

Senior citizens clubs: A way to emotional stability and happiness

By AUDREY L. WILLIAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

Seventy-one-year-old Baxter Holman Sr. never pictured himself getting old, he says, nor did he think about being a member of a group made up of only senior citizens.

"I didn't think I'd ever get this old," says the cue and piano man for the Rhythm Band, one of 24 senior citizens groups formed through Experiment in Self-Reliance Inc. Founded 18 years ago under the present president, a spry 88-year-old Gladys Gaither, along with Alberta Reynolds and Euphonia Workman, members meet each Thursday at ESR's Senior Center on Patterson Avenue to play their favorite hymns and gospel selections on tambourines, drums, bazookas and cymbals.

Overall, there are over 121 senior citizens clubs supervised and coordinated under the Winston-Salem Recreation Department. The general concept surrounding senior citizens clubs, say geriatric and mental health specialists, is to ensure that their members remain active mentally and physically.

Joyce Jackson, coordinator of the clubs who meet at the Patterson Avenue center, has been working with senior citizens five and a half years now.

"The senior citizens clubs are really active," she says. "One of our clubs is going to Canada for a week and the Bon Air Club is going to the beach in July."

"A lot of the trips are one-day, but they're going places," she says, "and then we have an adult basic education class for those who want to get their GED (general equivalency diploma or high school credit)."

The North Carolina Senior Citizens Federation Association, an advocate for the elderly, was founded here in Winston-Salem and ESR's executive director Louise Wilson played an instrumental role in organizing the now statewide group. At the recent NCSFCA

pageant, Winston native Dessie Oliver, 75 and a member of the Gray Avenue Senior Citizens Club since 1968, was the first runner-up.

She represented all the senior citizens of Winston-Salem.

"It gave me a lot of experience," she says. "I enjoyed it because people think you're too old to do things like this. I enjoy working with other senior citizens. I think I'm still beautiful and I'll do what I can to stay that way until the Lord takes me."

"I joined the (senior citizens) club because I was sitting around at home with nothing to do and no where to go," says Oliver. "I think it's a wonderful privilege when you

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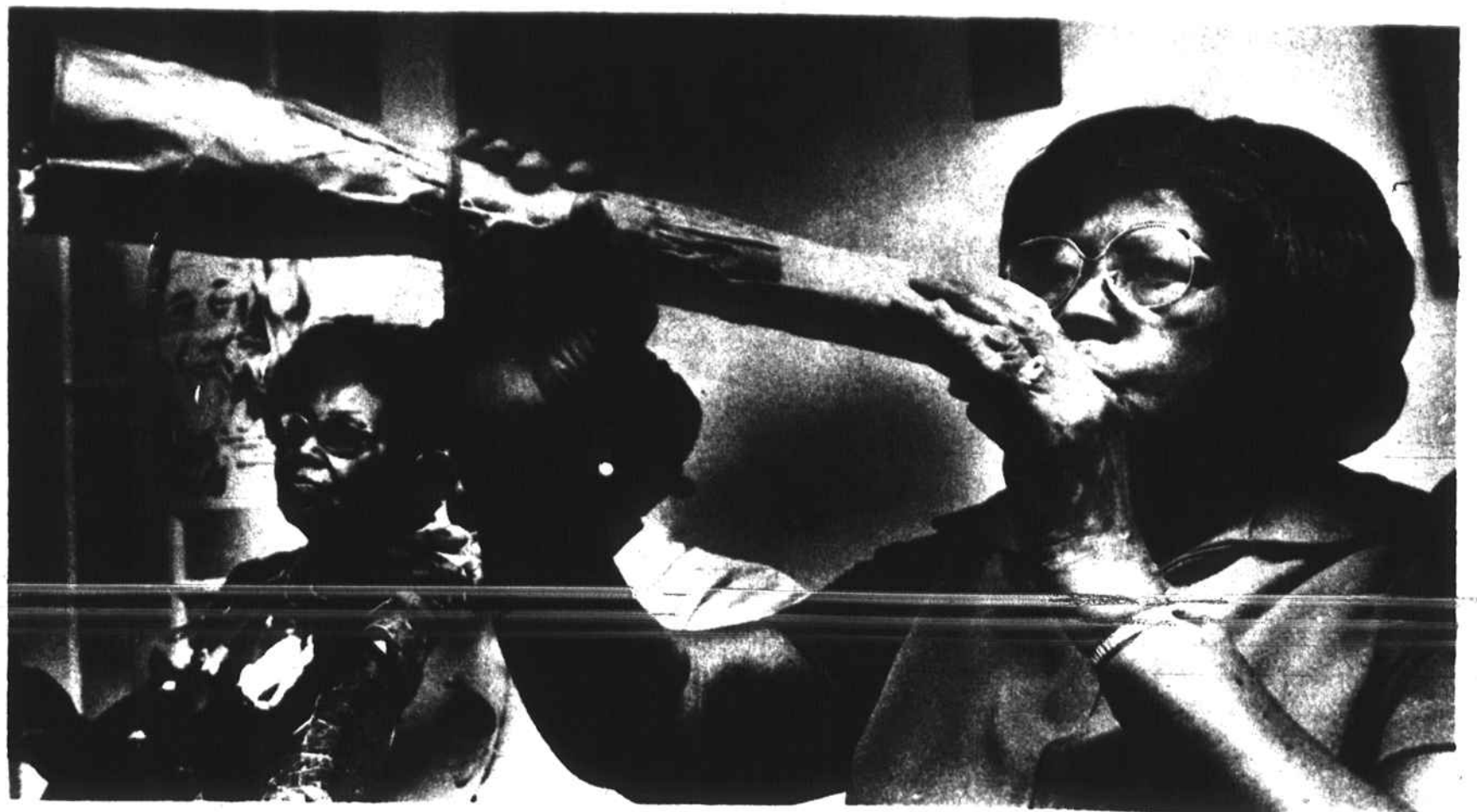
-- Dessie Oliver

