

LVCVA guru gets royal send-off

By John T. Stephens III
and Kathi Overstreet
Sentinel-Voice

More than 100 guests attended the retirement party hosted by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority at Cashman Field for Roosevelt Toston.

Toston stepped down as manager of diversity marketing after a 29-year career earlier this month. The party was attended by the who's who of Las Vegas, including politicians, gaming executives, community organizations and business professionals.

"I am blessed to have held four different positions at the LVCVA," said Toston. "Each has given me an opportunity to give back to the community and be a resource for people to tap into. My work at the LVCVA allowed me to travel across the United States and six continents, telling the world about Las Vegas."

Toston's focus was minority markets. He competed against other global hot spots, generating business in professional and leisure tourism. Worldwide minority markets represent \$1.5 trillion in buying power annually.

Two days after the LVCVA party a private gathering took place for members of the Toston family and close friends. It was more party than retirement remembrances. Mary Alice Freeman, a sister, was also an honoree.

"My sister is the organizer of the family," Toston said. "She has a knack for getting people to work together."

Freeman has her own success story. She worked for Pacific Bell in California for 23 years before retiring. After two years, however, she got bored, reapplied to her



Roosevelt Toston retired earlier this month as manager of diversity marketing for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority. He worked at the tourism entity for 29 years.

old company, was rehired and worked another seven years to round out a 30-year career. She recently relocated to Las Vegas to be closer to the family.

"Ro is a champion and Mary is the leader, she is the wire that holds the family together," said their sister Sweetie.

Loved ones expressed gratitude and appreciation, sharing fond memories surrounded Toston and Freeman.

"I've always described Roosevelt as a dapper gentleman who really knows the industry," said Gwendolyn Budd, a friend and colleague from New York. "We've known each other for over 20 years. It has been a pleasure knowing him and doing business with him over the years."

Many of the younger Tostons spoke of the mentoring they have received through the years.

"Uncle Ro, I look up to you and I want to thank both of you for the legacy you have left us with," said his

nephew, Arnold Salisbury, from California.

"I have known Roosevelt for many years. He's a good man who knows how to treat people right. I had to come tonight to let him know how special his friendship is to me," said George Turner, founder of the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners. He flew in from New York.

Toston comes from a family of nine. Because this is where he put down roots, Toston considers himself a Las Vegas native. By the time he turned 16, both of his parents had passed away. Toston moved from rural Epps, La. to Las Vegas to live with brother Lee, who was 20 at the time.

"I promised our father I would look after Ro, so when he came to live here I laid down the law," Lee said. "But I didn't really need to. He never gave me any trouble and he graduated from Las Vegas High School in 1961 with honors."

Toston went on to attend the Career Academy of Famous Broadcasters and completed the John Cameron Swayze Correspondence Course. He then enrolled in Clark County Community College (Community College of Southern Nevada) and earned an associate degree in business management. While attending community college, he dabbled in news reporting.

Toston was the first full-time African-American television news reporter in Las Vegas. During a five-year stint, he reported the news for KORK TV-3, KLAS TV-8 and radio station KRAM. He left news reporting for a career with the LVCVA in 1975 to become the tourism-marketing manager.

"I saw Roosevelt on TV and decided I wanted to go into that line of work so I called him on the phone," said Mya Lake Reyes, a longtime Toston friend. "And although he didn't know me, (See Retirement, Page 5)

Black chefs cook up youth philanthropy

By John T. Stephens III
Sentinel-Voice

A group of local gourmet chefs will provide the delicacies and you can provide money that will go into a scholarship fund to assist "at-risk" elementary schools and high school students.

The Alliance of Black Culinarians (ABC), a non-profit group, is sponsoring its 13th Annual "Gourmet Grazer" on Sunday, Feb. 8 at the Stardust Hotel Pavilion, 3000 Las Vegas Blvd., from 4 to 8 p.m.

Exotic ethnic cuisine, including Mexican, Italian, Soul Food and general fine dining will be served.

"We will have some excellent food," said T.E. Williams, a chef, founder and chairman of ABC. "It's our annual fundraiser, where Black chefs prepare their favorite array of dishes."

There will be a disc jockey and live entertainment. Money raised from previous grazers has gone toward scholarships for underprivileged high school seniors and has been a funding source for Kermit R. Booker Elementary School. Over the years, the "entrée engineers" have donated between \$5,000 to \$10,000 annually to educational projects.

"The amount varies," said Williams, with the amount determined by the outcome of the grazer. The chefs of ABC are hoping at least 1,200 people stop by the Stardust and indulge their palates. ABC was founded in 1991 as a resource to provide education, training, and recognition and career advancement for African-Americans interested in the culinary arts. The group has 15 members.

"I found the need for Black culinarians to come together and give back to the community," said Williams. "Other (culinary organizations Williams was involved with) were not receptive to going back into the Black community to give back." Williams, a chef master who has more than 44 years of experience in the culinary arts, was concerned that there were no African-American executive chefs on the strip. To the best of his knowledge there is only one Black executive chef on the strip who is reportedly originally from Africa.

Williams, who is the chairman of the culinary arts department at Vo-Tech High School was also troubled by the number of Blacks not advancing in the culinary field.

"Since we formed (ABC) and come together, four Black chefs have become certified in Las Vegas," Williams said. The cost to attend this fundraiser is \$25. For more information, call (702) 896-4318.

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Nurse-backed program targets Black men

By John T. Stephens III
Sentinel-Voice

The Southern Nevada Black Nurses Association is concerned about the health of Black men. (SNBNA) will sponsor a free health-screening program for black men at the West Las Vegas Library Theatre, 951 W. Lake Mead Blvd., on Saturday, Feb. 14 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.

"We want the men to come so that young men and boys can be more aware of their health," said SNBNA chapter founder Debra Toney, a registered nurse who holds a doctorate. "By the time they find out that something is wrong, it's too late."

The event is being tagged:

"Taking Care of All the Men in Your Life: A Program on Men's Health."

Co-sponsors are the 100 Black Men, Community Partners for Better Health and the Las Vegas Chapter of the National Black Police Officers Association. Master of Ceremonies for the event is Sweet Lou Collins. Door prizes will be awarded and refreshments served.

According to Toney, African-American men, on average, die at 68. African-American women, on average, perish five years later. Toney, however, credits women for making their men go to the doctor when they observe something that is

unusual or not normal.

Health screenings for blood pressure, HIV, diabetes, anxiety/depression, visual testing and body mass will be available. There will be presentations for heart disease, diabetes, cancer (colon and prostate) and AIDS, along with a question-and-answer panel discussion.

"We want people to be aware of what is happening to them, enter and exit the medical system with little incident," Toney said.

SNBNA is a local affiliate of the National Black Nurses Association that was established in 1994, with approximately 150,000 members in 77 chapters throughout the

United States.

The Las Vegas chapter was founded in 1995 and has 30 members. Toney says her group would like to increase their membership and host more health-related programs and forums.

"We are the experts. We do the research. We develop programs that address African-American health needs and care," said Toney. SNBNA also lobbies the legislature for black's medical needs. "We (African-Americans) are number one in everything that is bad health care," she said.

As a bonus, registrars from Clark County will hold a voter-registration drive.