

Ashville, N.C.'s youngest mayor impresses

Bellamy also first Black to lead this town of 50,000; city's Black population below 20 percent

By Sandra Isley

Special to Sentinel-Voice

GREENSBORO, N.C. (NNPA) - Terry Bellamy, the youngest and first African-American mayor of Asheville, N.C., made a special trip to N.C. A&T University recently to give students, professors and Aggie alums words of encouragement, determination and motivation.

She "double-dog" dared students to follow their dreams. Bellamy, sworn into office last year at the age of 33, used her own experiences to show students that they can succeed despite the odds.

Bellamy was defeated in her first attempt to become mayor of Asheville, a picturesque town in the Blue Ridge Mountains.

"I had run for mayor before, in 2002, and I tell you, I lost so bad, the media didn't even bother to ask me what I thought (of the election results)," she said. "It was so bad, they [couldn't care] less."

Bellamy said she picked herself up and dusted herself off. She had a constant reminder of her defeat. As a member of the City Council, she had to work side-by-side with the man, Charles Worley, who defeated her. Bellamy said she immediately began to focus on running for mayor again.

Bellamy said that it was important for her to become mayor of Asheville because of the lack of African-American role models in the city, which is probably best known as the home of the renowned Biltmore Estate.

"In Asheville, we don't have a lot of African-American young people with a lot of positive role models. We



Terry Bellamy made history as the first African-American and youngest person to serve as the mayor of Asheville, N.C.

just don't. Usually, the ones that do well in high school leave the community... So I knew that if I wanted to make a difference in my community, I needed to be the difference that I wanted to see," she said.

Asheville has a population of more than 50,000. Less than 20 percent of the city's population is Black.

Bellamy explained to students that they were CEO's in their own rights because each of them were responsible for making decisions that would ultimately affect their lives and others around them. She also explained to them that their minds are the greatest assets.

"You are your best investment, or your worst" she emphasized "depending on how you see yourself. If you don't see yourself as the best, who will?"

Another technique that

she implored students to use was visualization through the use of a journal.

"I challenge you all to do it," said Bellamy. "Studies show that individuals who write out their goals and read them on a regular basis and see them, achieve them more likely than anyone else. So, if you don't write in a journal, you should start."

She also encouraged students to be the best, regardless of the negative attitudes of people around them.

"Let your haters be your motivators," she said, referencing a line from a news program that had inspired her.

Bellamy, who is a married mother of two, pleaded with students not to waste the taxpayers' money or their parents' money by going to college and not using their education to accomplish something in life.

"Think about your life and what are you going to be doing five, 10 years from now. What are you going to do with yourself? How are you

going to make our world better, because I double-dog dare you to do it," she said.

Her closing advise implored students to "dream,

dream big, because the only thing that's stopping you, is you."

Sandra Isley writes for the Winston-Salem Chronicle.

An Open Letter to the Community

Dear Neighbor,

Much has been said about the state of affairs with the Economic Opportunity Board (EOB), the Community Action Agency designated to provide anti-poverty services to women, the elderly, children, and the working poor. I was asked to join the board of directors in September of 2005 to identify ways to help the agency become debt-free and to improve services to the people it serves. As your State Senator, I wanted to take the opportunity to explain some of the facts surrounding EOB and to discuss what is still being done to preserve the programs upon which so many people in our community depend.

• **FACT:** EOB has been facing financial challenges for many years. After the federal government took action to cancel the Head Start grant with EOB in February, the financial crisis worsened.

• **FACT:** EOB needs to account for millions of dollars it received in advances from the state of Nevada. While it is very likely that these funds were used to provide services and to fund key personnel, until a full account of this money is done the taxpayers and citizens who rely on EOB will not know for certain.

• **FACT:** KCEP, the radio station owned and operated by EOB, is not immediately at risk of being sold. Conditions set by a bank loan and others who were providing funds to improve the financial condition of the agency required that the radio station be placed on the market OR that the funds be raised to pay off the millions of debt the agency faces.

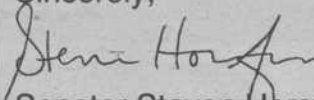
• **FACT:** Several board members, including myself, offered a plan of action to help EOB at no cost to the agency. This included the commitment of several corporate executives with experience in fundraising, fiscal operations and grants management. Most of these individuals were willing to volunteer their services to the agency for \$1 or to have their salaries paid with non-EOB funds, and their expertise could have helped to protect and preserve the EOB and its programs. This plan was rejected.

• **FACT:** The current financial condition of EOB does not allow it to fully fund client services, employee payroll, and overhead expenses and also make payments toward the millions in debt that is owed. Several banks were approached by the board and none were willing to approve a loan based on the current financial condition.

• **FACT:** The board has a responsibility to provide financial and programmatic oversight and to provide direction to the senior management on the implementation of the agency's mission. I resigned from the board of directors two weeks ago because of the inability of the board and senior management to act on the proposals that were being brought forward to save the agency.

I hope that some of the facts provided above have helped to answer any questions you might have about EOB. I will continue to work with other elected officials and community leaders to identify steps that can be taken to protect the services and programs so many families depend on everyday. If you would like to contact me, please feel to call 632-3922.

Sincerely,


Senator Steven Horsford



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