

St. Louis American nets top NNPA honors

By Lorinda M. Bullock
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DETROIT (NNPA) - For the second year in a row, the *St. Louis American* dominated the National Newspaper Publishers Association's Merit Awards dinner, netting eight awards including the top honors — the General Excellence and the John B. Russwurm Trophy that is given to the newspaper receiving the most points in all Merit Awards categories.

The American also placed first in the Best Column Writing category.

"We are also surprised, flattered, deeply, deeply appreciative, honored and proud," said Donald M. Suggs, publisher of the *St. Louis American* in an interview. "First of all, we have a great regard for our readers

and a great obligation to our readers, so we invest in every page of our newspaper, into the quality of our reporting, into our layout, and into our content overall. Every week we try to make a special edition for our readers."

Staffing is the key, said Suggs. "We want people who are passionate about what they do and creative. We have been able to develop, over the years, people who take their work seriously," said Suggs.

"It's labor intensive, but our philosophy is excellence."

The semi-formal gala in Detroit's Renaissance Center Marriott last week celebrated the past, present and future of the Black Press in grand style.

"This is really the Oscar



Sentinel-Voice photo by Monica Morgan

NNPA Chairman John Smith and General Motors Chairman and CEO Rick Wagoner, a recipient of the Chairman's Award.

night for the more than 200 Black newspapers," said dinner chair Ofield Dukes.

Black newspapers from across the nation were recognized for their excellence in

21 categories ranging from best photography to circulation promotion.

The *Carolina Peacemaker* may have had a quiet presence during the awards ceremony with one third-place win for best news story, but its publisher, John Kilimanjaro, was awarded with one of the most highly anticipated awards of the night, Publisher of the Year.

Kilimanjaro, who founded the *Peacemaker* in 1967, was not in attendance to accept his award. Kilimanjaro's resume also includes a career in academia as well as journalism. He has served as Professor of English at North Carolina A&T and established the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts there in 1969. He founded the Paul Robeson

Theatre in 1970, served as executive director of the theatre and the Richard B. Harrison Players from 1970-1981. He produced more than 80 major plays and musicals.

Other big winners that made several trips to the stage included the five-time nominated *New Pittsburgh Courier*, winning four first place awards including Best Feature Story, Best Women's Section, Best Sports Page and Best Business section. The *Philadelphia Tribune* also placed first in four categories — Best Youth Section, Best Use of Photographs, Best Church Page and Best Special Edition Broadsheet. The *Tribune* was nominated nine times — the most of any publication.

Mother and son politicians Congresswoman Carolyn Cheeks Kilpatrick and Mayor Kwame Kilpatrick welcomed the newspapers to the city of Detroit and thanked the Black Press for its contribution to the Black community.

"We thank you for feeding the information engine because we're not ignorant because you give us the correct stories. You tell it straight, and you tell it like we need to hear it, and you lift up our community," said Mayor Kilpatrick.

"We need you now more than ever," said Congresswoman Kilpatrick.

The evening was celebratory with one solemn and proud moment as the NNPA honored the life and legacy of Charles Kelly, founder and publisher of the *Michigan Citizen* who died earlier this year.

A visual salute to Kelly was played on a large screen as Detroit Councilwoman JoAnn Watson spoke about his fearless reign at the *Citizen*, tackling issues other publications were to afraid to take on, and "calling out" Michigan politicians of all races, "making them more honest."

The crowd stood and applauded Kelly's family including his widow, Teresa, and daughter, Catherine, who succeeds him as publisher.

Other tributes of the night were paid to the 2006 inductees into the Black Press Hall of Fame, including NNPA founder John Sengstacke, journalist, and advisor to three American presidents; Louis Martin; and former *Michigan Chronicle* publisher Longworth Quinn.

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the collaboration of community and faith-based organizations to find solutions. Clark County Commissioner Yvonne Atkinson Gates fielded the audience's questions about legislative action to resolve problems, including affordable housing, employment opportunities and health care issues.

One of the participating organizations, CAAN, Caucus of African American Nevadans, was represented by host pastor Dr. Robert E. Fowler Sr.

"We take the forum approach, and it is a valuable place [where the community] and the legislators are put in touch," Fowler said explaining the event's advantage.

He added that "some people feel they don't have a voice" and this forum gives them a place to be heard. About 40 people attended.

