

Black firefighters irate over pranks

By Charles Hallman

Special to Sentinel-Voice
ST. PAUL, Minn. (NNPA) — A stuffed monkey found last August hanging from a noose inside a St. Paul Fire Department service garage on Energy Park Drive is still under investigation, officials say. Based on the department's previous responses to racial incidents, Black firefighters are concerned that this occurrence will be "swept under the rug" like similar complaints in the past.

The monkey-in-a-noose incident was not reported until September, claimed St. Paul Fire Chief Tim Butler. When it was brought to his attention, "I have to admit that I was a bit shocked, because I have not seen that type of behavior in our department," he said.

"I went out personally to the repair garage the day it was reported [and] ordered that those items be taken down, and ordered an internal investigation on who put it up, why they put it up and what they meant by putting it up," said Butler.

Butler said he then hired an independent investigator, and in October he received a preliminary report. He added that the investigation should be completed soon. The St. Paul fire chief said that he also met with several Black firefighters.

"They have mentioned a number of concerns they have about racial treatment or racial issues about the department. We've had incidents in the past, and have a history in the past, but I don't believe it is widespread in our department, nor did I

think it was that graphic."

However, the noose incident has served as a breaking point for most of the 29 Black firefighters in the St. Paul department. They met last week to discuss this incident and other issues that reflect a continuation of the racial insensitivity that has long existed within the department.

Some are convinced that whenever the incident investigation is completed, nothing will be done about it. Speaking to the *Minnesota Spokesman-Recorder* only on the condition that their true identities would not be disclosed, two longtime Black firefighters we will refer to as...

"Max" and "Mac" said that past racial incidents have usually been "swept under the rug."

Many Black firefighters are afraid to speak out for fear of retaliation, Max admitted. "There are [just] a few of us, and some of us don't want to make waves," he continued. But after learning about the noose, "A lot of them were offended and want us to move on that."

The noose may have been up for quite a while, Max said. "Workers [at the garage] told us that they have been playing with it, [putting] it on one side of the shop, then stealing it from the other side. I think it is [noteworthy] that no one confronted them [about it]. When I saw it, I was hurt, then angry."

Retired St. Paul firefighter Nathaniel Khaliq, now the St. Paul NAACP chapter president, vividly remembers similar issues in the past. "Someone carved a noose with a body hanging from it

CHARLOTTE, N.C. (AP) — The former official who filed a \$225 million racial discrimination and sexual harassment lawsuit against NASCAR is very pleased with her settlement and looking forward to moving on, her attorney said. Maurica Grant reached a confidential settlement with NASCAR following 12 hours of mediation earlier this month in New York. The session was suggested by U.S. District Court Judge Deborah A. Batts after the first court appearance in what was expected to be a yearslong battle between the two sides.

"She'd been out of work a long time. We thought it was in the best interest of our client not to drag this out two

on a chair in a fire station," Khaliq recalled. "We immediately filed a complaint, but of course they never found out who was responsible. Like many other incidents, usually when they found the responsible party, there wasn't a whole lot that was done about it."

"I just think the sordid, racist history of the St. Paul Fire Department is something that has been going on for a long, long time," continued Khaliq. "For the most part, there has been little if any discipline or punitive action taken toward those that were responsible."

However, he does see officials move quicker in other situations, Khaliq said. "When women came on the department and there were incidents of degrading magazines and other things lying around, they cleaned that up really quick. But for some

to three years," said Benedict P. Morelli of New York-based Morelli Ratner PC.

"She needed closure. She's a young woman, and when you make the sort of allegations she did, it's difficult to move forward and get on with your life."

Settlement terms were confidential, and neither side admitted liability or wrongdoing. "She's very, very happy with the resolution," Morelli said. "And I don't think NASCAR wanted to leave it out there. They wanted to put this behind them, as well."

Grant, who is Black, worked as a technical inspector responsible for certifying cars in NASCAR's second-tier Nationwide Series from January 2005 until her Octo-

ber 2007 termination. In the lawsuit filed in June in the U.S. District Court for the Southern District of New York, Grant alleged 23 specific incidents of alleged sexual harassment and 34 specific incidents of alleged racial and gender discrimination during her employment.

Among Grant's claims, she said she was referred to as "Nappy Headed Mo" and "Queen Sheba," by co-workers, was often told she worked on "colored people time," and was frightened by one official who routinely made Ku Klux Klan references.

Grant also said she was subjected to sexual advances from male co-workers, two of whom allegedly exposed themselves to her, and

unable to reach Parsons by our press deadline. Our calls to St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman were not returned.

