

# Card aims to focus Black spending power

By Ayana Jones

Special to Sentinel-Voice

PHILADELPHIA (NPA)—African-Americans reportedly have the largest spending power of all minority groups in America, yet it has been said most of that money is flowing out of the Black business community. According to Target Market News, a research and information firm specializing in Black consumer marketing and media, African-Americans had an overall spending power of \$631 billion in 2002. As the owner of Unity Card Services, Anthony Quinones has come up with a novel way to help Black-owned businesses tap into the strong spending power of the community and enable consumers to receive discounts on retail services.

After about a year of planning, Quinones launched the "Unity Card," which enables consumers to receive discounts when they shop at participating Black-owned businesses. The plastic card resembles a credit card in its appearance. For a nominal fee, consumers have their choice of either the "Old Glory" flag or "Black" edition of the card. Quinones, a 35-year old native of the Bronx, N.Y., says the concept of a discount card evolved over time.

After working as a financial analyst in the magazine industry for about nine years, Quinones saw first hand how advertising dollars were starting to dwindle over time. He started to think about a way to save businesses money in advertising costs.

After realizing that many small Black-owned businesses lack the financial resources to afford advertising, he opted to offer a service that would enable them to receive free advertising via a Web site, www.unitycards.com, in exchange for discounts to cardholders.

Quinones refers to the card system as a win-win for all involved because it enables businesses to receive free advertising while driving customers to their stores who can tap into discounted products.

"Of course the money stays in the community and we help build up the community," he says.

Quinones points out the importance of the program in that it helps educate people about the location of Black-owned businesses.

"We have the list of businesses online and in the directory so that people will know where the Black shops are," he said, adding that many people are not aware of the location of some Black

retailers because of their lack of advertising.

Recognizing that everyone may not be able to access the Web site, plans are underway to publish a community business directory in October. The directory will list participating businesses, advertisements and articles about the business community.

After launching the card, it was a challenge for Quinones to get people to come aboard and tap into what Unity Card Services has to offer. Over time, he was able to push the card by attending business seminars and networking functions.

Now the Unity Card program has grown to encompass approximately 150 businesses in 19 states; 35 of those businesses hail from the Philadelphia area.

Quinones, who has a bachelor's degree in accounting from Herbert H. Lehman College, launched Unity Card Services in 2001 with the help of his sister, Sasha Quinones, and others.

He ultimately funded the business with approximately \$30,000. He says that he was able to follow through on his vision of launching his business by relying on his own resources. Like many other budding entrepreneurs, he attempted to obtain various

business loans but was unsuccessful.

"It just got to the point to where I just got tired of applying, so I just decided to save, be creative, cut corners. I wasn't going to let that stop me from the dream," Quinones remarked.

"I saw early on that this was something that we needed to go after and nothing would stop me."

In addition, he is also working to launch a line of bags and mugs with the Unity Card logo to further encourage the concept of patronizing businesses in the community.

He noted that when larger stores come in and ultimately end up driving out small businesses, it takes away from the sense of community.

Though the concept of the card has caught on quicker than he anticipated, Quinones envisions the Unity Card program evolving into something that is used throughout the country.

"We don't just want to make money but we want to see social progress, economic progress..." Quinones says of the company's vision. "So it's really a cause, more than just a business. We're really devoted to seeing a different Black America."

Ayana Jones writes for the Philadelphia Tribune.

# Now's time to take MATAH to new level

By James Clingman

Special to Sentinel-Voice

During the weekend of Aug. 22, I had the honor, privilege, and pleasure once again to serve as master of ceremonies for the annual MATAH conference, which was held in Philadelphia, the home of the Ken Bridges' family. As many of you know, Ken was one of those killed during the sniper attacks in the Washington, D.C., area; he was also a co-founder of the MATAH Network, along with his partner, Al Wellington. Jocelyn Bridges, Ken's "queen," and all of the Bridges children were in attendance as well, not only to celebrate the life and legacy of Ken Bridges but also to kick off a new era in MATAH's revolution and evolution. They, along with hundreds of other conscious, loving, and determined brothers and sisters, were there to take MATAH to the next level.

MATAH is a distribution channel that makes available more than 100 products and services of which 90 percent are produced by people of African descent and is designed to promote economic consciousness and re-direct more of our vast consumption spending to businesses owned by people of African descent.

