

Super Bowl gives Detroit financial kick

By Charles Hallman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

DETROIT (NNPA) - Super Bowl XL is now history, and the multitude of visitors have returned to their homes from Detroit, where the game was played. Detroit is one of only 12 U.S. cities to ever host a Super Bowl, and only the third northern cold-weather venue to do so; Pontiac, 60 miles north of Detroit, and Minneapolis were the others, in 1982 and 1992, respectively.

The city got spruced up for the event, especially the once-dormant downtown area. Banners hung from two Brewster Project towers, the city's well-known depressed housing area. Longstanding vacant buildings were bulldozed and cleared away. Potholes, a constant reminder to drivers of how bad Detroit's streets are, suddenly disappeared.

The city got an extreme makeover in hopes that the annual, globally viewed event would finally erase the negativism usually associated with the Motor City.

"Detroit is my home, and I already know what it has to

offer," said Stacie Clayton, Super Bowl Host Committee vice president for external affairs.

"[Visitors] will find it is not as terrible a place as the mass media have portrayed it," said Detroit Branch NAACP President Wendell Anthony.

But with this year's signature season-ending NFL event over, a new question arises: "Now what?" asks Wayne State University journalism professor Luther Keith, a lifelong Detroit resident who recently retired from the *Detroit News* as senior editor and columnist. "Now that the Super Bowl is over, now what? And it is the 'Now what?' that is the key for Detroit in the future."

Not unlike the previous 39 championship games, Super Bowl XL was typically viewed as a financial shot in the arm for its host city. With a population of nearly one million, the majority of them Black, city residents and officials expected nothing less — numbers like \$300 million generated from the game and related activities have been oft discussed.

But how much of this financial manna from heaven actually goes to the Black community, queried *Michigan Citizen* city editor Bankole Thompson in "Super Bowl Blackout." The article was very critical of the Super Bowl's perceived financial benefits to Detroit.

"There was talk that the Super Bowl would be a financial miracle for the city," said Thompson last week. The article also presented criticism from some local Black business owners who felt they weren't getting their fair share of contracts. Thompson said that several Black business owners participated in workshops designed to explain how they could apply for Super Bowl contracts, but he called the process "a bureaucratic strategy" to keep them out.

Valena Cade owns Big Fellows restaurant, a popular Black-owned eatery on Detroit's east side just minutes from Ford Field, where the Super Bowl was played.

"They [the NFL] talk a good game," she was quoted in Thompson's story as saying. "I don't see how any of

us are making money."

Clayton also disagreed with Cade. As a high-ranking Black on the Host Committee, she worked very closely with the NFL's "Emerging Business" program, designed to teach minority-owned businesses how to get Super Bowl contracts.

"I did read [Thompson's story]," she noted. "I feel with some of the people in the article and what they were saying. But one of the things I always wanted to make clear every time I spoke about the program is that not every business is going to get a Super Bowl-related contract. Just because you signed up for the program didn't get you any guarantee that you got work."

Cade's husband Greg said that they applied and were awarded a contract. "One offer we got was for 2,500 people for dinner," he explained. "We submitted a bid and felt like we could handle it — it was close to \$4,000 — and another bid was for a luncheon for around \$4,000. We would have to close down for the whole day

[Sunday] just to do the luncheon, and economically it was not beneficial for us to maybe net \$2,000."

Greg Cade did report a 25 percent increase in business during Super Bowl week, but attributed that to it being the first of the month.

"I believe if a business put in their portfolio that they had done business with the Super Bowl, that shows that they are capable of doing business with any event that we have coming in town," Keith added.

Of the 25 Detroit-based businesses awarded contracts, according to Clayton, 23 were Black-owned.

"Overall, between the Host Committee and the NFL," she said, "we spent about \$5.8 million to date. I know there are some people that are disappointed, but there are people who are very, very happy with the work that they have gotten."

"If you got a contract, yes; if you didn't, it would be a big no!" said Detroit Urban League Chairman/CEO N. Charles Anderson, whose organization met with the Host Committee. "Obviously, in a

city where the mayor is African-American (Kwame Kilpatrick), who has an interest in economic development for African-Americans, I don't think that this was something the Host Committee could ignore."

NFL officials left impressed, said Clayton. "I had several conversations, and they said that they already learned things in Detroit that they want to take to South Florida for next year's Super Bowl."

"The challenge for us is, what will we do on the sixth of February and beyond?" said Anderson.

Added Anthony: "The real test is, can this be an anchor of progress once the game is over?"

"It was great to have the Super Bowl, to have cooperation across racial lines and geographical lines," said Keith, "but it can have a very hollow ring six months or two years from now if Detroit continues to grapple with those fundamental social issues."

Charles Hallman writes for the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder*.



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that I am inspired to go even further.”

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the visionaries—those are the ones
that inspire me. Their different way of
thinking opens new doors for all of us

to walk through and go even further.
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