

LV Urban League looks forward to Morial's leadership

By Kathi Overstreet
Sentinel-Voice

Las Vegas, one of the fastest growing cities in the U.S., was void of an Urban League affiliation, but thanks to concerned citizens that will soon change.

In spring 2001, a committee comprised of local citizens and community leaders conducted a community needs assessment. Information was sent out to the community, letters of support were received from elected officials, two focus groups were held, and more than 200 signatures were collected expressing a desire to have an affiliate chapter in Southern Nevada.

More than four months later, the committee con-

cluded that a chapter was needed to implement programs in the areas of skilled trades, education, and youth development.

Nearly two years later, the State of Nevada awarded the Urban League permission to operate under a legal charter in Clark County. Since the initial efforts by acting president Jackie Shropshire to establish a chapter, the membership has grown from 5 to 30.

The Urban League founded in 1910, has over 100 affiliates in 34 states and the District of Columbia and is the nation's largest and oldest community-based movement.

The Urban League's mission is to enable African-

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Americans to secure economic self-reliance, parity, power and protect our civil rights by ensuring that our children are well educated and by helping adults achieve economic self-sufficiency.

"I have been involved with the Urban League for more than 40 years. In 1957, the

Urban League helped me get a job as a clerk typist with the airlines. I was the first black hired in the office of TWA in Kansas City, Mo.," Shropshire said. "My mother also was involved with the Urban League, the meetings were held across the street from our home.

The Articles of Incorporation for the Las Vegas Urban League were filed in February and are being processed. According to Shropshire, the committee makes its formal presentation for affiliation to the National Board of Directors this summer. Once the affiliation becomes official, a local board of directors will be selected. The 25-member board must include certain percentages

representing the community at large, service recipients, and youth under age 25. The board will then select the formal Urban League officers.

"Locally we have had no extensive knowledge (about) working directly with the Urban League, however, it is clear to me that doing so is a direct asset to our community and Las Vegas," said Hanna Brown, president of the Urban Chamber of Las Vegas.

Las Vegas is becoming part of the long-standing organization at a time when change is also occurring at the national level. Last week, Marc H. Morial was named the new President and CEO of the league, said Michael J. Critelli, chairman of the Urban League Board of Trustees.

In his new post, Morial will oversee an annual budget in excess of \$40 million and a network of more than 100 nationwide affiliates.

Brown said, "I am truly excited about the new leadership of the National Urban League." Also president of the Urban Chamber of Commerce, Brown added, "The Urban Chamber is looking forward to working and

partnering with the Urban League."

Morial, 45, followed in the footsteps of his father, Ernest "Dutch" Morial, as two-term mayor of New Orleans. Morial's father was the first African-American elected mayor in 1978.

He left office with a 70 percent approval rating. Under his leadership, crime reduced by 60 percent and a police department under tremendous scandal was reorganized. As mayor, he was responsible for the return of the NBA Hornets to New Orleans from Charlotte during his final months in office.

"I have watched Marc's career through the years, even prior to his election as mayor in 1994. I think it's great. I am very, very excited because he comes from a family that understands the needs of our community," Shropshire said.

"He has worked with mobilizing groups in areas where the Urban League's mission focuses on racial inclusion, employment, urban economics and helping to rebuild our neighborhoods. He brings youth and a breath of fresh air to our entire movement."

Urban League

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ful New Orleans firm, Morial is the son of Ernest N. "Dutch" Morial, New Orleans' first African-American mayor, and Sybil Morial, a teacher and university administrator. Marc Morial was mayor of New Orleans from 1994 until last year, when he was ineligible to continue beyond his two terms.

When he left office, Morial had a stunning 70 percent approval rating among voters. He also developed a high national profile while serving as president of the United States Conference of Mayors in 2001 and 2002.

"We used a search firm and ended with almost 200 names," one board member said. "We got that down from 20, to 10, to four and finally to one."

An effective, telegenic public speaker with an easy-going manner, Morial is expected to cast a long shadow in the civil rights community similar to Urban League legends Whitney M. Young Jr. and Vernon E. Jordan Jr.

Unlike when Hugh Price took over, Morial will inherit a respected, financially sound and vibrant organization poised to become an even stronger voice on domestic issues. And at the age of 45, he is also expected to attract more young people to the 93-year-old organization.

The Urban League, which has an annual budget of more than \$40 million, has more than 100 affiliates serving more than 2 million people.

At its last national conference, 61 percent of those in attendance were female, 23 percent were between the ages of 30 and 44 and 37 percent were between 45 and 64. Half of the delegates earn more than \$50,000 and 79 percent were college graduates.

