

## Petition for Smith clemency gaining steam

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Spectators stood wall-to-wall in the packed courtroom. People were tense and silent with dread.

Among the crowd, Gus and Odessa Smith, the parents of the defendant, Kemba Smith, stood side-by-side, awaiting the judge's sentence of the 23-year-old college student after she turned herself in and pled guilty to minimal involvement in a drug distribution conspiracy in which she sold no dope.

A first-time offender with no previous criminal record,

they thought surely there would be some leniency, some mercy for their daughter, who had operated under the control of an abusive boyfriend - a boyfriend who had brutally beaten her and even threatened the lives of her family.

But Judge Richard Kellam, appearing to be a product of his time as a white 87-year-old from a wealthy Virginia Beach family, factored in no such elements as mercy. After a brief statement, Kellam, now deceased, said the mandatory minimum sentence must be invoked:

"Twenty-four years" in federal prison with no possibility of parole.

Shrieks, sobs, and gasps of shock and disbelief pierced the courtroom.

Mrs. Smith fainted to the floor and was picked up and carried out in the arms of her husband. Witnesses have said even the prosecutor looked shocked.

That was five years ago. Mrs. Smith recently recalled those initial moments as "the most chilling affect I've ever had in my life."

But, the bang of the judge's gavel did not end the

case for this family from Glen Allen, Va., near Richmond. Instead, it began a five-year fight, a journey of faith for the Smiths that has taken them all the way from that courthouse to the White House.

They have now turned to President Clinton and the U.S. Department of Justice with a request that the president grant clemency to Smith, based on an incorrect and excessive sentence, among other factors. Lawyers of the NAACP Legal Defense and Education Fund submitted the petition on her behalf. They took on the case after the

Smiths dissolved their relationship with the original defense attorneys.

Momentum has ballooned the case of this young woman, now incarcerated in the Danbury Federal Correctional Center in Danbury, Conn.

With national news coverage and activist parents, she has become an icon for opponents of so-called "mandatory minimum" sentences, which have caused the incarceration of thousands of first-time, non-violent drug offenders for extreme periods of time with no consideration

of their non-criminal history.

By simply telling Smith's story by website and by word of mouth, Mr. and Mrs. Smith are constantly drumming up support for her. They have won support from the 38-member Congressional Black Caucus, the Alpha Kappa Alpha and Delta Sigma Theta sororities among thousands - if not millions of people - who have now heard about the case. Letters are pouring in to the White House, asking the president to grant clemency, but more are needed, Mr. Smith said.

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Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

Jean-Bertrand Aristide addresses the media during a news conference in Port-au-Prince, Haiti Monday, a day after a presidential election boycotted by all major opposition parties.

## Aristide declared winner in election

By Michael Norton

PORT-AU-PRINCE, Haiti (AP) - Former President Jean-Bertrand Aristide was re-elected with an overwhelming 92 percent of the vote, the electoral council announced Wednesday, giving the final tally for a contest boycotted by all major opposition parties.

Runner-up, Arnold Dumas, had just 2.4 percent of the vote in Sunday's elections and the other five candidates garnered even less. Candidates have three days to contest the results.

Aristide's Lavalas Family party also made a clean sweep of nine Senate seats that also were contested Sunday, giving it all but one seat in the upper house.

It won 80 percent of all

seats in the House of Assembly in May, June and July legislative elections that opponents charged were rigged.

Aristide confronts a mammoth task as he prepares to take power in the hemisphere's poorest country for a second time, following an election boycotted by the opposition amid charges of intimidation and irregularities.

He will be hobbled by the distrust of world leaders, the desperation of his people, and a list of enemies equal to his growing reputation as a ruthless political manipulator.

Aristide became Haiti's first freely elected leader in 1990, ending nearly 200 years of dictatorship. He was ousted by the army in a bloody coup after seven months in office.

## Event to honor student help center

John T. Stephens III  
Sentinel-Voice

A dedication ceremony has been planned for the expansion of the Academic Support and Community Service Center.

The two-year-old center created by the Clark County School District has acquired 30 new computers for a total of 45 computers in their new technology laboratory. The ceremony will take place Dec. 7 from 10:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. The center is located at 926 West Owens Ave., Suite 926.

The Technology Learn-

ing Laboratory will launch an innovative state-of-the-art educational software program (PLATO) which is designed to increase student achievement in the areas of Reading, Math, Science, Language, Arts, etc.

"(The center's) purpose is to provide outreach service for parents, students, and staff," center director Yolanda McKinney-Arrington said. "Our primary intent is to facilitate problem solving, referral services, and improve achievement in all academic areas."

Clark County School

Board trustees created community centers in each of their districts to give parents one location to go to address student issue. Previously, parents went to a facility on 2832 E. Flamingo Road.

"The bottomline is to support the student achievement of all District C schools," said McKinney Arrington, whose trustee is Shirley Barber.

To that end, her center offers tutoring from 3 to 4:30 p.m. Monday through Thursday and from 9 a.m. to 1 p.m. on Saturday. The center also has a lending library and a computer lab.

The center has raised more than \$200,000 in private contributions and has an annual operating budget slightly below \$30,000 a year.

TRO Learning Incorporated, Wells Fargo Bank, and the IBM Computer Corporation provided funds for the technology learning lab.

The center has sponsored book drives; its next book drive is slated for February. Staff have also held a career day for children interested in aviation.

Those interested in more information on the center can call 799-3140.

## DRUM MAJOR

Don Cunningham pounds out a melodic tune during the 4th Annual International Drum Festival at the West Las Vegas Library Theater. The event also included a history lecture on the drum's African roots, samples of Argentinian drumming and a demonstration of the steel drum. Cunningham and his wife Alicia Rodriguez has garnered national acclaim and earned a Grammy nomination for their album "Strings 'N' Swings."

Sentinel-Voice photo by John Broussard

