full house. Everyone who is here is a supporter of hers," said John Morabito, a recording engineer for the church. "It's her church now."

## CBS PULLS PLUG ON GUMBEL SHOW, MIGHT RETURN AS MIDSEASON REPLACEMENT

NEW YORK — CBS is shutting down production on "Public Eye," the newsmagazine featuring Bryant Gumbel. The program's staff got official word last Tuesday from CBS News president Andrew Heyward that they would lose their jobs before the scheduled Sept. 16 final broadcast. About 40 staffers are affected, said CBS News spokeswoman Sandy Genelius. The news came as little surprise, since "Public Eye" suffered low ratings during its freshman season and failed to win a slot on CBS' upcoming fall lineup, announced in May. "You can't keep a staff if you're not on the air, because if you're not on the air, you don't have a budget," Genelius said. She said "Public Eye" still may be back as a midseason replacement, and could draw on a number of "banked" stories the current staff will leave behind.

# Race, politics twisting Chicago custody battle

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*  
CHICAGO — Race and politics, a combustible mix, have become even more so in a Chicago custody case pitting black and white parents in a battle over a black child.

"Give the baby back!" a white motorist yells as he slowly drives past the neighborhood ward office of Alderman Edward Burke.

In front of the office, a black minister pushes an empty baby carriage back and forth to symbolize his belief that Burke and his wife are trying to steal a black child.

Tina Olison, the child's mother, wants him back.

The Burkes, who are white,

want to adopt Baby T., a 2 1/2-year-old boy who was placed in their foster care after he was born with cocaine in his system.

Race isn't the only thing twisting this case, however. Olison claims that in trying to be reunited with her son, she must overcome not only her own troubled past but also the influence the Burkes wield in Chicago.

Anne Burke is an Illinois appeals court judge; her husband is an ex-cop, a lawyer and a powerful political insider, influential in slating Democratic candidates for judgeships.

Olison, 36, is a recovered drug addict who has lost all

three of her children to the state's child welfare agency.

Now she's fighting the Cook County State's Attorney's effort to permanently end her parental rights. Her case, which goes to trial next month, is being watched by many blacks who consider the Burkes' custody of Baby T. a cruel irony because the alderman fought bitterly with the city's first black mayor, Harold Washington.

"Ed Burke has never done anything for the African-American community," said the Rev. Al Sampson, taking a break from his lonely vigil with the baby carriage at Burke's ward office. "The Burkes

should go to Ireland and adopt an Irish kid."

Since shortly after birth, Baby T. has lived in the Burkes' spacious brick home in a blue-collar neighborhood of mostly whites and Latinos, where there are few blacks, if any.

The Burkes, both 54, have four grown children of their own and had another foster child before Baby T. Anne Burke said terms of their foster care license forbid them from discussing any children in their custody.

Olison began drinking in junior high, and by the time she graduated from high school she was downing a six-pack of (See Politics, Page 15)

# Ousted commission leader says race played role

*Special to Sentinel-Voice*

COLUMBIA, S.C. — The former head of the Commission for the Blind sued Friday, saying he was fired because he is black.

When Donald Gist was let go in May, commission board members would say only that he no longer met their expectations.

Gist alleges the board retaliated after he exposed wrongdoing at the agency. A supporter later pointed out there weren't enough blind members on the panel, as required by federal law. Gist also says he was never told why he was fired.

"My dismissal took place without any semblance of due process," he said.

Gist also said he repeatedly asked the board to consider

reinstating him, but with no success. "On at least three occasions, the board has refused to meet with my counsel or myself," he said. Gist, who headed the commission for eight years, is seeking more than \$1 million in damages for emotional distress and lost wages.

Board Chairwoman Lynn Smith said she is confident the panel acted properly and stands by its decision.

Gist's lawsuit is not the first to emerge.

A former top aide who alleges Gist attacked her at a conference in Maryland last spring is suing the state. Leslye Wheeler alleges the state was negligent in hiring and supervising him. Her suit seeks \$300,000 in damages. Gist has denied assaulting Wheeler.

# Court ruling might give collegian chance for new trial

*By Reginald Stuart*

*Special to Sentinel Voice*

Richmond, Va. native Kemba Smith appears to have won the chance she has been seeking for more than three years. She may get the opportunity to have a court review of the 24-1/2 year mandatory federal prison sentence she received for her minor role in a violent Tidewater area drug ring.

It is the first positive news for the former Hampton University student who pleaded guilty in October 1994 to drug trafficking, money laundering and racketeering charges.

She was sentenced at age 24 to 24-1/2 years with no chance for parole, under harsh new federal sentencing laws, despite acknowledgments by federal prosecutors that she neither sold nor benefited from the drugs sold by her then boyfriend, the late Peter Michael Hall.

The news from the federal court came as her parents, Gus and Odessa Smith, were taking

their drug offender awareness campaign across the country, seeking support for a review of their daughter's case and that of other first time, nonviolent drug offenders.

In a little noticed ruling on July 14 by the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Fourth Circuit in Richmond, a three-judge panel ruled unanimously that a defendant in a case unrelated to Smith's had sought review of his case in a "timely" manner, that is, within one year after President Clinton signed into law the Anti-terrorism and Effective Death Penalty Act of 1996. Clinton signed the legislation on April 24, 1996.

Ruling in the case of Michael Dwayne Brown vs. Ronald Angelone, the appeals court panel adopted the reasoning for "the vast majority" of court cases that "... the prisoners whose convictions became final anytime prior to the effective date of the AEDPA had until April 23, 1997 to file their motion" for review of their case. The panel noted that its

assessment of the timely manner issue was in sync with that of six other appeals courts.

The Fourth Circuit ruling in the Brown case appears to reverse a finding last Spring by Judge Robert Doumar of the U.S. Court for the Eastern District of Virginia.

Judge Doumar, who seemed to take issue with the harshness of Smith's jail sentence, nevertheless rejected her petition to challenge her guilty plea and sentencing based on a procedural technicality — the timeliness of her petition. He noted that she pleaded guilty on Oct. 17, 1994, thus Oct. 17, 1995 would have been the latest she could have sought redress.

Smith, who is now represented by the NAACP Legal Defense and Educational Fund, her fourth set of lawyers, filed her latest petition on April

23, 1997. That was one day before a possible window of opportunity would have closed under the new law signed by President Clinton.

"We had just come back from the national NAACP convention and were checking the voice mail," said Gus Smith, recalling the day he and wife Odessa learned of this newest court ruling.

"We checked the voice mail and Laura (Hankins) from the defense fund said, 'Congratulations! You're back in court.'"

"Odessa fell to the floor," Gus Smith recalled. "We all cried. Then we got Armani (Kemba's three-year-old son by Peter Hall), all held hands and prayed. This was prayer answered," said the Richmond tax accountant. Odessa Smith teaches in the area's public (See Court, Page 15)

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