

NEWS CLIPS

MALCOLM X STAMP TO BE ISSUED EARLY NEXT YEAR

The United States Postal Service recently announced that the 33-cent Malcolm X stamp will be released early next year as a part of the Black Heritage Series. Malcolm X, the controversial civil rights figure, will be the 22nd African American honored by the postal service. Others featured in the series include Benjamin O. Davis, Sr., Ernest Just Hall, Louis Armstrong, Paul Robeson and Billie Holiday.

UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MISSISSIPPI CREATES MINORITY AFFAIRS POST

HATTIESBURG, Miss. (AP) — The University of Southern Mississippi plans to do more to keep black students, and the school's first coordinator of minority affairs will handle the details. Adina Narcisse, 31, who earned her master's degree in counseling and psychology from USM, was chosen over 17 other applicants for the job. "The university does a good job of recruiting minority students," she said. "I want to work at keeping more of those minority students until they graduate." Narcisse said she wants new support services for the students. "I want to create a place for them that will help them to graduate," she said. Narcisse will serve as adviser to the Afro-American Student Association and Students Promoting Education and Empowering for Diversity. She will also conduct sensitivity training on campus. Vrita Delaine, assistant vice president of student affairs, said the position was created in response to the rapid growth in minority enrollment. This fall, minority students make up 16.6 percent of the 12,895 students enrolled on the Hattiesburg campus.

CDC: SMOKING AMONG PREGNANT TEENS RISING

According to the Centers For Disease Control and Prevention's National Center For Health Statistics, smoking by pregnant teens remains high and increased slightly in 1995 and 1996. The study, "Smoking During Pregnancy 1990-96," reported that smoking among pregnant teens 15-19 years of age increased to 17.2 percent after declining for several years. "This study confirms once again that we must do more not only to help people stop smoking, but to prevent them from smoking in the first place," said Health and Human Services Secretary Donna E. Shalala. "Every day 3,000 teenagers start to smoke, placing themselves at risk of lung disease and cancer. And, as this heartbreaking report shows, smoking among teenagers who are pregnant is also going up — putting the next generation at risk as well." The overall rate of smoking during pregnancy dropped 26 percent between 1990 and 1996, so that in 1996 about 14 percent of all pregnant women reported smoking compared to 20 percent in 1990.

HARLEM CHOIR SET TO EXPAND TO OTHER CITIES

NEW YORK (AP) — If everything goes as planned, the Boys Choir of Harlem will be helping make beautiful music in several cities over the next few years. The Boys Choir, celebrating its 30th year in New York, announced last week that it is establishing satellite choirs in Milwaukee, Miami, San Francisco, Chicago, Detroit, and Commerce, Texas. The programs are in varying stages of development: The Milwaukee project, for instance, is in its second year and has a choir with about 40 boys, while the Chicago project is still in its initial fund-raising stage, said Boys Choir director and co-founder Walter J. Turnbull. "We're very excited about the expansion," Turnbull said. "Our model requires hard work and commitment as well as artistic vision and social and academic development. We believe every kid can learn." The Boys Choir program is known for the rigorous standards at its high school, the Choir Academy of Harlem. The academy is attended by about 300 boys and by 200 members of the Girls Choir of Harlem, established in 1979. Each applicant must audition, though singing ability is not a requirement. Instead, prospective students must reproduce a pitch — a skill necessary to learn to sing. Parents and guardians are also interviewed and must show a willingness to support their children through the ups-and-downs of the artistic and academic program.

HUD sets up first Houston office

HOUSTON (AP) — People who think they've been victims of federal housing discrimination soon may take their complaints to a local U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development office.

The agency's secretary, Andrew Cuomo, said the complaint center is especially necessary in Houston, with its fast-growing immigrant population and large numbers of blacks, Hispanics and Asians.

It's also the largest city in the country without such an office.

Cuomo announced a \$400,000 building grant last Wednesday to the National Fair Housing Alliance.

