

# Comics aid Katrina victims Ruling

LAS VEGAS (AP) - After an eight-year hiatus, Comic Relief, the celebrity-studded fundraising telethon for the homeless, is back.

Robin Williams, Billy Crystal and Whoopi Goldberg will take the stage Saturday to raise funds for Hurricane Katrina victims, capping the weeklong Comedy Festival which begins Tuesday in Las Vegas.

Comic Relief founder and president Bob Zmuda said the decision to revive the telethon came after he narrowly escaped the wrath of the 2004 Asian tsunami while vacationing in Thailand.

"I got severe survivor's guilt," he said. He returned

to Thailand to volunteer in a morgue with thousands of bodies. "It was the worst experience in my life and yet it became the best."

After he returned to the United States, Hurricane Katrina smashed the Gulf Coast, leaving thousands homeless, and giving Comic Relief a new cause.

"We decided we had this great brand name and comedians were still willing to do it," he said.

The show marks the ninth major telecast of Comic Relief, a 20-year-old institution which held its last major event in 1998. This year it will bring together many top comedians, including Bill

Maher, Jon Stewart, Stephen Colbert, George Lopez and Sarah Silverman. Wayne Brady will host the show's satellite location in New Orleans. It will be broadcast live from Caesars Palace on HBO.

Much of the proceeds will go to building traditional "shotgun" houses in New Orleans' Holy Cross area in the devastated lower Ninth Ward.

"People have kind of forgotten. They say New Orleans is OK now. And it's not. It's ground zero," Zmuda said. While the benefit has a serious cause, the rest of the Comedy Festival week is all about yucks.

## Equations

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Howard), I had no idea what I was going to do with math. I had no idea about graduate school; no one ever told me about that. I was just doing it because I liked math. So, programs like these, different conferences to go to, really teach you more about the opportunities, more about your field. You get to meet a lot of people and you see those same people at different conferences, so you get to network," she said.

Crump plans on going to graduate school and pursuing her PhD. Crump said that like her teachers, she would like to go her old school and encourage Black students to get into math.

"I want to at some point and go back to explain to students there's money to be made and people don't like it; so if you can do it, go do it and you will be a commodity," she said.

The idea of getting excited about math and spreading it to other young Black people is exactly why Scott Williams became one of the founders of the National Association of Mathematicians, the organization responsible

for MathFest, and the creator of the Mathematicians of the African Diaspora website.

Williams, a world-renowned math professor currently at the State University of New York at Buffalo, remembers when he was one of about four Black PhDs in 1969.

Sitting in the back row of the auditorium, Williams was beaming as he looked out over the crowd mixed with students, professors and math professionals discussing internship and job opportunities. "When I started out I didn't know anybody (Black) in mathematics. It was a while before I got to learn a few people. So I think organizations like this are phenomenal," he said.

"I realized we needed to have some connections."

Numbers from the College Board show that while numbers are improving for Black students taking the Advanced Placement Calculus exams in the last decade, they still make up a small percentage of test takers.

Of the 248,000 students who took the AP Calculus AB and BC exams in 2006, only 9,680 were Black.

Crump said kids need to become "comfortable" with math early on, but more enthusiastic teachers and parents are needed to guide kids along the way.

"I think middle school is the most important time in your life; you learn the most, and that's when you decide you're going to college. I think it's the most important time that we need to express to young, Black students that they need to be comfortable with math. They may not love it, but they need to become comfortable," she said.

Eager students like Crump reassure Williams that the future of Black mathematicians is in good hands.

"There's just a wealth of possibilities. Kids think, you look at the math teachers in high school and this is what I can do with it. You can do so much more," he said.

"I know people with degrees in mathematics who have gone into law and medicine and all kinds of things. You are trained to think precisely about things. This is one advantage to have that training. So, there are many, many things possible with mathematics."

## Republicans

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communities, such as money for educational shortfalls, after school programs, Head Start and community development block grants.

"The 109th Congress has been the do-nothing Congress," says Leger. "And I think that with a new progressive Congress in power, they will understand the struggles that the states are going through and they won't leave the states out there to hang, basically, and try to fulfill all of these duties without help from the federal government."

And candidates running for president might benefit from that shift as well. If presidential voting mirrors the votes for governors, 295 electoral votes could go to a Democratic candidate president, 169 more than they

had. The presidency is won with 270 electoral votes.

Even with early speculations that the presidential race is shaping up to include Black Republican Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice possibly, Green says he is tiring of trying to change the party from within.

"The ones they do prop up, like your Colin Powell's, he carried the water for Bush, and now that he's out of there, he's beginning to tell how he really felt," Green said. "He should have had the courage to tell how he felt while he was sitting there with that power... I'm not there because I believe in what they say. I'm there because somebody's got to be there to tell them that they are wrong."

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Ellen Munford, a White female.

Her husband, Tommy Munford, hired LeGrande to help murder his wife for insurance benefits.

Munford, who is also White, was allowed to plead to second-degree murder, and received a life sentence after testifying against LeGrande. After LeGrande was sentenced, it was concluded by doctors that he suffered from psychosis.

"Whether he did it or not is not the question," Guilford County Commissioner Melvin "Skip" Alston said about LeGrande at the press conference. "The question is whether or not he got a proper and fair trial."

LeGrande was "severely" mentally ill and not competent to represent himself.

In addition, Robinson noted that LeGrande's standby counsel were not allowed to tell the court that LeGrande, among other ailments, believed that he was receiving signals from Oprah Winfrey and former CBS News anchor, Dan Rather. LeGrande also wore a Superman T-shirt to one of his

court proceedings.

"This is clearly not a man who should have been allowed to represent himself," Alston said.

After filing countless frivolous documents in court on his own, a federal judge ultimately appointed two lawyers to represent him for his appeal. However, the lawyers had little to present in federal court, and LeGrande's case was denied certification by the U.S. Supreme Court.

Those against LeGrande's death sentence point out that the prosecutor in the case, District Attorney Ken Honeycutt, is currently under investigation for hiding key evidence in two previous death penalty cases. Both of which have been overturned.

All-White juries have sentenced at least three other men of color, that were prosecuted by Honeycutt's office in the 1990s, to death.

Honeycutt also gained an unsavory reputation with some people by wearing a gold lapel pin shaped like a hangman's noose, and awarded those pins to assistant DA's for winning death penalty cases and as a boost

to their morale.

Robinson said that LeGrande was chosen by the prosecution because of his race and was exploited because of his mental illness.

"The prosecutor in this case lacked the integrity and the ethics that North Carolinians expect in our court system today," Alston said.

Robinson pointed out that Easley overturned a similar case in 2001, when Easley granted clemency to Robert Bacon based on the issue of racial bias and the unequal treatment of Bacon and his two co-defendants.

Bacon, who was "duped" into killing his White girlfriend's husband, was sentenced to death by an all-White jury.

The victim's wife, who was reported to have been the mastermind, was sentenced to life.

"We cannot be content with a law that has one set of justice for the wealthy and the White and another set for poor and the minorities," Alston said. "We hope that the governor will do the right thing on this."

Melde Rutledge writes for the Carolina Peacemaker.

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