

# France fetes first Black woman pilot

By Alice Thomas-Tisdale  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

RUE, FRANCE (NNPA) - With great anticipation, the people of this small village, located about 150 miles outside the city of Paris, awaited the arrival of the famed African-American female aviators at the Museum of the Caudron Brothers, pioneers of aviation in Picardy.

The momentous occasion occurred on June 17, as members of the Bessie Coleman Foundation departed the bus they chartered from Paris. They were cheered by the townspeople, including Mayor Serge DesChamps, the French tourism and museum staff, and French military pilots. There was no brass band, but the clock in the museum's tower chimed loudly enough to signal it was time to celebrate.

The realization that the people of Rue knew as much, or possibly more, about Bessie Coleman than most Americans was quite apparent as they made their presentations at a formal program celebrating the life and legacy of the first African-American to receive a pilot's license (1921).

Words were not the only expressions of appreciation exchanged during the pro-

gram. Bessie Coleman Foundation President Beverly Armstrong was presented with books written on the Caudron brothers, as well as with kisses and hugs from the presenters.

The Foundation reciprocated by presenting gifts to the mayor, including a plaque to be housed in the museum, and a \$5,000 scholarship from the Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University for a deserving student from area villages. Each guest received a Bessie Coleman logo T-shirt, travel bag, and lapel button.

The program was a fitting tribute to Coleman. It was also confirmation that members of the foundation, who selected France to celebrate their 10th anniversary by honoring Coleman, and to thank the people of France for embracing Coleman's dream to fly, did not travel thousands of miles in vain.

"This is an historical event for both African-Americans and Blacks in aviation. We sincerely thank our sponsors for making this moment in history possible," Armstrong said.

Sandra Campbell performed her one woman play "Bessie," which was well received by attendees. Also on

hand for the ceremony were relatives of both the Coleman and Caudron families.

The historic day of two nations coming together to pay tribute to the Black pioneer aviator and the Caudron brothers was highlighted by a candlelight ceremony organized by the civic organization sponsors, The Links, Incorporated. The mayor of Rue and members of the Coleman and Caudron families transferred flames from their individual small candles to one large candle held by Armstrong, symbolizing an eternal flame of hope for those who dream of flying.

"We want to thank the Bessie Coleman Foundation for keeping the legacy of Bessie Coleman alive in our youth. The Links Incorporated is committed to education, and we are so proud of the work that the [foundation] is doing to preserve our history," stated the organization's Southern Regional Director Margaret Thompson Johnson.

Following the program, members of the foundation toured the area where Coleman received her flight instruction. Eighty-four years ago, it was here that Coleman first learned to fly, and although the facility is no

longer visible, members walked along the beach and peered into the sky as if imagining Coleman waving frantically to them, beckoning them to come fly with her.

"Our multi-city, trans-Atlantic journey provided a unique opportunity to honor the legacies of Robert Abbott, of the *Chicago Defender*, for helping Bessie Coleman get to France, and the Caudron brothers' flight school for welcoming her. These four visionaries paved the way for other African-American females to fly," said Anne T. Sulton, Esq., foundation legal counsel and co-coordinator of the celebration. According to biographies on Coleman, she could find no schools in the U.S. that would train her to fly, so it was at the urging of Abbott that she studied French and relocated to the school in France.

In addition to major corporate and private sponsorships, the event was supported by 100 Black Men of America, Inc.; National Black Coalition of Federal Aviation Employees; and Tuskegee Airmen, Inc. (Stewart 105).

Alice Thomas-Tisdale writes for the Jackson Advocate.

# Notorious B.I.G. lawyer: Police confessed

LOS ANGELES (AP) - The Notorious B.I.G. wrongful death trial ended its first week Friday with an attorney recounting an unconfirmed but potentially explosive claim of a confession by one or two corrupt police officers.

An anonymous tipster said two witnesses at a Dec. 11, 2000, police disciplinary hearing said former officers Rafael Perez and David Mack had confessed to the New York rapper's 1997 killing, B.I.G. family attorney Perry Sanders Jr. told the court outside the presence of the federal jury.

If proven, the allegation could become the "centerpoint" of the family's case against the city and Police Department, Sanders said, adding that he did not know the names of the witnesses.

The two witnesses, one of whom had been jailed with Perez, "started to testify about Perez and Mack and were told to stop," Sanders said outside court. "And they both had been threatened by the LAPD a few days earlier not to testify."

Sanders told the judge the tip came Thursday from a former LAPD officer who said the hearing was held in the basement of a county jail and targeted former officer Paul Byrnes, now deceased. Sanders listed the names of five other people the tipster said were present at the hearing and said Perez had also been scheduled to testify.

Two people identified by the tipster confirmed to a family investigator Friday they were present at the hearing, Sanders said. He told reporters outside court that those two people generally confirmed the tipster's account.

U.S. District Judge Florence-Marie Cooper sent the nine-person jury home early and urged the defense to investigate the claim immediately.

"I am certainly very concerned about the contents of this telephone call," Cooper said. A hearing was planned for Monday to discuss the allegation.

B.I.G., born Christopher Wallace and also known as Biggie Smalls, was 24 when he was gunned down while

leaving a party at the Petersen Automotive Museum shortly after midnight on March 9, 1997. No one was ever arrested and the case remains unsolved.

The Wallace family's suit alleges Mack arranged for his college roommate Amir Muhammad to kill Wallace at the behest of Death Row Records founder Marion "Suge" Knight. Wallace fam-

ily attorneys have tried through testimony to link Mack — now serving time for bank robbery — to Perez, known for his key role in the city's Rampart corruption scandal. The lawsuit claims the LAPD covered up Mack's alleged involvement and shouldn't have allowed him to associate with Knight while serving as a police officer.

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