get our age and have other people to be with and do things like learning to read together, learning to sew. It's a wonderful blessing."

Delores Guthrie, director of the Senior Center, says the biggest problems senior citizens clubs are facing is lack of transportation to get to and from their meeting places, unless members live at their meeting places, like those of Sunrise and Crystal Towers, apartment buildings for the elderly. Then, she says, transportation is still a problem. Having available vans to take the senior citizens on outings has also been a problem. But, Guthrie says, the major needs of the elderly are being met.

"It's very important that we continue these clubs," she says. "We have people who are socially as well as economically deprived."

"These clubs help promote mental health and they



Keeping Active

Mrs. Maggie Brown, a member of the Rhythm Band Senior Citizens Club, gives her all during the band's rendition of "Amazing Grace" (photo by James Parker).

keep the elderly socially active and they (the members) also use their resources," says Guthrie. "Some may sew, others type and then some may have public speaking skills, but they're still using their resources and keeping them in the community through these clubs."

According to experts, the major problem facing the elderly isn't always the fact that once they retire they must live on fixed incomes, but that they tend to suffer from severe depression and loneliness, in turn leading to deteriorated minds and bodies. Barbara Muse, assistant director of the Forsyth-Stokes County Mental Health Association agrees with Guthrie that senior citizens clubs promote mental wellness.

"I personally believe that clubs and support groups are important for everyone's mental wellness," she says.

"Loneliness is one of the major problems and if senior citizens stay at home," says Muse, "that loneliness tends to grow, but if they get out and become active, then they don't have time to sit and think about their problems or their aches and pains."

Muse says research has proven that physical activity increases the chemical in the brain that fights against depression, and with the elderly depression can be deadly.

"Staying shut up alone and inactive only feeds depression," says Muse, "and the deterioration of aging."

"We don't like having to treat people with mental illness," she says. "We're promoting physical activity and laughter, which works to keep the elderly and everyone healthy and happy."



Young & Gifted

Talented

Anthony Brown is already making his mark in the world of art. Now he's experimenting with music (photo by James Parker).

Sibling rivalry sparked art interests

By AUDREY L. WILLIAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

One of the reasons 13-year-old Anthony Brown has excelled in art and academics is because of an age-old condition called sibling rivalry.

"I got started into art through my brother Richard," says Anthony. "He would draw pictures all the time and bring them home and mom would be impressed. I was jealous, so I started drawing."

Anthony, the eldest child of Richard and Rosa Brown who reside in a tidy brick home on Pleasant Street, have his brothers, 10-year-old Richard Jr. and 7-year-old Alain, to compete with for his parents' attention and praise.

But Mrs. Brown supports all three equally and says she finds their artistic talents true gifts from God.

"Their talents just manifested in them," she says. "It's amazing. My baby is scribbling now. It's in him, too."

"I'm very proud of Anthony and all of my boys," she says. "They didn't get it from me but then again some people just think of art as just drawing, but it's decorating, doing odd things around the house, cooking, floral arrangements. I like to do all of that."

