

BET executive appointed to Marriott's exec board

Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON – Debra L. Lee, president and chief operating officer of Black Entertainment Television, was one of two new appointees recently elected to the board of directors for Marriott International, Inc. The other is Richard S. Braddock, chairman at the private equity firm MidOcean Partners. Marriott's board has 11 members, seven of whom are independent, outside directors.

"I am pleased to announce that these two highly accomplished and respected executives and leaders are joining our board," J.W. Marriott, Jr., chairman and chief executive officer of Marriott International, said. "Debra brings considerable operational and legal expertise, and Rick, a deep insight into equity markets and distribution channels. Both new members will be valuable strategic assets as we continue our growth in a highly competitive environment."

Lee's career at BET began in 1986 as vice president and general counsel. In 1992, she was named executive vice president of legal affairs and publisher of BET's magazine division, and in 1995 she assumed responsibility for BET's strategic business development



Debra L. Lee, president and chief operating officer of Black Entertainment Television.

and was named president and chief operating officer in 1996.

Prior to joining BET, Lee spent five years as an attorney with Washington, D.C.-based Steptoe & Johnson, a corporate law firm. Lee serves on the corporate board of directors of Eastman Kodak Company and Washington Gas & Light Company.

House vote extends African trade

WASHINGTON (AP) - The House voted Monday to extend a trade pact that offers duty-free treatment on some goods and other trade benefits to the poorer countries of sub-Saharan Africa.

The legislation, approved by voice vote, would prolong the life of the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA) by seven years, to 2015.

More urgently, it grants a three-year extension to a provision of the 2000 act, set to expire Sept. 30, that allows African participants to sell duty-free to the United States textiles made from yarn and fabrics coming from third world countries.

"In a few short years, AGOA has managed to draw hundreds of millions of dollars of foreign investment to the continent, creating hundreds of thousands of desperately needed jobs," said Rep. Ed Royce, R-Calif., chairman of the International Relations subcommittee on Africa.

Also on Monday, the chairman and top Democrat on the Senate Finance Committee, Sens. Charles Grassley, R-Iowa, and Max Baucus, D-Mont., said they will introduce a companion bill in the Senate. "There's no reason the Senate shouldn't pass this bill this year," Grassley said.

According to the office of the U.S. Trade Representative, imports under AGOA reached \$14 billion in 2003, up 55 percent

from the previous year. U.S. direct investment in sub-Saharan Africa was up 12 percent at the end of 2002 to \$8.9 billion.

Thirty-seven of the 48 countries of sub-Saharan Africa qualify for AGOA. Last December, President Bush added Angola while removing two countries — the Central African Republic and Eritrea — for failing to meet eligibility criteria.

Rep. Jesse Jackson Jr., D-Ill., was one of the few lawmakers to speak against the legislation, saying it compels African participants to meet conditions on security and economic reforms that are not imposed on other U.S. regional trade agreement partners.

The administration, in a statement, voiced its strong support for the House bill, saying AGOA "is the centerpiece" of U.S. policy to "encourage economic and political reforms, alleviate poverty in sub-Saharan African countries, facilitate the region's integration into the global economy and create jobs here at home."

The White House also urged Congress to remain aware of free-trade talks that have begun with several AGOA countries. Negotiations opened a year ago for a free trade agreement with the five nations of the Southern African Customs Union — Botswana, Lesotho, Namibia, South Africa and Swaziland.

Suit: DMX breached contract

NEW YORK (AP) - Rapper DMX, who growls and barks through most of his records, has landed in the legal doghouse with a company that claims he breached an agreement to promote its line of high-end doggie-wear.

Amusing Diversions Inc. alleged in court papers that when it signed a promotion agreement with DMX, whose real name is Earl Simmons, it was unaware of his involvement in dogfighting or his conviction on animal cruelty charges.

Agents for the 33-year-old rapper, who recorded the hit "Get at Me Dog," said in court papers that he had recorded "dog awareness" radio spots urging people to be kind to their animals. Those announcements reflected his "positive connection with dogs," they said.

But Amusing Diversions, in its filing this week in Manhattan's state Supreme Court, said his radio spots were "part of a community service obligation judicially imposed upon him" for animal cruelty.

DMX pleaded guilty to the cruelty charges in 2002 after officials found 14 pit bulls living in filthy conditions at his New Jersey home.

He was fined and ordered to do the ads. Lawyers for DMX did not immediately return calls Friday seeking comment.

Michael Rovell, lawyer for Amusing Diversions, said the company signed DMX last June and paid him \$15,000 to help sell leather jackets, bubble jackets with fur trim, sports jerseys and other high-end "urban" dog wear.

Rovell said Friday that DMX had done "nothing, not a thing" to support his end of the deal.

He never mentioned the products during various TV appearances despite promises to do so, court papers say.

The lawsuit alleged fraud and breach of contract and sought the return of the \$15,000 paid to DMX, plus \$75,000 the company claimed it invested to promote the clothing line.

Smokey Robinson sued over slogan

WHITE CASTLE, La. (AP) - A Louisiana chef is suing Smokey Robinson for trademark infringement over a catchy slogan he says he has used for years to sell gumbo and other fare.

Johnny "Jambalaya" Percle, who sued the singer last week in federal court, said he had "Soul in Yo Bowl" trademarked in 1997 after using it for a decade.

Percle's complaint says that Robinson's use of the phrase, "The Soul is in the Bowl," for his line of Louisiana foods is so similar that it will confuse consumers.

"If he would have called it 'Smokey Robinson's Gumbo,' he wouldn't have heard boo from Johnny Jam," said Percle, a chef at Nottoway Plantation, about 25 miles south of Baton Rouge. "I truly believe by all legal rights, 'Soul in the Bowl' is mine, not his."

Robinson and his California-based SFGL Foods introduced "Smokey Robinson's Soul in the Bowl" line in January, featuring frozen Louisiana gumbo.

The products are on sale in some Chicago grocery stores, with distribution

planned for California later this month. A national rollout is planned by the end of the year, according to a company Web site.

Percle, who once catered a meal for Robinson in New Orleans, learned of the similar slogan from a friend who called to ask whether the chef and singer had joined forces.

Steve Sherman, a California lawyer for SFGL Foods, said he is aware of the lawsuit, "but I have not personally had an opportunity to review the complaint yet. It doesn't sound like something that has merit."

Johnson wins student of month

Aaliyah Johnson has been named Expertise School of Beauty Student of the Month. Johnson said despite the fact it has taken her nearly a year to complete the three-month course, due to major injuries suffered after being run over by an SUV two months after she started school, through perseverance — she made it. "I am so blessed ... I love what I do ... and I have a job waiting for me at LaMurray Spa." Johnson credits her husband for getting her into school and her stylist (a former Expertise student) for influencing her school of choice. "Here I've learned the proper techniques, salon conduct and the latest trends in nail design, the fact that this is a Black owned business with excellent instructors and located in our community serving the community is a plus."



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