

Activists to honor Wal-Mart, Tyson Foods amid protest

By Hazel Trice Edney
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - An annual luncheon, sponsored and hosted by the Rev. Al Sharpton and his New York-based National Action Network, to "honor those that keep the dream of Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Alive" is slated to give awards to Wal-Mart Corporation and Tyson Foods, both being sued for civil rights violations.

"Among the Sept. 7 'Dream Keepers Luncheon' honorees are Lions Gate En-

tertainment, the distributor of the critically-acclaimed movie 'Crash'; the legendary singer/songwriter Stevie Wonder; Wal-Mart Corporation; Tyson Foods; and Flora Walker, the Western Regional Director of AFSCME, the American Federation of State, County, and Municipal Employees; and Southwest Airlines," states a press release issued by Sharpton's group.

"This is absolutely unbelievable. I cannot believe that this is true because it is that

unbelievable that companies with the reputations of Tyson and Wal-Mart — when it comes to the way they have treated their employees — would be considered for an award in the name of Martin Luther King," says Bill Fletcher, a longtime labor and international activist, now president of TransAfrica Forum. "No one in their right minds would be nominating such companies; therefore, it was a mistake. You got it wrong or they sent out the wrong release."

Contacted by NNPA, Sharpton said at the time that he was unaware of the federal lawsuit against Tyson Foods, filed Aug. 12 by 12 Black employees alleging segregated bathrooms with a "Whites Only" sign, the pervasive use of the n-word, "monkey," "boy" and "watermelon" insults of Black people and a threat with a noose. The Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights Under the Law is representing the plaintiffs, who are joined in the suit by the U.S. Equal

Employment Opportunity Commission.

The lawsuit, which has gained widespread publicity, says Tyson violated Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 by maintaining a racially hostile work environment and retaliating against employees that complained.

Since the initial interview with the NNPA News Service, Sharpton says he has been in touch with the nominating committee and that he may withdraw the award if the issue is not satisfactorily

resolved. Gene Morris, president of Chicago-based E. Morris Communications, nominated Tyson Foods approximately three months ago, well before the suit was filed, Sharpton said.

"I told them I wanted them to address the issue," Sharpton said. "Otherwise, my recommendation to the committee is that we, the National Action Network, as the parent group, would not be able to give the award. I want to know how they're (See Award, Page 12)

Rapid growth leaves schools challenged

By Parker Philpot
Sentinel-Voice

The 2005-2006 school year started Monday, and the Clark County School District has its usual challenges — some traditional ones, some new ones — but all are magnified because of the district's sizable increase in student population.

The annual rate of increase is anticipated at about 5 percent, according to the district statistics. The student count for 2004-2005 reached close to 281,000. For this school year, enrollment is projected at 295,615.

Many students are still being registered for this semester. In October, the current enrollment numbers will be compiled. Due to the transient nature of the local community, the count fluctuates throughout the year. So much so that the actual net counts for a school year's enrollment are measured and adjusted by the end of the fiscal year, just before the start of next school year. Clark County is in the top five largest districts in the U.S. and is the fastest growing.

Hiring staff is among the major issues CCSD is facing. Shortages in teacher staffing hit a critical level this year when several months ago more than 600 educators were needed to meet the demand, and the district is still struggling to fill vital positions, especially in some specialized areas.

CCSD Public Information Specialist Jaime Lea, said, "As of last Friday, we still need about 350 teachers, mostly special education and [language]."

Throughout the past several months, there has been a fierce recruiting and hiring effort that extended across the country, even globally. Many of the positions in math and science are being filled by professional educators from abroad, including the Philippines. New teacher orientation had a broader scope this year to assist educators new to the district and also to local culture, customs and the country.

Considered a "majority minority" district, CCSD has ethnically diverse student demographics. The district report shows student ethnic distribution for 2004-2005: White 41.5 percent (116,586); Hispanic 35.2 percent (98,796); African-American 14.3 percent (40,162); Asian 8.2 percent (22,969) and American Indian .8 percent (2,321).

A number of substitute teachers have been hired to fill positions until full-time classroom instructors are hired. School Board Trustee Shirley Barber (District C) commented on the hiring strategies and need for more instructors: "It's good that they are hiring substitutes... but our children need full-time teachers."

In addition, Barber expressed a concern that she had received an unspecified number of calls from local residents who are seeking a position and have applied but have not yet been accepted. Barber said she will be "inquiring about that" and wants to see that everyone be given a chance. She added, "It takes time to do the [background checks]," explaining the districts challenge to hire quickly without sacrificing safe hiring practices.

In response to whether there are teachers locally that could help fill the need, Barber said that many here are "retired and don't want to come out of that... and some don't want to

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Sharpton speaks at Texas anti-war camp

CRAWFORD, Texas (AP) - The Rev. Al Sharpton joined hundreds of war protesters outside President Bush's ranch for an interfaith service Sunday, saying he felt compelled to meet Cindy Sheehan, the grieving mother who started the rally three weeks earlier.

Sheehan had arrived in Bush's hometown on Aug. 6 and refused to leave until she could question the president about the war that has killed more than 1,870 U.S. service members, including her 24-year-old son, Casey.

As her vigil drew attention, it also drew crowds, with some people joining her camp, celebrities stopping by to lend her their support, and Bush support-

ers heading for Crawford to protest the protesters.

On Sunday, Sharpton joined Sheehan in laying roses at crosses near "Camp Casey."

"I feel that it is our moral obligation to stand and to be courageous with these families, and particularly Cindy, that have become the conscience of this nation," said Sharpton, an activist and former Democratic presidential candidate.

Actor Martin Sheen, who portrays the Democratic president on NBC's "The West Wing," also met with Sheehan and spoke to a crowd of more than 300.

"At least you've got the acting president of the United States," the actor said. "I think you know what I do for

a living, but this is what I do to stay alive."

Several cars with pro-Bush signs drove slowly down the road by the protest campsite.

One man was arrested and charged with misdemeanor assault for allegedly shoving an anti-war demonstrator, McLennan County sheriff's deputies said.

Amid all the comings and goings around Camp Casey on Sunday, peace activists Genevieve Van Cleve and Peter Ravella got married.

The aisle was strewn with hay, and the crowd hummed "Here Comes the Bride."

"This is meaningful. This has substance," said Van Cleve, 34, of Austin. "We completely support what they're doing, and we just

wanted to add whatever love, fidelity, loyalty and honor that we could."

After the war protest ends Wednesday and Sheehan packs up camp, the anti-war group plans to spread its message on a bus tour, with the first stop likely in the southeast Texas district of U.S. House Majority Leader Tom DeLay.

Bush has said he appreciates Sheehan's right to protest and sympathizes with her, but his aides have said there are no plans to change his schedule to meet with her.

Sheehan and other grieving families met with Bush about two months after her son died last year, before she became a vocal opponent of the war.

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