The conference kicked off with meetings of the MATAH Holdings LLC and MATAH Investment Club LLC. (That's right. You can invest in MATAH) We then moved to the formal part of the meeting with a welcome and libations from Anthony Phillips (Philadelphia) and Brother Heru and his queen, Sister Gloria; Pastor Joseph Parks, from Winston-Salem, N.C., gave the invocation. We then issued a challenge to the MATAH to move to the next level and after that, as they say, "It was on!"

Dr. Therman Evans, a minister and medical doctor, gave one of the best speeches I have ever heard. This brother is outstanding, and if you ever, and I mean ever, have an opportunity to hear him speak, you should definitely take advantage of it. Evans talked about bees and squirrels and how they, with their miniscule brains, have enough sense to take care of themselves in an orderly fashion. He admonished us to do the same for ourselves. I'm telling you, this brother threw down the gauntlet in a big way. When the tapes and CD's are available, you just have to get them.

Other speakers included Jackie Mayfield, founder and president of Compro-Tax, a brother who has created franchise opportunities for some 90 (and counting) entrepreneurs. We were graced with an uplifting message from Brother John Raye, television legend and sales guru, who spoke on the topic, "The Power of Commitment," and we heard from MATAH's new vice president, Charles "C.J." Johnson, who shared strategies for taking MATAH to the next level. Gaston Armour, from Chicago, Juanda Honore, of Los Angeles, and Ashiki Taylor, from Atlanta, all MATAH regional sales reps, shared insights on their particular areas of expertise and how they have helped grow the MATAH Network in their respective regions.

We heard two gifted ministers, Carroll Johnson, (See Clingman, Page 12)

## Activists

(Continued from Page 5)

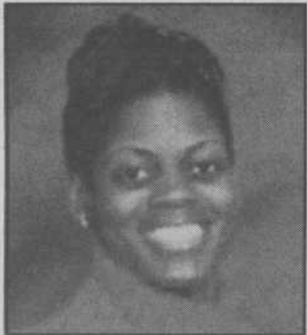
where one passes leadership to another. And just like every other facet of life, if you expect some one to just pass it to you, then you've got another thing coming."

Bond argues that age is overrated.

"This youth-versus-older-generation phenomenon is an old thing and it's always been with the younger sect pushing the elders and you shouldn't think that simply because you are young, that it qualifies you for something. That's not true if you are young and it's not true if you are old," he says.

Jesse Jackson, in his speech at the anniversary of the March on Washington, appeared to take a swipe at young leaders trying to assert themselves.

"There was a song we used to sing called 'Which Side are You On?' and it is not about your age, that which you cannot determine, but about what team you are on and what direction you are going," he said. "Are you with an older Thurgood Marshall



*"I've had the benefit of having some wonderful mentors in that I saw from them ministry that was done well, that was inclusive and intelligent."*

— Alise Barrymore

or a younger Clarence Thomas? Are you with an older Franklin Roosevelt or a younger George W. Bush? Are you with an older Nelson Mandela or a younger Mangosuthu Buthelezei or Jonas Savimbi?"

Now that he is older, Jackson seems to forget some of the criticism he faced as a youth eager to create his own following.

In Ralph David Abernathy's autobiography, "And the Walls Came Tumbling Down," (Page 425), he recounts a staff meeting in which Jesse Jackson, Andy Young and James Bevel were arguing against launching a "Poor People's Campaign."

Writes Abernathy, "Jesse had taken the floor and was enumerating all the reasons why Martin's [King] Poor People's Campaign would never work, why we should try something entirely different. Once again that morning he went on at great length and I could tell that Martin was getting more and more restless. Finally, without saying anything in response to Jesse, he got up, walked over to the chair where I was sitting, and said, 'Ralph, give me my car keys.'"

Abernathy said after he and King walked out on the balcony, Jesse Jackson followed them.

"Doc," he called out."

Martin whirled and glared at him. 'Jesse,' he barked, 'it may be necessary for you to carve out your own individual niche in society. But don't you bother me.' Such an outburst was uncharacteristic of Martin and Jesse was stunned. His mouth fell wide open and for the one of the few times in his life, he was speechless."

Hutchins says he, too, was speechless after being upbraided by some of his mentors.

"If I ever become despondent it's not because of the death threats I receive on a daily basis. It's that the elders attack us," he says. "A couple of my elders got back up behind me and assaulted me publicly and their speeches were very anti-young people coming up and taking up leadership and you would think that they would have said good job or we appreciate what you have done. But what was said was that it wasn't about age—it's about agenda."

Hutchins says older civil rights leaders may have a monopoly on age—but not ideas.

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