

BLACKONOMICS**Black capital group sets economic plans**

By James Clingman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Kudos to Sister Jennifer Parker and, of course, her excellent support staff of volunteers, for conducting one of the best economic empowerment conferences I have ever attended – and I have attended quite a few. Jennifer is the brainchild of The Black Capital Network (www.thebcn.com) and has diligently labored to bring her vision of economic prosperity for African-Americans to fruition. She “stayed the course,” as George Fraser would say, and presented their second annual Black Capital Network conference. She and her husband, Mel, held on to their commitment, continued to make the sacrifices necessary to accomplish their goals, and they brought an outstanding event to the people of Buffalo, New York, on November 1, 2003.

I had the honor and pleasure to conduct a Blackonomics workshop during the conference, but my excitement is grounded in three other aspects of the BCN: I was thrilled to see the turnout of participants; I was impressed at the variety of vendors and, not only their willing to support the BCN but also their reciprocal commitment to recycling Black dollars; and I was especially pleased with the outstanding speakers Jennifer brought to the conference. I often talk about how even I need an economic empowerment “booster shot” from time to time to keep me going. Well, I certainly got that and more at the Black Capital Network Conference.

Being in the company once again of Brooke Stephens, financial author (Wealth Happens One Day at a Time) and lecturer, listening to Brother Melvin Gravely, entrepreneur, author (When Black and White Make Green), and lecturer, hearing real solutions for accessing capital, seeing the New York activist and legend, Dorothy Pittman Hughes, (Wake Up and Smell the Dollars – Whose Inner City is it Anyway?) in person, and just being in close proximity to so many accomplished entrepreneurs and fantastic brothers and sisters was, indeed, a privilege and an honor for me.

Then there was Simon T. Bailey. The author of Simon Says... Dream – Live a Passionate Life, Bailey took the conference by storm, or should I say a “Whirlwind”? This brother delivered one of the best speeches I have ever heard. If you have not heard Simon or read his work, somewhere down the line there is a treat waiting for you; sooner or later you will come in contact with this brother, who is one of the nation’s most sought-after speakers. Weaving metaphors, life-lessons, homespun yarns, common sense, metaphysics, and stark realities into a tapestry of positive, results-oriented, and very practical strategies for success, Simon T. Bailey was a joy to behold. He is a fresh face on the scene and surely someone to watch as he humbly makes his way to the top, but reaches back to help someone else as well. We should listen to what Simon says.

All in all, the Black Capital Network was a veritable potpourri of excellence, comprising local business owners and corporate representatives with national authors and entrepreneurs. The event ended with a book forum, sponsored by local attorney, John Elmore, and The Weddings of Color Expo and Fashion show. The forum featured local authors and was moderated by Yvonne Rose, co-owner and Editor of Amber Books, Phoenix, Arizona, the nation’s largest African-American self-help and career guide publishing house. The Weddings of Color Expo and Fashion Show highlighted wedding gowns by New York designer, Therez Fleetwood. Ms. Fleetwood is also the author of the new best-seller, The Afrocentric Bride, which features the most beautiful and culturally sensitive wedding gowns ever made. Check out Ms. Fleetwood’s gowns and her book; you will be very pleased with what you see. Now what is the bottom line of all of this? Meetings and conferences are held by and for Black people in this country virtually every week. But, as I told my audience, it’s not just the meeting that’s important, it’s what happens after the meeting. My chal-

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Urban TV Network anchors in Las Vegas

By John T. Stephens III
Sentinel-Voice

Urban Television Network Corp, a low-budget national broadcaster of Black-oriented programming, is moving its home base from Fort Worth, Texas to Las Vegas.

The move comes after a local college professor, Lonnie Wright, was named chief executive officer. Wright is a former University of Las Vegas-Nevada basketball player and associate vice president of the Hospitality Institute at the Community College of Southern Nevada.

“I want to do something to try to uplift our children,” Wright said. “Given (fact that) our young are very impersonal.” Wright said today’s youth are too obsessed with “backing that thing up” and “bling bling (money, clothes and jewelry).”



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— Lonnie Wright, President, Chairman and CEO (UTNC)

Wright became president, chairman and CEO of Urban Television Network Corp. (UTNC) when African-American investors acquired a 51 percent controlling interest in the publicly traded company.

His first official appointment is University Regent Linda Howard who will be in charge of education programming for UTNC.

“Television indoctrinates them to think less of morals, family and spirituality,” Wright said of youth. “Life is more than superficial.”

Appointed to his new post, with a \$500,000 investment paid in quarterly installments, Wright wants to broadcast positive and informative programming to the communities UTNC serves.

The network has 72 stations across the US and is recently televising Black college and university football games in the Southwestern Athletic Conference.

Wright intends for the network to develop sitcoms, talk shows and even health programs as it begins to take off and grow.

“Producing more shows for people of color,” he said.

UTNC Executive Vice President Randy Moseley says that by being the only minority-owned network gives them a significant advantage with diversity spending programs of Fortune 1000 companies.

The network was established 10 years ago as an American Independent Network affiliate that was later purchased by the Hispanic Television Network.

After the new owners filed Chapter 11-bankruptcy protection, Moseley and a group of investors bought it.

Wright, who is a native of Las Vegas, wants in the next six months to offer jobs and positions to locals in the southern Nevada media industry.

“A lot of African-Americans are not being hired by ABC, NBC and CBS,” he said of current conditions.

French company wins maintenance job in St. Louis

By Tavia Evans
Special to Sentinel-Voice

ST. LOUIS (NNPA) - The number of private companies with a stake in the city’s public schools increased again recently when the St. Louis school board pushed through a \$56.4 million contract to outsource the district’s maintenance department to a French-based firm.

According to the five-year contract, Sodexo, Inc. will be paid nearly \$10.4 million this year to oversee the district’s custodial and facilities division. The company can also qualify for an additional \$250,000 bonus based on their performance during the first year.

The pending racial discrimination lawsuit against Sodexo, Inc. did not seem to impact the board’s decision to grant them a contract.

Two years ago, 10 current and former Sodexo Marriott Services Inc. employees filed a racial discrimination suit, alleging the company failed to promote Black managers and sent them to work at predominantly Black institutions.

Board vice president Ron Jackson said the members will be watching the company’s performance and treatment of all district employees.

“When there’s a racial discrimination case against a company, they usually bend over backwards to prove they’re not, they do everything to say no, its not true,”

Jackson said. “Vigilance and due diligence and monitoring, and that’s what we should be doing anyway around all of these contracts, somebody’s got to be paying attention.”

Before the vote, the school board ignored repeated requests from the community to make the contract open to the public and available for discussion. Board member Bill Haas complained that he only received a copy of the contract a few days before the vote.

Odysseus Lanier, a partner with the Houston-based McConnell, Jones, Lanier & Murphy, LLP (MJLM) coordinated the contract with Sodexo Inc.

Lanier told the audience at the board meeting that the initial intention was to outsource all of the jobs in the maintenance division. After a two-day sick-out by district engineers, the board approved a plan to allow the engineers to remain district employees supervised by Sodexo, Inc.

According to the approved contract, the district retained 80 percent of the custodial and facility positions, including 26 stationary engineers. The private company will be required to consider the 116 laid off maintenance employees for their open positions. The district projects it will save \$5.9 million a year.

Lanier said the district will appoint a building commissioner to oversee the private company.

Tavia Evans writes for the St. Louis American.

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