The two Twin Cities fire departments are worlds apart with regard to diversity, Khaliq said. "When you compare [Minneapolis] to St. Paul, it is an outright disgrace," he noted.

There are about 460 firefighters in Minneapolis, of whom 60-65 are Black. In St. Paul there are 410 firefighters, of whom 29 are Black and 16 are female.

Chief Butler said, "I have been working with the city attorney to look into the previous racial history in our department... I've made a commitment that this would stop. It has no place in the workplace."

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reason, they don't have a lot of empathy for African-Americans, and that's why they continue to do those things and brush it off as 'boys will be boys.' It is usually the same outcome: Somebody did it, but they didn't mean anything by it."

Khaliq, a 17-year St. Paul fireman who retired about six years ago, said that he supports the Black firefighters' efforts to unify and fight against such conditions. "I think it is important that they are organized, because they certainly can't count on the union, and the only other course of action is the courts."

The *Spokesman-Recorder* tried contacting Chris Parsons for comment, who is secretary and a high-ranking Black member of the International Association of Fire Fighters Local 21. After several attempts, we were still

unable to reach Parsons by our press deadline. Our calls to St. Paul Mayor Chris Coleman were not returned.

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The NCAA has worked closely with the BCA in trying to find a remedy, creating coaching academies and even adding the position of vice president for diversity and inclusion. But NCAA President Myles Brand does not believe the governing body can implement a college version of the "Rooney Rule," the NFL's standard that requires teams to interview at least one minority candidate, because the NCAA can't tell its members how to make a hire.

So Keith has spent years trying to convince university administrators to be more inclusive — to little avail. "People ask if this is racism or racially motivated," Keith

said. "I'll say this, whatever it is is a subjective argument about whether it's racially motivated or not. But when you look at the stats, it certainly brings up a racial issue."

An issue that could one day become a federal case.

"I would still love to think that student-athletes and parents who have athletes of color would look at schools and say 'If you can't be a coach or administrator there, why would you attend?'" Keith said. "If we start getting that done, I think there will be some real changes. And it may come down to the legal aspects, as much as you'd hate to say that."

who refused a trade from the St. Louis Cardinals to the Philadelphia Phillies in 1969 and took his case to the courts. Flood sat out the entire 1970 season and played just 13 more games in 1971 before retiring.

Some contend Flood then became a baseball pariah despite a resume that included two world titles, seven Gold Gloves and a career batting average of .293. Yet his legal fight helped open the door to free agency. And if Keith and Scott can find the right person to make a case against a university, they believe things could finally change for minority football coaches, too. Keith has some strong advocates.

Coaches

(Continued from Page 12) Scott said. "I think, from what we've gotten, there are some questionable facts, some questionable cases in regards to Title VII."

Finding a strong case isn't enough. Scott, as any lawyer, would rather pursue an open-and-shut case — though attorneys wouldn't dare use that term.

Another problem: The potential ramifications for anyone who does file suit.

"Let's be honest," Keith said. "When someone decides to follow that course, their chances of having employment are diminished."

Keith and Scott compare it to the case of Curt Flood, the former baseball player

LEGAL NOTICES

Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada

Uniform Standard Specifications for Public Works' Construction Offsite Improvements, Clark County Area, Nevada

Sections 623, and 635 of the Uniform Standard Specifications; Drawing Nos. 234.1, 234.2, 234.2A, and 412A of Volume I of the Uniform Standard Drawings and Drawing Nos. 404.213, 404.213A, 404.1005, 404.1024, and 404.1029 of Volume II of the Uniform Standard Drawings for Public Works' Construction Offsite Improvements, Clark County Area, Nevada have been added, revised or deleted by the Regional Transportation Commission of Southern Nevada (RTC). The additions, revisions and deletions to the drawings listed above were approved by the RTC between July 10, 2008 and December 11, 2008, and will become effective on January 1, 2009. Please refer to the RTC website at www.rtc.southernnevada.com for the specific changes, additions, and deletions made to the drawings. Revision sets are also available to download via the RTC's website.

The Uniform Standard Specifications and Drawings manuals and updates will no longer be sold in a printed format. In an effort to reduce costs, a compact disc (CD) containing all three manuals is now available for purchase from the RTC. The cost for the CD is \$5.00 and can be picked up from our offices at 600 South Grand Central Parkway, Monday through Friday between 8:00 AM and 5:00 PM excluding holidays. Shipping of up to 6 CD's within the Continental United States via United States Postal Service, priority flat rate can be provided for an additional \$6.00 charge. An order form is available on the RTC's website. If you have any questions, please contact the RTC at (702) 676-1500.

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