Anthony's work consists of a variety of pencil drawings, charcoal and watercolor paintings. His work has been displayed at Hanes Mall, Wachovia Bank and Trust Co. and recently displayed a still-life charcoal at the Journal and Sentinel building. A conscientious student

who chalks up only A's and B's, Anthony will enter the eighth grade at Hill High next year and begin a much more strenuous academic curriculum.

"I want the enrichment in academics," he says, "and in art, too."

Because his talents were recognized at an early age and thought to be above average, Anthony received a scholarship to study basic adult art at the Sawtooth Center. His younger brother, Richard, will also attend in July.

While in the seventh grade at Philo Junior High School this past year, the honor student knocked other com-

"I want to make art a part of my life ..."

--Anthony Brown

petitors out of the running when he presented his interpretation of an exciting career poster contest. The finished product is now on display at the city-county school administration office.

"I want to make art a part of my life," says Anthony. "I want to study art and all the basic skills of it. Maybe one day I can branch off into other jobs that call for art, like architecture."

At Philo, Anthony played corner back for the school football team and competed and won in the 220-relay in Please see page B5

For Walter Tucker, it's business as usual at Mechanics and Farmers Bank

By ROBIN ADAMS
Chronicle Staff Writer

Walter Tucker, the new senior vice president and city executive of Mechanics and Farmers Bank on Claremont Avenue, doesn't say much about the sudden resignations of Mel White and Betty Hanes, the bank's former two top executives.

Instead, Tucker says he prefers to talk about the job he came to Winston-Salem to do. Number one on his agenda is improving the bank's relationship with the black community.

"We don't have the kind of relationship I feel we ought to have," says Tucker. "The income per capita among blacks in Winston-Salem, I understand, is higher than in any other city in North Carolina. We (Mechanics and Farmers Bank top executives) are impressed with that market but we have not scratched the surface of breaking that market. We haven't got to where we ought to be."

Getting to where Tucker wants to be might take a little time. After all, the black-owned bank only opened in Winston-Salem in 1981 and still operates under the old bankers hours, closing daily at 1 p.m. and reopening at 3 p.m. Unlike the other banks in town, it only has one branch, with its closest competitor located directly across the street.

But Tucker is willing to wait. He says it takes a while for people to change banks they have been doing business with for years.

"It takes time. People are not willing to change banks

unless they have a bad relationship with their present bank," he says. "It's almost like a church relationship. People don't change churches unless something awful happens."

"In due time, people will see our good work and come to us. We consider ourselves a symbol for black North Carolinians. It's different riding down Claremont Avenue and pointing out Wachovia and pointing out Mechanics and Farmers. There is a sense of pride in seeing that it is owned by us, and it's ours."

The sense of pride that Tucker says the community

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-- Walter Tucker

should have for Mechanics and Farmers is one of the reasons he has been employed with the company since 1958.

After completing college at Virginia State and a two-year tour of duty with the Army, Tucker left his native Blackstone, Va., and moved South looking for a job. He thought he had found one with black-owned North Carolina Mutual Insurance Co., but was mistaken.

"North Carolina Mutual was located in the same building as Mechanics and Farmers," says Tucker. "I thought I was at the insurance company but I was in the

bank."

The foul-up didn't disturb Tucker too much because working for a minority-owned bank, like an insurance company, amazed him.

"I liked the idea of blacks owning businesses that were normally associated with the majority community," he says. "I was really looking at being affiliated with a black-owned institution."

Tucker made that mix-up 26 years ago, but his love for the banking industry has not changed even though he has moved from a teller window to the top executive's office.

"The job has become very complicated, though," Tucker says. "The environment has become more consumer-oriented and banking is very diversified now. We used to have only one kind of savings account Now there are 16 different kinds of savings accounts."

Because the banking business has changed so much, Tucker says minority-owned banks, like other community-based banks, have a difficult time trying to compete with the larger, more diversified institutions.

"There are some areas we can't get into because we don't have the staff or it's too expensive," Tucker says. But the one saving grace of Mechanics and Farmers is to remain a community bank and become people-oriented.

Although banking has been Tucker's life for most of his adult life, he himself is as diversified as the banking industry.

His wife died a year and a half ago and he has since become both mother and father to his three children. Please see page B5



Walter Tucker: Mechanics and Farmers new city executive says the bank has a ways to go before getting where it wants to be (photo by James Parker).