

Bush promotes home ownership

CRAWFORD, Texas (AP) — President Bush pledged his administration's best efforts Saturday to help more people realize the dream of home ownership and called on Americans to "put hammer to nail" in voluntary efforts to meet that goal.

Bush said that while the home ownership rate has reached 68 percent for many Americans, it remains at under 50 percent for blacks and Hispanics.

"These numbers are troubling because home ownership lies at the heart of the American Dream," the president said in his weekly radio address. "It is a key to upward mobility for low- and middle-income Americans."

Bush commented as he settled in for a weekend of relaxation at his Texas ranch

before heading to Europe for a weeklong series of meetings with world leaders on such potentially contentious issues as missile defense and global warming.

Bush, who earlier this week joined in as a Habitat for Humanity volunteer to help build a house in Tampa, Fla., used the radio address to sketch an affordable housing solution based on government and private efforts.

On the government side, the president said he is seeking a \$2 billion increase in the annual budget for the Department of Housing and Urban Development to help revitalize communities in urban and rural America.

He said the American Dream Downpayment Fund will provide \$200 million in down payment assistance to

help 130,000 low-income families buy homes. And he said a new program will allow people who receive low-income rental assistance to combine a year's worth of payments and use the money for a down payment on a house or to make monthly payments on a new mortgage.

"We're also proposing a \$1.7 billion tax credit to support the rehabilitation or new construction of up to 100,000 homes over a 5-year period," Bush said.

And he asserted that the \$1.35 trillion tax-cut bill he signed into law this week will make money available for use in buying a new home or paying the mortgage on an existing home.

"Government can play a helpful role but so must many others," the president said.

"My administration is dedicated to helping the private sector organizations, like Habitat for Humanity, that build homes and lift lives."

He made a direct pitch for volunteer assistance.

"If you have an opportunity to help Habitat for Humanity, or other organizations working to make the American Dream a reality for more families, I hope you do so," he said.

"Government funding can help," Bush said. "But Habitat relies on volunteers to accomplish the bulk of its mission."

"And I can tell you, from personal experience, there's no better way to feel like you're making a difference than to put hammer to nail and help people realize their dreams."

Forum eyes males

Special to Sentinel-Voice

Zion United Methodist Church will host a forum Sunday titled "Zion's Men Facing the Challenge in the New Millennium."

The forum is scheduled to begin at 11 a.m. at the church, 2108 N. Revere.

Slated to give the guest speech is M. Daniel Bennett Jr., assistant professor at the Georgia University School of Social Work in Atlanta. Bennett is the son of Zion United Methodist pastor the Rev. Marrion Bennett.

The younger Bennett has an undergraduate degree in sociology from Hampton University, a master's degree in social work from the University of Pennsylvania and a doctoral degree from the University of North Carolina



M. Daniel Bennett, Jr.

at Chapel Hill.

Bennett has worked several years in the children's mental health field, including a stint in the Carolina Children's Initiative and research into anti-social aggressive behavior in children and adolescents. Those interested in attending can call the church at 648-7806.

Harlem's renewal continues, city to get bookstore

NEW YORK (AP) — On Frederick Douglass Boulevard in Harlem, next door to a Disney shopping outlet, a bookstore will soon be born.

Not just any bookstore, but a black bookstore. Not just any black bookstore, but one owned by one of the most respected black booksellers in the country. And not just any location, but Harlem, the historic heart of African-American culture.

The "Hue-Man Bookstore" is scheduled to open by early fall. The space, unused right now, is about 4,000 square feet, among the largest of any black-owned stores.

"I had a vision for a large African-American book store in a city with a large black population," says owner Clara Villarosa, who recently agreed to a 10-year lease and who ran a prominent bookstore in Denver for 15 years before moving to Harlem last year.

What makes this store especially notable is that Harlem, home to the great black arts movement of the 1920s and 1930s and countless reading groups today, has had surprisingly few booksellers.

One long-closed store was owned by filmmaker Oscar Michaux, best known for the silent classic "Body and Soul." Another store, Liberation Books, thrived during the Civil Rights movement of the 1960s, but now is open only for limited hours.

Otherwise, Harlem residents must seek out books by other means: the public library, street vendors, a small section in a general store. No

"I had a vision for a large African-American book store in a city with a large black population."

— owner Clara Villarosa

major chain has an outlet here. No store in recent memory has been a member of the American Booksellers Association.

"The problem for a long time was money. During the Harlem Renaissance, there was a lot of talk when a new book by Langston Hughes or Zora Neale Hurston would come out, but not a lot of sales," says writer David Levering Lewis, whose books include "The Portable Harlem Renaissance Reader" and two Pulitzer Prize-winning volumes on W.E.B. Du Bois.

But in the past decade, a substantial black market has emerged in Harlem and elsewhere. The success of Terry McMillan's novel, "Waiting to Exhale," confirmed that sales to blacks alone could make a best seller. Just in the past year, several major publishers have set up imprints designed for black readers.

"Harlem is truly an underserved area in terms of bookstores," said Manie Baron, a Harlem native and publisher of Amistad Press, a black imprint of HarperCollins. Villarosa's store will be part of Harlem U.S.A., a federally designated "empowerment zone" that grants tax breaks and exemptions from government regulations. Neighboring stores include Disney, Modell's and

Duane Reade. Two and one-half blocks away is the office of former President Clinton.

"I know he likes bookstores so I expect him to be a customer," Villarosa says.

The opening of Hue-Man eases two concerns of community leaders. One was getting a locally owned retailer to participate in Harlem U.S.A. The other was finally persuading a bookseller, any bookseller, to set up shop in Harlem. Officials had tried since 1992 and were turned down by Barnes & Noble among other stores.

"The chain bookstores have stereotypical ideas. They don't think there's as large a market as there is," says Drew Greenwald, president of Grid Properties, a private company that helped develop Harlem U.S.A.

Villarosa is a major presence among booksellers, especially black booksellers. She is the first black woman to serve on the ABA's board of directors and she founded a black booksellers organization within the ABA. In Denver, her support of black writers led to friendships with McMillan, Maya Angelou and E. Lynn Harris, among others.

"She took some of my books into her store when I was still selling them from the back of my car. I've never

forgotten her for that," says Harris, author of such bestselling novels as "Abide With Me" and "Just as I Am."

If the new store succeeds, it will likely become an essential stop on book tours and a community center in

Harlem, just as Villarosa's store was in Denver. Villarosa is already planning the guest list for her launch party.

"It's going to be a blow-out! Authors are saying, 'Tell me when to come.' I called Maya Angelou. I called Terry

(McMillan) and said, 'Terry, you know you're going to come.' E. Lynn Harris is going to come."

"She says I'm coming?" Harris said with a laugh, "Well, if she said that, then, yeah, I guess I'll be there."



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