

NAACP focused on helping collegians

Nation's largest civil rights group in process of chartering campus chapter

By Chelsi Cheatom
Special to Sentinel-Voice

America's most influential civil rights organization has embarked on a new path locally with the creation of a chapter of the NAACP underway on the UNLV campus. The newly forming chapter is currently in the process of chartering with the national organization.

"This is the first time we have had a college chapter in Las Vegas. We are excited about its inception and hope to grow it quickly," said local NAACP president, Dean Ishman.

The creation of the college chapter began two years ago when Jeff Wilson, a UNLV graduate student, began advocating for the NAACP's expansion onto the campus. Wilson is currently on the executive com-

mittee for the Las Vegas branch, and serves as college organization chair. He is also currently serving as the advisor for the UNLV chapter.

For Wilson, the organization has always been a significant part of his life. "It began when I was a kid back in my home town in Virginia," said Wilson. "I would go to the playground where there was no working water fountain. My friends and I would go to the building next door for a drink of water. When we would go inside, there would be groups of older people gathered, and it turns out that that was the NAACP. That's how I first became interested in the organization."

Wilson went on to join the college chapter of the organization at Virginia Commonwealth University. He

would eventually be elected president of the university's chapter. When he started at UNLV for his graduate studies, he attended meetings at the local NAACP. He was soon contacted by the previous president of the local NAACP about starting a chapter at UNLV. After two years of informational meetings, membership recruitments at the university, and perseverance, he had created a viable organization.

The new organization has recently been recognized by the UNLV Student Government. They have sent their recognition packet to the national NAACP and are awaiting a letter of approval from the state conference president. Once the letter is received, their application will go before the national board

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YAC

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In fact, one is a five-room house, and two of the rooms are without a roof.

The first home provides shelter for 33 infants and school-age children with three adults to care for them. The second home accommodates 40 children. Included among them are four deaf girls.

All of the occupants access an outdoor water tap and share a single toilet. In the third home there are 80 children. They eat, sleep and play in one room similar to a hall or large gathering space for special events. Attached to that room are a bathroom, kitchen and staff room. A school supported by the British is nearby. The children study and sleep at the school, Fuller said.

The needs are many, Fuller said. Toland, who lives in the

Bonanza Village subdivision near Martin Luther King Boulevard and Washington Avenue, holds yard sales periodically to raise funds to support YAC. The women also encourage people to donate clothing for the children. Fuller said she traveled to Las Vegas with two suitcases, bringing an empty one that she filled with children's clothes to take back to South Africa.

"Once you go there and see what the needs are, it is very difficult to sit and do nothing," Fuller explained of what led to the passion she has to help the children of South Africa. "I find it sad when I hear people who are retired say they are bored with nothing to do. That's probably because in their younger days they didn't do anything," she said.

Doing nothing is not an option for Fuller. With a birthday a few days away, she is always looking for a new way to improve the

lives of the orphaned children. She introduced a program that celebrates birthdays and said she will develop a rites of passage program for girls. Fuller got the idea after attending the closing ceremony for the local 2005 Rites of Passage Program held on March 20 at the West Las Vegas Arts Center sponsored by S.I.S.T.A., acronym for the service organization Sisters in Society Taking Action.

"It was so beautiful," Fuller said. "I want to do something like that for the children in the orphanages in South Africa. These children are struggling so. A child was asked to write her name on a piece of paper, and she wrote 'orphan.' That is really sad. But she had heard it so much that it defined her identity. I want to use the Rites of

Passage program to help build their self-esteem. That is also why I started the birthday program."□ The birthday program is a program that Fuller uses to celebrate the birthdays of the children who otherwise would have nothing done in celebration of their birth.

In addition to her programming in South African orphanages, Fuller welcomes American visitors all the time and plans their itineraries when asked to help.□ Last year she organized an itinerary for a group of 12 Delta Sigma Theta sorority sisters who traveled there from cities across America. She said such connections are wonderful, because through them, relationships and support for the YAC outreach programs are established.

For more information on how you can make donations of food, clothing or money to Your African Connection, contact Fuller at www.abconn@absamail.co.za.



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