

Kermit Booker ES touts empowerment school status

By Frank A. Albano
Sentinel-Voice

About 50 parents and other interested parties crowded into a small room at the community resource center at MLK and Carey.

They came to hear Kermit Booker Elementary School Principal Beverly Mathis explain that Booker has been selected by the district as one of four new schools to get empowerment school status starting in August and what that means for parents and their children.

Before the presentation began, the students were led into a play area, leaving parents and school district staffers alone to hash out the pros and cons of the new empowerment schools process. Principal Mathis led the opening remarks.

Mathis and proponents are extolling the benefits for Booker, among the school district's latest schools to be tagged an "empowerment



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Dianna Saffold-Cooks, an educational advocate, questions Clark County School officials during a community meeting about the newly awarded empowerment school, Kermit Booker Elementary, and what affect it will have on its staff, students and parents.

school." The school campus advocates and school district staffers characterized it as a

"hope" and "vision for the future" of education.

In her trademark strong,

commanding voice, Mathis wasted no time in convincing parents that Booker's em-

powerment application plan and approval was going to be highly beneficial to the students, their parents and the community.

"Everybody supports our children," said Mathis. That sentiment nobody disagreed with, however Dianna Saffold Cooks questioned and commented to Mathis.

"Other principals concern me," said Cooks. "They take the best teachers."

Cooks was referring to the practice, in her observation, whereby some principals bring their favorite teacher or group of teachers along when transferred to head a new empowerment school.

"Is this going to continue?" Cooks asked.

Associate Superintendent of Schools Karlene McCormick-Lee said, "Chosen schools had to apply and be accepted by a team."

Cooks is concerned about principals who would abuse autonomy power.

She then went on to tell of a bad experience with an unnamed principal at a newly created empowerment school. However, she did heap praise on Mathis. "Not everybody is Bev Mathis."

Empowerment schools is a concept for delivering more effective services to students, parents and instructors. An additional \$400 per child is allocated in the budget. A group of instructors and administrators form "design teams" that decide how the money is to be spent, with the school principal's oversight.

Some advocates say that an one major advantage is more autonomy at the school level. In part, yes, but the centralized school administration calls the final shots. Bound by state and federal laws, the school can and does submit plans. But, if the administrators don't sign off on the proposed plan, it's a no go.

As some critics point out, they do not consider that autonomy. Full autonomy, or SBM for School Based Management, is free of centralized management. Cooks and others that have concerns on this aspect say it's more like decentralization; that as long as the school's plan meets state and federal criteria, the school board nor administrators should have any say in how the schools spend the money or designs instructional programs.

Decentralization was the subject of a recent school district search for a new superintendent in recent years. One candidate's home base in New York City, N.Y., has schools similar to the empowerment type of structure that are called Autonomy Zones. However, the New York State legislature fired the central school board. The district was broken up into 32 separate districts. Each new district is made up of area schools, committees of parents, teachers and school principals. They jointly manage all budgeting, expenditures and instruction.

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Buffalo Soldiers' Legacy: Freedom fighters, then and now

By Kanika Vann
Sentinel-Voice

An important piece of history was presented in the Vista Ballroom on Saturday to a few hundred attendees at the Flamingo Hotel and Casino, as the Las Vegas Chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers hosted a fundraiser, A Tribute to the Buffalo Soldiers, to honor three of their members, while subsequently educating those in attendance about the significant roles that the Buffalo Soldiers have played in American and African-American history.

The event showcased several speakers, including Trooper Harold S. Cole, a current member and previous president, and Stan Armstrong, an associate professor of African-American History at UNLV.

According to Cole, "As a Buffalo Soldier, it is my duty to educate my people about a part of our past that even our national government has yet to fully acknowledge. The Buffalo Soldiers have been in existence for 142 years, yet we aren't even mentioned in most encyclopedias or history books.

The term "Buffalo Soldiers" became a general term for all African-American soldiers who fought for the United States, but is now

partly used to describe U.S. Army units who can trace their respective regiments back to the original regiments."

"[The fundraisers serve as another means for me to speak] of the formation of the original regiments (the 9th and 10th Cavalry, and the 24th and 25th Infantry Regiments) after the Civil War, their missions, personalities, the organization as a whole, and the parts they played in defending the United States from 1866 to 1951, creating a rich military history."

Cole, 83, believes that he has a duty to educate others about the organization and his experiences with it before he passes away. "I know I don't have much time left. We're losing our older members by the thousands. We've had members live to be 92, 93, 111, and even 117 years old. But each of them was sure to educate others about the importance of the Buffalo Soldiers," Cole emphasized.

Nationally, the Buffalo Soldiers educate school children, speak to military groups, government groups, and women's organizations, informing them of and inviting them to become Buffalo Soldiers themselves. Altogether, there are 35 chapters across the country.

"Today, the Buffalo Soldiers are more than just past or present soldiers fighting in wars at home or abroad," Cole said.

"In 1966, we revamped the organization to include soldiers of country and community. If you fight for the rights of your people in your neighborhood, your city, or your state, you are a soldier. If you are working to make a difference in the lives of others, are willing to commit to a life of community service, and have a desire to educate others about this vital piece of history, you are welcome to join us, whether you're male or female."

George Osborne, Vice President of the Las Vegas Chapter, said, "Everyone was invited to attend this event. We especially wanted children to attend, as they are the carriers of history. Without adequate representation in our history books, our youth are all we have to preserve the legacy of this organization. History should not be set aside. That is why the Buffalo Soldiers' main mission is to promote the history and tradition of the Buffalo Soldiers and to work with children to make sure that they are educated about these often forgotten men."

"Our organization is very

community oriented, having made several appearances over the years at many of the local parades including the MLK Parade and the Boulder City Christmas Parade, where current, younger members ride horseback and wear the attire of the Buffalo Soldiers," Cole said.

At the fundraiser, there were Buffalo Soldiers dressed "time appropriate" according to Cole.

"They wore various uniforms worn by the Buffalo Soldiers throughout the years. Dinner was served, there was a performance by a seven-piece band, a silent auction, and two seminars, which began earlier in the day."

The proceeds from the event went to the Las Vegas Chapter of the Buffalo Soldiers and other selected charities.

"I just want people to know that there were African-American soldiers that fought for the freedoms that we now own. The Buffalo Soldiers were brave, patriotic, and proud to fight for the United States," said Cole. "The Buffalo Soldiers of today, whether they went to battle or not, represent that same pride and bravery, fighting to preserve history and home."



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