

Majority-Black board leads school district

LITTLE ROCK, Ark. (AP) - For the first time since federal troops escorted nine Black students into Central High School 49 years ago, the Little Rock school board has a Black majority.

Dianne Curry won a runoff election last week, meaning four of the Little Rock School District's seven board

members are Black. The 26,000-student district has been predominantly Black for years, but until now, it had never elected a Black-majority school board.

"Right now, they see a board that looks like them and it's easier for us to connect with them," said school board member Charles

Armstrong, elected last month. "You've got a board that can reach out to the community."

Until 1957, Little Rock had operated separate schools for Blacks and Whites. Despite a U.S. Supreme Court order, Gov. Orval Faubus sought to pre-

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Boyd



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Al Barber, right, CEO of TBL Construction, and Stanley Wyre, center, President of TBL Construction, speak with a participant during the Urban, Latin, and Asian Chambers of Commerce joint breakfast last week at the MGM Convention Center. Among the panelists during the diversity presentation was Chairman and CEO William S. Boyd of Boyd Gaming Corporation, making a commitment to help the organizations.

(Continued from Page 1) per month, but he projects that the support from Boyd will help add at least "one a week or so."

President and CEO Otto Merida of the Latin Chamber agrees that the campaign will help his membership increase and help by "allowing us to expand our operations, specifically those that cater to starting and expanding small minority businesses in Clark County."

Asian Chamber President Stan Saito concurs the co-pay will "definitely make a big difference in how we can attract more members."

As part of this new program, Boyd will aid subcontractors who work on the Echelon Place development with standard operating costs by funding the firms' workers compensation fees and general liability expenses.

"All too often, small and new businesses, often including [contractors and subcontractors that are minority or women-owned], are forced into disadvantaged bid situations because of the insurance factor," Johnson said. "There's little doubt this will greatly level the playing field for all companies wanting to do business with [Boyd]," she added.

Overstreet said that Boyd

called for a meeting shortly before the Urban, Latin and Asian chambers held their annual joint luncheon last week. "They [Boyd] called to request a meeting with us to become more active, to make sure they had a diversity initiative that was on par with MGM and Harrah's," Overstreet said.

He said that the two programs Boyd announced this week are part of other proposed initiatives aimed at identifying and including more minority-owned businesses as vendors and subcontractors.

Overstreet said that although Boyd has been a member of the Urban Chamber for many years, he was surprised at the level of outreach and funding commitments, saying, "That's pretty good."

He added that Boyd's program to help fund subcontractor's insurance expenses is significant and will give minority-owned companies needed assistance.

"That's a big help," he said, explaining that insurance — workers compensation and liability — is relative, computed as a percentage, and can cost a business hundreds to thousands of dollars based on the size of the

contract.

A spokesperson for Boyd expects that there will be more announcements on the Echelon Place development and opportunities for minority and women participation. Their corporate website is www.boydgaming.com.

Black Panthers

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ment of Human Resources as a community liaison.

When they were finished, they flipped a silver dollar to see who would be chairman. Seale called heads. Heads it was.

Later, when he saw Newton looking sharp in a black leather jacket, he decided that members should wear something similar as a kind of uniform. They added berets after watching a movie about the French resistance in World War II.

The Panthers' most controversial accessories were the then-legal weapons they carried when they began monitoring police activity in predominantly Black neighborhoods.

In 1967, as state legislators were considering gun restrictions that eventually passed, armed Panthers showed up at the California State Capitol in protest, grabbing national attention.

The militant approach, which frightened many White Americans, set the Panthers apart from other activist groups.

"They filled a critical kind of void in the civil rights struggle," said Charles E. Jones, chairman of the Department of African-American Studies at Georgia State University.

"At a time when folks began to reassess the utility of nonviolence and turning the other cheek, the Black Panther Party offered an alternative."

The Panthers are often remembered for gunfights with police that left casualties on both sides.

Still, former members point out that they were about more than guns. They ran breakfast programs for children, set up free health clinics, arranged security escorts for the elderly and testing for sickle cell anemia — along with holding their police conduct review boards.

At its high point, the party had about 5,000 members across the country, Seale said.

Looking back, he still thinks the guns

were necessary. A year before the Panthers were founded, he said, another group called Community Alert Patrol tried monitoring police activity, armed with tape recorders, walkie-talkies and law books.

"After a month of them doing this, they, in effect, got their law books taken and torn up, their tape recorders and their walkie-talkies smashed up with billy clubs, their heads were cracked up and drug downtown and locked up," he said.

A number of factors led to the Panthers' demise, starting with government opposition, Jones says. In 1967, the FBI launched a counterintelligence program against what it termed "Black hate groups" as well as other activists.

Internal disagreement on tactics and leadership weakened the party further and, "ultimately, people just got burned out. It's hard being a full-time revolutionary in the United States," Jones said.

Several Panthers were arrested on a variety of charges — and some are still in jail.

Seale and others were charged with conspiring to murder a party member who was believed to be a police informant, but those charges were later dropped. Seale, who turns 70 this month, moved back to Oakland in the 1990s and keeps busy with speaking engagements.

Newton was convicted of manslaughter in the 1967 death of an officer shot when police stopped a car Newton was driving. That verdict was overturned. Newton struggled with addiction and was shot to death by a drug dealer in Oakland in 1989.

Continued interest in the Panthers is "a fascinating phenomenon," said Jones, editor of an anthology, "The Black Panther Party (Reconsidered)." For him, it comes down to "a certain kind of boldness. It really stems from their community organizing, their commitment to serving not only Black folks but all oppressed people."

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