

# Super Bowl dissing Black businesses

By Bankole Thompson  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DETROIT (NNPA) - Detroit will host the 2006 Super Bowl in February, drawing thousands of visitors and celebrities to its town.

A profit-making event, the Super Bowl, organized by the National Football League awards millions of dollars in contracts to render services during the week of the football event.

But many Black business owners in Detroit say the Super Bowl host committee, which is the official liaison between the NFL and metro Detroit, has yet to give African-American businesses significant contracts.

The committee launched the Emerging Business program as part of its overall contract with the NFL to teach new entrepreneurs how to get contracts.

On its website, the Super

Bowl host committee described the business program as "a business procurement process benefiting local emerging businesses including minority- and women-owned businesses in the State of Michigan."

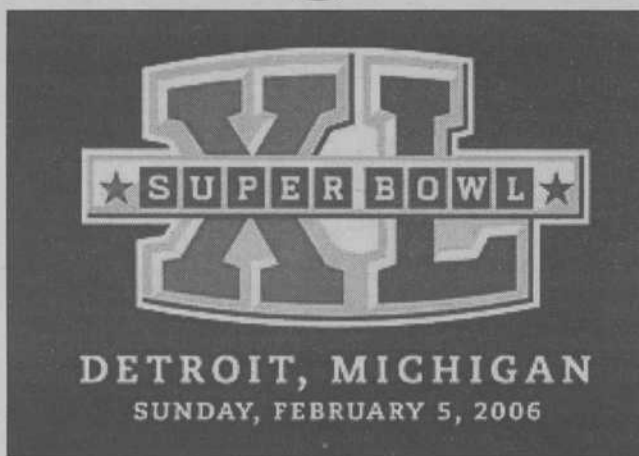
Some local Black businesses claim it is a charade.

"They talk a good game. I don't see how any of us are making money," said Valena Cade, owner of Big Fellas restaurant.

Cade said she bid on four different catering contracts for the Super Bowl but did not win one.

"The only one that I received for a possible confirmation was for about \$4,000," Cade said. "When I thought about it, that is no money when I have to pay my staff. I called them back and told them I was not interested."

She said it was an "in-



sult," for her to be given a Super Bowl contract with such low margins. According to Cade, she would make a \$1,000 profit.

Cade said she is competent contractor. In the past, she provided similar food service for events such as the Tastefest, Jazz festival and other Detroit summer activities.

"I'm capable of doing large contracts," Cade said. "I can feed thousands of people."

Visibly upset, Cade said, "I don't need any part of the Super Bowl."

She said she invested a lot of time and energy preparing replies to Requests for Proposals, or RFPs, to bid for contracts that she did not get.

"You spend hours making these proposals and don't see the money," Cade said.

Like Cade, Carolyn Hopkins owner of a therapeutic massage center, De'spa Elite, also said she

submitted her credentials for contracts but to no avail.

Hopkins was later informed that NFL players would be flying in with their own massage therapists instead of using local businesses to perform spa service.

"It's a shame what they are doing to us in this city," Hopkins said. "The hotels I called told me that the NFL would not allow anyone to bring in businesses that they have not approved."

Hopkins said the workshops that were held under the Emerging Business program "[were] not even worth the time."

"We thought if we go there, we'll meet the decision makers, but that was not the case," Hopkins said. "I've been in business for 20 years and everybody in the city knows our business."

Loretta Watson who runs Sparkle Janitorial had similar complaints.

"The hype was that they were going to leave so much money in the city, but that is not true," Watson said. "Our concern is the amount of business they are leaving. I have bid on a number of the contracts. I did not get the contract with the Motown Winter Blast or the NFL Tailgate party."

According to Watson, the business that the Super Bowl was supposed to bring to the city is hype.

When contacted, the Super Bowl host committee's vice president for external affairs Stacie Clayton, an African-American denied the allegations.

"To date, we have spent about \$1.3 million in total on contracts. Thirty percent have been with African-American businesses and about 90 percent of those come from Detroit," Clayton said.

"We have worked with 67 emerging businesses that have received contracts. Of that 67, 25 are Detroit-based businesses."

Out of the 25 Detroit-based businesses that have received contracts, Clayton

said 23 are African-Americans; however, Clayton would not disclose the dollar amount for each contract that has been let out to Black businesses.