Shropshire said, "I was very pleased with the turnout, particularly on a Saturday morning—and 113 degrees."

Louis Overstreet representing the Urban Chamber of Commerce introduced the state report. Overstreet issued a broad call to action to improve the plight of Blacks in Nevada: "What can we do collectively to make a difference?"

He first launched an indictment: "Welcome to the apathy capital of the United States." He recognized Shropshire for "the vision she brought to Las Vegas."

The data in "State of Black Nevada: An Overview," was compiled by two



Dr. Larry Gamell, director of the State Health Division Office of Minority Health, cites healthcare disparity statistics for Blacks in Nevada at the forum Saturday.

young members of Horsford's team that he recognized at the forum — Kimishia Woods, 15, and Detrick Sanford, 20.

The significance of their involvement is reflected in their concern about the facts they discovered, especially the shocking statistics about problems affecting African-American youth directly, such as the rise in HIV/AIDS and teen pregnancy rates.

Sanford, a student at University of Nevada, Las Vegas and a staff member at Nevada Partners, said he found the information "interesting" but really feels compelled to "share these statistics with the youth in our community."

In particular, Sanford was surprised to hear "that teen pregnancy rates are so high,

especially in Nevada. He also is very concerned about the high school dropout rates.

The report states that Nevada ranks third to last in the country for Black student graduation (40.5 percent).

Woods, an honor student at Canyon Springs High School who will have dual college enrollment next semester, said she feels that it is important to involve youth to help improve conditions. She, too, was surprised to hear how many areas hold risks and problems for Blacks, like skyrocketing AIDS rates for women and economic disparity of Blacks compared to other ethnic groups.

"Not a lot of things are directed toward the youth," she said. Woods suggests that organizations address younger people at the places they frequent, not just at settings where adults traditionally meet.

The forum brought out some "startling" facts and "new information," according to one audience member, who vowed to take action based on what he heard.

Darin X, 37, a native of Las Vegas, said he is "concerned with Black affairs" and attended to learn, "How can I, as an individual, make a change?"

Furthermore, he said he had hoped to hear more "solutions" but concluded that "education is the common denominator" to solving all the problems. "We have to have more candid conversations with our children," he said.

He was most alarmed at the health related problems. One of the major problem areas affecting Blacks nationally and statewide: the state of Black health and disparity in health care.

Dr. Larry Gamell, director of the Nevada State Health Division Office of Minority Health, exposed the crisis in rates of disease and higher death rates for Blacks.

"Nevada ranks 47th as far as health is concerned compared to other states. The status of minority health is what keeps us at the bottom of the list," Gamell said.

He revealed another tragic statistic on the state of children and infants in Nevada: "African-Americans have the highest rate of infant mortality." He defined infant mortality as babies who "die before their first birthday."

Two participating organizations addressed HIV/AIDS and the alarming rise of infection for women and seniors in the Black community — AFAN, Aid for Aids of Nevada, one of the oldest organizations in the state, and F.A.C.T., Fighting Aids in our Community Today.

"This virus is getting blacker," said F.A.C.T. Executive Director Wayman Starks. "We have to remove the shame and blame," he said.

The national report states: "Blacks are 12 percent of the population, but account for more than 33 percent of the reported AIDS patients. The single highest rate of increase for HIV/AIDS in 2005 was for heterosexual Black

women."

The report on Nevada shows that "24 percent of all reported AIDS cases and 26 percent of HIV reported infections are among African-Americans."

The disparity is that Blacks are only about 8 percent of the population.

The state report included data in eight focus areas and it mirrored the areas covered in the Urban League's "State of Black America" book, which is available for viewing or ordering at the local office at 1058 W. Owens in Nucleus Plaza, or visit the national organization's website at www.nul.org.

The "State of Black Nevada" contained these main categories, to match the national report: employment; business; home ownership; education; children and infants; voting rights; and healthcare.

Two additional categories were added in the state report: Hurricane Katrina and judicial system.

The only areas that showed improvement was in the state of Black business and home ownership. Both had shown a steady increase in recent years.

At this time, there is no planned follow-up on the information presented, but the data is useful, according to Shropshire: "We try to see where the disparities are and try to formulate our programs to deal with those problems... It is very helpful to see where the holes are," she said. "It helps us to avoid duplication of programs."