Because it has more affluent delegates than any other national civil rights organization, the League has often been tagged with the label of being a bourgeois organization.

Price was particularly sensitive to that criticism during his nine-year tenure. In an interview with the NNPA News Service last fall, he said: "People have often said to me that the National Urban League is a middle-class organization. I've said to them, 'If you are accusing us of trying to get poor people and working class people into the middle class, we plead guilty.'"

He also could have pleaded guilty to help-

ing the league refine its image. Established a year after the NAACP, the Urban League was seen as the second-oldest civil rights organizations.

And with the NAACP's inflated membership numbers, it was seen as the second-largest group.

In recent years, the National Urban League has billed itself as "the nation's oldest and largest community-based movement devoted to empowering African-Americans to enter the economic and social mainstream."

Its board is still dominated by corporate executives. Among major civil rights groups, it has perhaps the most integrated board.

Morial has proven that he can work well across racial lines and is credited with reducing racial tension in New Orleans. When he was elected for a second term, he became the first Black mayor to win a majority of the White vote while running against a White opponent.

Morial earned his bachelor of arts degree in economics from the University of Pennsylvania and graduated from Georgetown University Law School in 1983.

He was involved in numerous civil rights cases as an attorney and was one of the lead plaintiffs in the "Chisom v. Roemer," the U.S. Supreme Court cases that ruled that judicial elections are covered by the 1964 Voting Rights Act.

He was elected a state senator in 1991, where he served two years and co-authored more than 90 bills that became law. The "Baton Rouge Report" named him "Rookie of the Year."

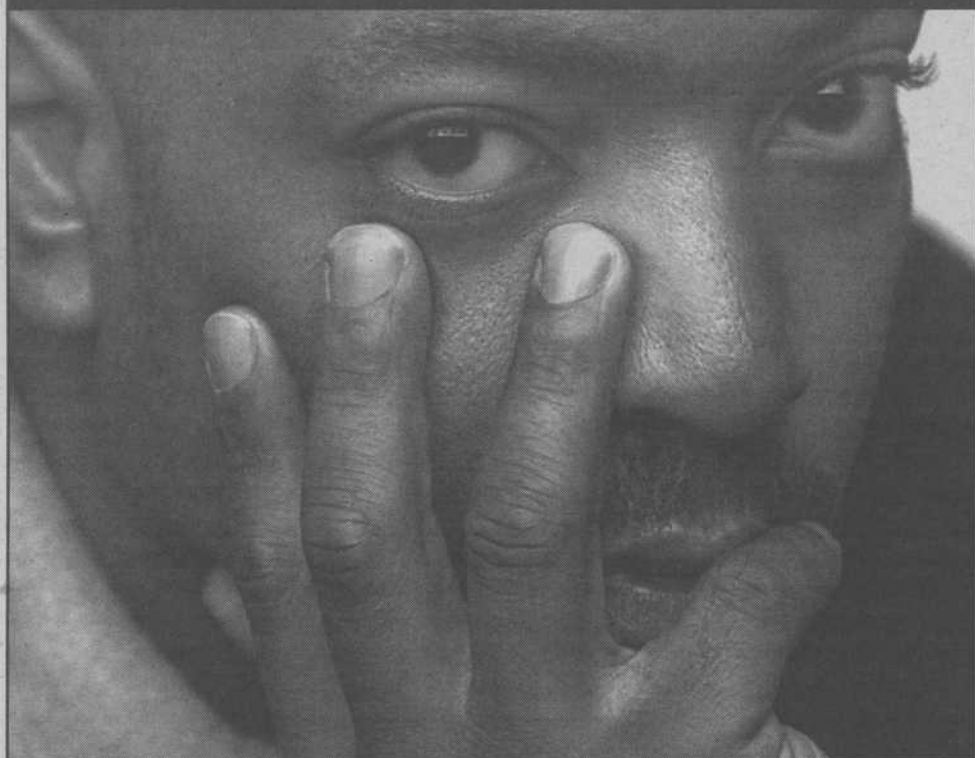
Morial was first elected mayor in 1994 at age 35. One of his major accomplishments was reforming a corrupt and inefficient police department, which led to a sharp drop in crime.

Under his leadership, more than \$1 billion was spent on construction projects.

In 1998, Morial became the first mayor to file suit against the gun industry, arguing that manufacturers did not go far enough in incorporating safety devices in their design of handguns.


Morial also has served as an adjunct professor of political science at Xavier University in New Orleans. He is married to Michelle Miller, a local newscaster.

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