

## NEWS BRIEFS

### FIREFIGHTER JOHNNY WILLIAMS IS BACK ON THE JOB

Firefighter Johnny Williams is back on the job at the Clark County Fire Department. Williams was suspended June 22, pending a hearing. Williams was suspended from the fire department two days after his wife, Lorraine Russell Williams, was also terminated. Russell Williams was suspended for unspecified reasons. She was simply told that she had not passed her probationary period. Russell-Williams was in training to be a firefighter and was two days from her graduation date. When Williams was suspended days two later, he developed chest pain and spent the next five days in the hospital. At his hearing, he learned an additional charge of sexual harassment had been made against him. He was given one day off without pay but was not terminated. Russell-Williams was not so lucky. Although she also had a hearing with personnel from the Clark County Dept. of Human Resources, she received official notification that she was terminated because she had not passed her probationary period. Russell-Williams has hired attorney Kathy England and is pursuing litigation against the CCFD.

### ANNAN, BUSH HEADLINE NATIONAL URBAN LEAGUE CONVENTION

WASHINGTON — United Nations Secretary-General Kofi Annan and President Bush are among the featured speakers at the upcoming National Urban League national convention here this month. Annan is scheduled to speak on Monday, July 30, and Bush is slated to address the convention on Wednesday, Aug. 1, the convention's last day, said Urban League President Hugh Price, who spoke with the NNPA about the upcoming conference. Secretary of Education Rod Paige, one of Bush's more high-profile African-American cabinet posts, will speak on Tuesday, July 31, a day after Sen. Tom Daschle, D-S.D., addresses convention delegates. The theme of this year's convention, held from July 28 to Aug. 1 at the Washington Convention Center, is "The Opportunity Agenda: Achieving Economic and Social Equality in the New Millennium." "We're going to be focusing on a development agenda for our community," said Price. The NUL president, who said he was "delighted" Bush would address the convention, said he thinks the president's emphasis on improving elementary school scores in reading is "right on target." However, the NUL stands ready to criticize him if he attempts to destroy affirmative action, he added. "We call it as we see it, based on the issues," said Price. "And our bottom line is what advances the best interests of the African-American community."

### NAACP EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE RENEWS PRESIDENT KWEISI MFUME'S PACT

NEW ORLEANS (AP) - The executive committee of the NAACP's board of directors has approved a multiyear contract extension for president Kweisi Mfume, board chairman Julian Bond said late last week. Terms of the deal were not disclosed. Final approval is expected at the board's meeting in October. Mfume, a former Democratic congressman, became president and chief executive officer of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People in February 1996. He's been credited with turning the organization around after his predecessor, Benjamin Chavis, was ousted for allocating NAACP funds to quiet sexual harassment allegations against him. NAACP members and outside observers have said that under Mfume, the civil rights group has regained some of the relevance it had in the 1960s, focusing on increased voter turnout, diversity in the television industry and advocating for children's health issues, among other things. Mfume's first term as president ended in February. The agreement "will assure that we continue to have his strong leadership for many years to come," Bond said as the NAACP's 92nd annual convention wrapped up.

### Correction

Assembly Bill 328 became law during the last session of the legislature. The law reduces the time ex-offenders have to wait to get their records sealed and their rights restored.

# \$8.7 million reached in Louima lawsuit

NEW YORK (AP) — Abner Louima, the Haitian immigrant tortured with a broken broomstick in a police station bathroom in 1997, received a record \$8.7 million settlement last Thursday in one of the nation's most notorious police brutality cases.

"I don't really see myself as a rich man," Louima said. "I see myself as someone who's lucky to be alive and able to see some justice."

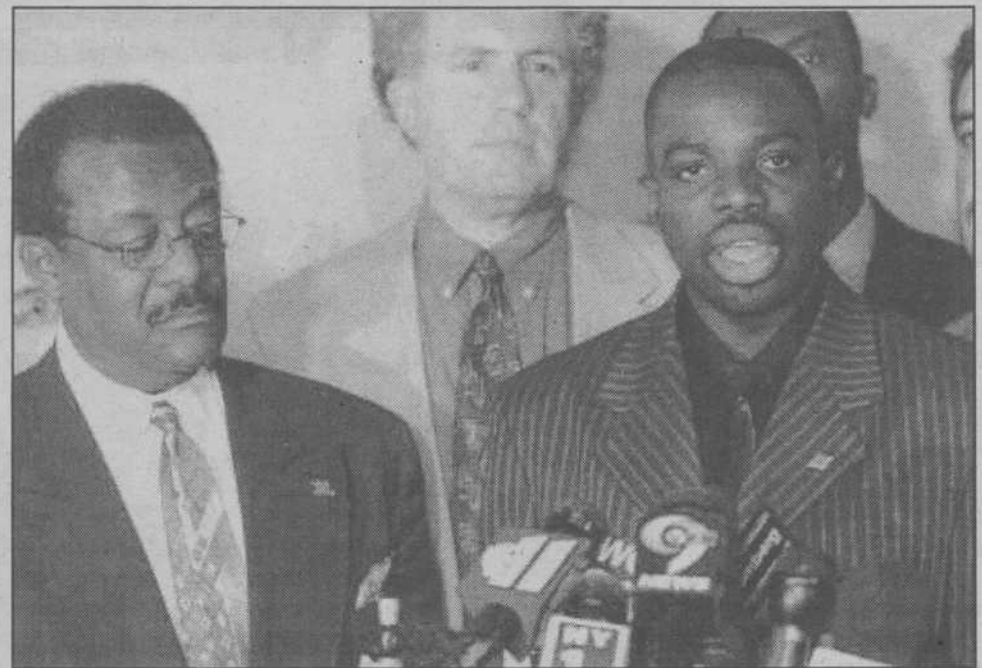
The deal closes a case that strained relations between blacks and Mayor Rudolph Giuliani, and touched off protests accusing police of abusing minorities.