The nonprofit group will

set up the office to receive and investigate complaints of housing discrimination and educate the public and the housing industry about the Fair Housing Act, Cuomo said.

Zixta Q. Martinez, program director for the alliance in Washington, D.C., said the need for a local office was "tremendous."

"The patterns of discrimination are clear and the lack of enforcement is pretty apparent," she told the *Houston Chronicle*.

Ken Zimmerman, deputy assistant secretary for enforcement and programs in the HUD fair housing office, said a 1989 survey by the cabinet agency showed blacks in Houston received

false or incomplete information about housing availability 39 percent of the time.

For Hispanics, the rate was 36 percent.

Martinez said the office likely will open in two years. Ideally, she said, the \$400,000 in seed money will be combined with other HUD grants and donations from local mortgage lenders, insurers and real estate institutions.

The Houston grant was part of \$11.5 million the housing agency gave to 42 U.S. cities and counties. San Antonio, Austin and Hidalgo County will split another \$533,000.

Neither Martinez nor

Cuomo would single out any Houston area realtors, lenders or insurers as discriminatory.

But Martinez said the alliance has received complaints from Houston about practices of "steering," in which potential buyers are referred to particular neighborhoods on the apparent basis of race, and of "redlining," in which home insurers treat minority or mixed neighborhoods differently.

Although Cuomo said the money is not intended to address such tangential issues as street closings and gates to isolate affluent neighborhoods, Martinez said federal law also defines these as fair housing issues.

Banks accused of denying loans to Blacks

BIRMINGHAM, Ala. (AP) — A new report accuses Alabama banks of being hesitant to make loans to black people, which it says are denied mortgage loans far more often than whites.

Based on the 1997 loan register of the federal Home Mortgage Disclosure Act, the report concludes Alabama banks deny loans to high-income blacks twice as often as they refuse mortgages to whites of the same income level.

It also claimed banks make few loans in mostly black communities, and that nearly half of all low-income mortgage applicants are refused loans.

"This pattern is remarkable," said Walt Higgins of the Alabama New South Coalition, a mostly black political organization that released the report last Monday with other groups.

"Clearly, banks in Alabama need to learn from what banks in other parts of the country are doing to better serve low-income consumers so that these citizens have the chance they deserve to participate in the American dream of home ownership," Higgins said.

But banking officials disputed the report and said

they are giving loans to blacks and low-income applicants more often than ever before.

"Our banks are very conscientious of trying to provide affordable housing to moderate- and to low-income applicants, regardless of whether they are minority," said Jerry Spencer, executive director of the Alabama Banking Association.

The study was based on data reported by mortgage lenders to the federal government under the Community Reinvestment Act, which requires banks to meet the credit needs of all consumers in their markets.

Using the federal data, SouthTrust and Regions Bank received "outstanding" ratings for 1995 and 1996, respectively.

AmSouth received a "satisfactory" rating for 1995 and 1996, as did Compass Bank in 1995.

Despite those positive ratings, the report took issue with the overall record of Alabama banks in handling loan requests from blacks and the poor.

Upper-income blacks are 2.25 times as likely to be denied a mortgage as their white peers, the study concluded.

"More than 25 percent of

Alabama's population is African-American, however a mere 13 percent of all mortgages originated in 1997 were to black applicants," stated a summary of the report.

Also, it said, of 108,311 mortgages made by lenders in 1997, only 6,343, or 6 percent, went to families living in majority-black census tracts.

"While nearly 26,000 mortgages were made in the state's rural census tracts, no loans were made to families living in rural census tracts that are more than 50 percent African-American," the report said.

Banking officials defended their record of

making loans in predominantly black areas.

"In 1997 alone we made more than \$19 million in mortgage loans and home equity loans to African-American borrowers," said Jerry Underwood, a spokesman for AmSouth. He said \$14.7 million of those loans were for families living in mostly black areas.

The report was released by the New South Coalition, the Southern Rural Development Initiative, the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, the Southern Christian Leadership Conference and the Fair Housing Centers of Alabama.

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