

# Black meeting planners promote literacy

By Kanika Vann  
Sentinel-Voice

Third and fourth graders smiled, laughed and applauded at "Reading is Everything," a child literacy workshop held recently at the Rio All-Suites Hotel and Casino, hosted by the National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners.

The event was the NCBMP's annual community service project. It was sponsored by one of its visiting member companies, Valley Forge Convention and Visitors Bureau, and coordinated by the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority.

Kermit R. Booker Sr. Elementary School students and adult leaders had a day of reading and entertainment in the Palma room last Wednesday. The workshop enveloped two central themes: "Read to Achieve"



Photo special to Sentinel-Voice

Willie Clay reads to Booker Elementary students as part of a literacy workshop held at the Rio Hotel-Casino. The National Coalition of Black Meeting Planners hosted the event.

and "Read to Succeed." 10, participated. About 40 adults and 100 children between ages seven and

"We always do community service projects, com-

munity outreach. But this time we chose to do an educational community service project to give directly to children, said NCBMP Chairman Richard Lee Snow.

"Children need positive role models, and we'd be doing a disservice to them if we chose not to reach out to

them. We usually do Habitat for Humanity projects, but this time we chose to do something different, although just as important."

Booker Elementary School was chosen by local groups to attend the event because of the difficulties and challenges they face as an inner-city school, according to Snow.

School Principal Beverly Mathis thanked the sponsors involved in bringing the "educational day" to realization. "It takes a village to raise a child," she explained to her students. "There are people out there that don't know you, but they still care. Today, a group of people invested in your futures."

The children were entertained by a number of various activities planned by the NCBMP and their affiliates. A magician showcased many acts, including a balloon show, hat and rope tricks, jokes and the ever-popular disappearing objects act. The students howled with laughter, jumped out of their seats, and applauded at the opportunity to participate in the show when the magician

asked for volunteers.

Educational vendors had displays at the workshop. Books were provided for placement in Booker's library, along with other books that were read aloud then given to the children as gifts at the conclusion of the two-hour workshop. A Washington, D.C.-based supplier, Tiffany Chester, asked the children questions about the President of the United States and his White House home before reading the story "Woodrow the White House Mouse."

Backpacks and tee shirts that boldly display the words "Read to Achieve" on the front of them were distributed to the children.

"These children may have never had this opportunity had the NCBMP not sponsored this wonderful event. They all live here in Las Vegas, but many have never even been to the Strip or inside one of the luxurious hotels," said Director of Diversity of Marketing for the Las Vegas Convention and Visitors Authority, Mya Reyes. "We wanted the children here (See Read, Page 11)

## Smoking

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ness will be affected."

He added, "The law has [caused] mixed opinions. We are trying to figure it out. However, he said, "If I could find a happy medium between my bar business and my dining room, I would be happy."

Louis' woes are in stark contrast to the concerns of University Patio Bar and Grill located on Maryland Parkway across from the university campus.

"We love the new law, said co-owner Penny Zimmerman, "No problem ...we don't have gambling."

Many bar and restaurant owners have expressed concern that the greatest loss would be from patrons who eat, drink, smoke and want to gamble. Banning smoking, they say, will hurt revenues, especially slots.

Question 5, was overwhelmingly approved by voters on November 7, making Nevada one of several states nationwide that have voted for and enacted similar laws. The ballot question passed by a majority 303,842 to 258,300 vote.

Proponents point to second-hand smoke health hazards as the rationale for the strict smoking ban.

Not only will smoking in restaurants be restricted, but shopping malls, grocery stores and all public places where food is served when the law takes effect. The law as written doesn't allow smoking anywhere food is cooked and served, even if it's in a gambling area or bar serving prepared food.

Proponents of the Nevada Indoor Clean Air Act say that adults, as well as children, can now be protected from second-hand smoke that harms and kills.

Supporters of the Nevada Indoor Clean Air Act include The American Cancer Society, The Heart Association, The Lung Association, Academy of Family Physicians and the Southern Nevada Health District. All have invested years in pushing for stricter laws and support the strict ban on smoking, which is considered to be among the strictest of all states with similar laws. Another group, the Coalition for Tobacco Free-Kids also supports the ban.

Trade groups, such as the Slot Route Operators, Petroleum and Convenience Store Association spent millions in advertising to promote an alternative to Question 5 for voters. Supporters of the latter question have accused the drafters of the campaign that called for "Yes on 4, No on 5" of being intentionally misleading.

Question 4, the so-called Responsibly Protect Nevadans from Second-Hand Smoke Act was pushed by trade groups in an attempt to defeat the stricter Question 5 smoking ban. The ballot question that received the most votes was the one that would become the prevailing law.

Question 4 would have allowed smoking in some restaurants, work places, some child care facilities and some grocery stores. Supporters claimed that it would be fairer to certain businesses and would still protect children. Opponents pointed out to voters that the proposed law would not have made the smoking laws stricter but, in some cases, less restrictive, such as the relaxing of restrictions on smoking in day care centers.

And according to The Nevada Indoor Clean Air Act supporters, passage of Question 4 would have prevented local governments from ever passing more stringent laws banning smoking in public places.

Connors is concerned about his bar customers, those who want to smoke, eat and drink, and he doesn't know how he'll keep his customers happy while keeping up his bar business.

But he's working on finding a solution.

One solution he is considering, since Seven Seas has a gambling area, is that bar patrons can eat and have beverages in the dining area, then take a smoke in the gambling area which would no longer serve food in that area. Connors said those who elect to smoke could possibly take their food, cigars, pipes, cigarettes and drinks to the slots area.

Another point of controversy raised by some business owners who are opposed to the smoking ban, is the apparent disparate treatment of large gaming establishments. There is current discussion about a possible court challenge to the law.

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