

# Marriott hotels: No room for smoking

By Hazel Trice Edney  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Alejandro Herrera, a 42-year-old home improvement specialist who frequently travels for his job will not be staying in a Marriott any time soon. A chain smoker, the sheet metal mechanic, gasped when learning of the hotel's new smoke-free policy. "Why are they going to do that to us?"

Actually, Herrera knows all too well the dangers of tobacco. He started smoking at age 9 while walking home from the store back home in Havana, Cuba, where he would sneak a few from the packs that he would buy for

his mother.

Thirty-three years and three attempts to quit later, he stands on a Washington, D.C., street, torn between two arguments.

He defends his right to smoke, while grieving the death of his mother. At 73, she died of a heart attack, only seven months ago, partially caused by complications of smoking.

Still, he would like to have the option of smoking in his hotel room.

It is the dangers of smoking — moreover of secondhand smoke from the tobacco use of others — that has caused the Marriott chain of 2,300 hotels in North



U.S. Surgeon General Richard Carmona says designated non-smoking areas in restaurants and bars are still unsafe.

America and corporate-owned apartments to become 100 percent smoke-free by October 15, making it the largest hotel chain so far to go totally smoke free. The

no-smoking ban extends to the company's 16 brands, including Ritz-Carlton, Courtyard by Marriott, Residence Inn and Fairfield Inn.

At this point, Marriott is limiting its no-smoking policy to North America and not the other 500 properties owned around the world.

"Marriott is going smoke free after receiving consumer requests. The decision is based on consumer demand as well as customer complaints about secondhand smoke. We have a very sophisticated guest satisfaction system," says Stephanie Hampton, spokesperson for Marriott International, based

in the Washington, D.C. area.

Hampton says after monitoring the reservations of Marriott guests, it was concluded that "Ninety-five percent of all reservations were for smoke-free rooms... And, one of the top complaints is that a guest asks for a smoke-free room and not get it," she said.

The Marriott policy affects all guest rooms, restaurants, lounges, meeting rooms, public spaces, and employee work areas of the hotels, according to a statement released by the corporation. Hampton said smokers will be allowed shelters away from the buildings that will be designated for their use.

"This is the broadest implementation in the industry of smoke free," Hampton says.

The move by Marriott is winning applause from anti-tobacco advocates. That includes the American Legacy Foundation, which assisted Westin Hotels, a much smaller chain of 77 hotels, to go completely smoke free last year.

"We obviously hope it is

a trend that is just beginning," said Legacy spokesperson Julie Cartwright. "The surgeon general has said there is no safe level of exposure to secondhand smoke. Certainly, we applaud the Marriott for doing this and we hope others will follow their lead."

Surgeon General Richard H. Carmona declared in a report released in June that even designated non-smoking areas such as in restaurants and bars are still unsafe for others under the same roof.

"Smoke-free environments are the only approach that protects nonsmokers from the dangers of secondhand smoke," Carmona said at a June 27 press conference. "The science is clear: Secondhand smoke is not a mere annoyance, but a serious health hazard that causes premature death and disease in children and nonsmoking adults."

The surgeon general's report states that health effects of exposure to secondhand smoke in adults increases a string of potential health haz-

(See *Smokers*, Page 12)

## Black family self-help

By Gail C. Christopher  
Special to Sentinel-Voice

The frequency and quality of parent-child interactions, as well as the environment in those early developing years, play a significant role in shaping the personality and future for all children. When almost 70 percent of African-American children are born to single mothers, the risks for negative outcomes are heightened.

As commissions, organizations, and the media examine the plight of young Black males in America, the family life aspect can no longer be ignored. In fact, its key, but often unspoken, relationship to the development of Black children into youths and young men is so significant that those seeking to reverse the plight of the Black male, should begin by mobilizing action in local communities that strengthens Black families.

When one looks for predictive factors that signal likely risk for school failure or involvement with the juvenile justice system, being raised in a poor, single-parent household emerges as the most consistent predictor. The African-American community must move past denial on this issue, otherwise it will not be properly addressed, and serious consequences will continue in our society.

Over the years, the psychological denial has had multiple levels.

Level One is denial of fact. Most Black children are not raised in a home with two parents. Sixty-eight percent of African-American births are to unmarried parents

compared to Whites (29 percent) and Hispanics (44 percent). Sixty-two percent of all African-American households are headed by a single parent, compared to Whites (27 percent) and Hispanics (35 percent); and 61 percent of Black children live in low-income families.

Level Two is denial of consequences. As a result of these realities, the single, custodial parent — almost always the mother — must be the provider (breadwinner), nurturer, caretaker and protector. She performs multiple roles simultaneously and, if young, usually faces significant barriers in each.

Level Three is denial of implications. This implies that a Black mother often must meet all the needs of her children, frequently ignoring her own emotional, physical and spiritual needs. She must be a superwoman, 24/7, and/or be extremely effective at rallying family and community supporters. A Cornell University study on single parent families showed that having a grandparent in the home can buffer the risks. Clearly, single parent families have an urgent need for extended family and community supports. The "village" idea.

The last level of psychological denial is the level of feeling or emotion. Once we face the fact, the consequences, the implications, we must individually and collectively face the feelings that are associated with this persistent and troubling trend. Most often, the predominant feelings are anger, resentment, frustration and despair. While some single moth-

ers do manage extremely well, feel love and have a sense of well-being most of the time, far too many are stressed, overburdened and not happy. These emotions are felt, often internalized by children, unknowingly.

Disconnected fathers are also frustrated, at the very least, and angry, too. All sorts of other emotions and attitudes swirl around — judgment, perceived helplessness, abandonment, shame, rejection and rage. The most important positive emotions can get buried.

A recent forum convened by the Kaiser Family Foundation, Harvard University and the *Washington Post*, has helped focus attention on the family structure. During the "Paths to Success for African American Males" forum ([www.kff.org/webcast/july18](http://www.kff.org/webcast/july18)), four young Black males offered interesting commentary. Two were exceptional academic achievers and two were former gang leaders. Despite the contrast in their experiences, all made one thing perfectly clear: It was love that motivated them to act in positive, productive ways. Love was the force that compelled them to achieve their best.

There are no simple answers to the complex, "plight of Black males." Life options will have to increase, and all systems that are currently failing these youth — education, mental health, health, justice, child welfare, labor — will all need to become more engaged in offering solutions. We need to learn how to listen to the calls — though muffled and sometimes hard (See *Families*, Page 6)



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