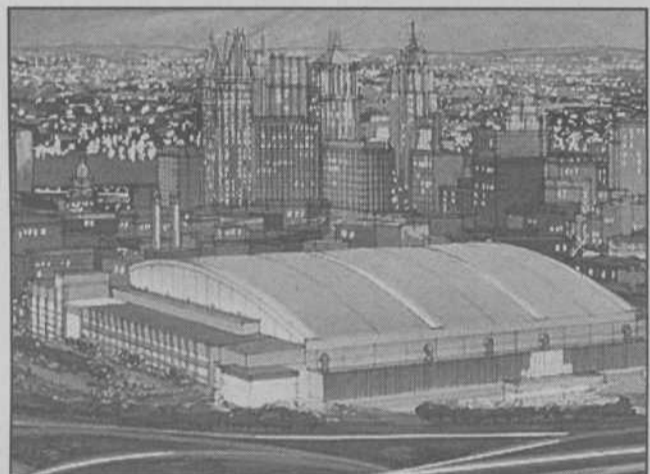
"We do not give out the dollar amount because some of the businesses have asked us, for confidential purposes, not to disclose those amounts," Clayton said. "It is not true that Black business are not getting anything."

She said her committee is working with an overall \$18.3 million budget out of which they expect to spend about \$3.5 million for the Emerging Business program, which has a listing of about 750 businesses. Fifty percent of that \$3.5 million she estimated will go to Black businesses.

"We did have a significant budget for the Emerging Business program," Clayton said. "It falls under the external affairs budget."

When asked how much has been allocated for her own external affairs department, Clayton would not release that number.

"We don't give a breakdown of how much we spend (See Detroit, Page 4)



Ford Field in Detroit is the site of Super Bowl XL.

## Works

(Continued from Page 1)

recruited to participate. The project does outreach to youth across the valley to participate in the mentoring programs. This year, Rhea Watson hopes they can include children displaced by the Gulf disasters to help encourage them about their future.

Rhea Watson's mother, Cynthia Watson, is the founder of the academy and says that "students are geniuses at work."

Las Vegas Works strives to give them a fair start in the world of work.

Rhea Watson said the private academy, founded in 2001, applied for a matching grant to do the project and was able to raise over \$5,000 on their own through in-kind gifts and volunteer services in addition to the \$2,500 base grant they received, which the group is working to match in cash donations by mid-year to keep advancing the project.

She said the famous King quote serves as the guiding principal for practicing activism to honor King Day: "Everybody can be great, because everybody can serve."

"I've appreciated the professionals," Rhea Watson said. "They are actually coming to their offices that day just to give these kids what will be an experience of a lifetime." She added, "Teachers and librarians have dedicated their time to come in to help."

The students will convene at Echoes of Faith, a nearby church, in a recreational room at the start of the event, which runs from 10:00 a.m. until 3:00 p.m.

"The [upper grade] students will be conducting an interview with the professionals they're shadowing. One student will operate the camera while others take notes and ask questions. This experience will allow students to get a clear understanding of the criteria re-

quired for these positions," Rhea Watson explained.

A day of play called the Dream Station will take place for the academy's younger students. "The station will be set up with [mock job scenarios complete] with costumes," she described.

"We put this program together to give them [students] a chance to see professionals in their work environment. To ask the question of how they got started," said Edward Watson, project media coordinator and father of Rhea.

"You don't have to work in gaming, but if you do want to, there are [lots of] jobs in [the industry]," he said.

"If I could introduce them to [various jobs] before they got older, they would have other options," Rhea Watson said.

"It didn't make sense to me that they [students] wait until they are juniors to begin to think [about career and business]."

I'm happy to see how excited the children are about coming on Monday. They have brainstormed and thought of creative places they want to go." They have asked to meet a fashion designer, an attorney and an architect. "We want to meet you..." the children said in their approach, Rhea Watson proudly said.

"We will have speeches to the kids concerning Dr. King. We don't want this man to be forgotten," Edward Watson emphasized.

During a day set aside for a historical hero, children will be working toward better futures for themselves. Looking back on what he has done, Dr. King would be proud of what the Watson's are attempting to accomplish.

"We are looking next year for it to be bigger and better," Edward Watson said.

For more information, call (702) 335-5729.

Parker Philpot contributed to this article.

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