

Black women's group to hold town hall meeting

Catisha Marsh
Sentinel-Voice

The Professional Black Women's Alliance will usher in 1999 with a Town Hall Meeting Saturday at the West Las Vegas Arts Center, 947 W. Lake Mead Blvd. Start time is 2 p.m.

Titled "New You, New Millennium", the event will feature influential African-American woman speaking on a variety of topics.

Rose McKinney-James, who chairs a nonprofit solar energy company and unsuccessfully bid for the lieutenant governorship in 1998, will address black



ATKINSON-GATES

women in the year 2000. Clark County Commissioner Yvonne Atkinson-Gates will discuss Las Vegas' future in the new millennium and youth mentor Vanessa

Williams will talk about setting goals. Refreshments will also be served.

"The purpose of this event is to reach out to young women; to encourage them to make wise choices now," said Faye Duncan Daniels, president of PBWA and one of its six founding members. "They will then be able to lead self-sufficient, healthy lives."

Daniels hopes to use the group's first-ever town hall meeting to inspire black women to empower themselves.

"Yes, I can!" is the motto of the 12-year group which

started out by providing role models for women on welfare, then delved into empowerment workshops and motivational programs.

At first, role models were picked from black women who were pioneers in their respective fields.

Today, the organization includes all women who contribute to the community.

Daniels described one kind of mentor the alliance looks for as the "Ms. Jane Pitman type (who has) gone to church for 80 years, made sure the children are clean and fed."

Every July, the group



McKINNEY-JAMES

honors community-minded women during its Rose Awards ceremony. To date, there have been 150 honorees.

Daniels credits photographer Lisa Margerum, the

group's youngest member, with orchestrating the event. Margerum earned a Rose Award for photography displays of the Million Man and Million Woman Marches and was later invited to join the group.

"I was thinking about how to work with the group and from talking to my younger sister, I thought we needed to reach out to young people, especially, African-American youth," Margerum said of the idea of holding a town hall meeting.

She also wanted to put the alliance's talent to use for the good of the community.

Public schools privatization draws criticism from Atlantans

ATLANTA (AP) — Several black organizations are suspicious of a company that could be the leading contender to privatize some public schools in Atlanta and Macon.

Critics say the New York-based Edison Project, which seeks to run schools for profit, would take limited tax dollars away from Atlanta and other systems made up of poor black students.

"It's quite easy to get into these poor, inner-city schools because parents are desperate to educate their kids," said Herman Reese of 100 Black Men of Atlanta Inc. "Clearly, we need to do something to jump-start education in Atlanta. But Edison is not the way to do it."

School officials in Atlanta and Macon are exploring private management of public schools.

Atlanta school officials have prepared a

request for proposals for private, for-profit, education management firms. Proposals are due in February.

And Bibb County school officials say they'll decide by March whether to hire such a company to manage two or three Macon elementary schools next fall.

Bibb County Superintendent Gene Buinger and board members have traveled to Miami and Colorado to examine schools run by the Edison Project, a seven-year-old company that operates 51 schools in 11 states and the District of Columbia.

The Edison Project operates publicly funded charter schools and schools in partnership with boards of education. It says it has invested \$40 million to research and implement the best teaching methods used in public and private schools.

Officials are considering whether such

companies can help with education reforms aimed at raising pupil performance and test scores, said Gloria Patterson, Atlanta's interim deputy superintendent for instruction.

Edison proposes operating three K-12 clusters of schools in different parts of the city, ultimately educating 6,000 Atlanta students.

Hallmarks of Edison Project schools include days that are 60 to 90 minutes longer than traditional; a school year about six weeks longer than normal; small classes; a computer in every child's home; a laptop for every teacher; a rigorous liberal arts curriculum emphasizing reading, writing, music, art and physical education; and a character and values component.

But critics maintain that the Edison Project does not deliver higher grades and more motivated students, and that it pursues districts

with low-income, underperforming students as a way to make inroads in wealthier districts.

"Let's kill this thing quick, fast and in a hurry," said the Rev. Timothy McDonald, president of the Concerned Black Clergy.

Deborah McGriff, an Edison vice president and former Detroit school superintendent, said the company does not choose the schools it operates. And because the schools are tax-funded, Edison must accept every eligible student.

She said two groups want Edison schools in their communities.

The schools are the now-vacant Drew Elementary, which is in the East Lake Meadows housing development being built adjacent to the East Lake Golf Club, and a school in Carver Homes public housing development, which has also considered a charter school.

Lawmakers still grappling with Hopwood ruling three years hence

By Renae Merle

AUSTIN (AP) — Three years ago, four white students won a lawsuit against the University of Texas Law School for reverse discrimination, but lawmakers are still grappling with the aftermath.

The Legislature is expected to debate several bills this session to counter the effects of the Hopwood ruling, which ended affirmative action from admission and scholarship decisions at the state's public universities.

"The harsh reality of Hopwood is that the next generation of Texans will have to live in a state where our best black and brown minds have to go to other states," said Sen. Rodney Ellis, D-Houston.

The ruling, named after Cheryl Hopwood, one of four plaintiffs who sued for admission into the school, was allowed to stand in 1996 by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Since then, the persisting problem has been "the brain drain," many school officials complain. Out-of-state

schools have recruited some of Texas' most talented minority students with affirmative action scholarships.

When Texas becomes a majority-minority state, as demographers predict, lawmakers will face a much larger problem than if they address the issue now, said

Sen. Royce West, D-Dallas.

A recent study by the Texas Higher Education Coordinating Board found minority enrollment at Texas colleges had risen slightly in 1998, but the number of blacks and Hispanics at many of the state's most selective institutions remained below the level it was before

affirmative action programs were dismantled.

A bipartisan push to put more money into financial aid could help, West said. The House Higher Education Committee has proposed spending an additional \$250 million over two years on loans and scholarships.

The Texas Commission on

a Representative Student Body has asked for \$500 million over two years for financial aid, hoping it will enable more low-income students — including blacks and Hispanics — to attend college.

The state currently provides \$122 million a year for financial aid.

Students may not receive grants based on race, but commission members say they hope need-based financial aid would help minorities, many of whom come from low-income families.

"I think the momentum has been building for some (See Lawmakers, Page 12)

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