The settlement came after months of tense negotiations with the city and its police union, the Patrolmen's Benevolent Association, which will share the cost.

Louima, 34, said he would use some of the settlement to set up a group for victims of police brutality. "Mine is just one case, and so much more needs to be done," he said.

Louima was arrested four years ago in a brawl outside a Brooklyn nightclub and taken in handcuffs to a police station. Officer Justin Volpe - mistakenly believing Louima had punched him - sought revenge by sodomizing Louima with a broomstick. Louima suffered a ruptured bladder and colon and spent two months in the hospital.

Volpe pleaded guilty and is serving 30 years in prison. Charles Schwarz was con-



Abner Louima, right, who was tortured in a police station bathroom in 1997, stands with his attorneys Johnnie Cochran, left, and Peter Neufeld, center, as he reads a statement during a news conference in New York.

(AP Photo/Beth A. Keiser)

victed of pinning Louima down. Four other officers were found guilty of lying about what happened. Charges against Louima were dropped.

The case led to a federal civil rights investigation of the department, though the government has since shelved the case.

Louima sued for \$155 million in 1998, accusing police of protecting violent officers behind a "blue wall of silence and lies."

He will receive \$5.8 million, with the rest going to his lawyers. He will get \$3.6 million up front, with more payments in later years and \$5,000 a month for life. The city is expected to cover \$7.1

million of the settlement - the most it has ever paid to a police brutality victim.

On Thursday, Louima said that because of his case, the city is dropping a union rule that allows two days to pass before officers who are suspects in criminal cases have to meet with investigators. Louima also said his case led the union to hire outside experts to train its officials.

However, attorneys for the city and the union both said the settlement imposed no departmental reforms. City lawyer Lawrence Kahn said those changes were already in place before the agreement with Louima.

"We've enhanced training and monitoring to ensure

something like this will never happen again," Kahn said. "There is no link between the lawsuit and the changes."

In 1992, a man won \$16.6 million after he was paralyzed in a struggle with New York police. But the city's cost was only \$4.5 million, Kahn said.

Earlier this year, Chicago agreed to pay \$18 million to settle a lawsuit over a fatal police shooting of an unarmed woman.

New York's 40,000-officer department still faces a separate federal civil rights investigation that was prompted by the 1999 slaying of an unarmed West African immigrant, Amadou Diallo, in a hail of 41 bullets fired by four white officers.

## Death penalty opponents honor Shaka Sankofa

### Special to Sentinel-Voice

More than 50 people gathered in a Texas community center recently to pay tribute to the life and legacy of Shaka Sankofa (Gary Graham) on the first anniversary of his legal lynching.

Many Graham family members were present for the tribute, including Sankofa's grandson. Sankofa's stepmother Elenora, who took up the fight to save his life after his mother Thelma passed away while he was in prison, shared the story of being treated with great disrespect when she went to visit him the day before his execution.

The theme of the tribute was a quote from Sankofa: "The odds we face are great, but even greater is the power of the people."

The gathering heard from other people who worked together to stop the execution of Sankofa.

That struggle was brought

to a halt by the state of Texas on June 22 of last year when Sankofa was executed in Huntsville, Texas, under the watch of then-Gov. George W. Bush.

A message sent to Shaka's supporters from Mumia Abu-Jamal emphasized, "Usually, poor folks commit crimes for money."

Politicians kill poor folks for their own political advantage: for a promotion; for a job. Which is worse?"

A young man named Trent told those gathered he had been in jail until the day after Shaka's execution.

When he was released he went to Shaka's funeral and it was then he made the decision to work for justice and to help his community.

Also inspired by Shaka's courage in the face of tremendous odds were the Huntsville 8, who were arrested at the protest of his execution and are still facing

politically motivated criminal trespass charges.

Other statements included a personal message from Fi-

del Castro, a letter from a death row prisoner and a message from the head of (See Sankofa, Page 5)

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