

Fort: A&T is preparing for its future

By ROBIN ADAMS
Chronicle Assistant Editor

Dr. Edward Fort, chancellor of N.C. A&T State University, hands out a copy of last year's chancellor's report with pride.

But nowhere in the slick-paper booklet does it list the many problems the school has been plagued with the past couple of years -- problems that have been heavily reported in the media. From tangled finances to a suit filed by a faculty member who claims he was denied tenure because of his race, to criticisms from some members of the school's board of trustees and alumni that Fort is out of tune with the university and its unwritten mission to educate students who have been classified as "diamonds in the rough."

What the booklet does represent, says Fort, is the real A&T story. The book says that:

- The School of Engineering is one of only four nationally accredited engineering schools in the state and the only one in the Piedmont.
- The School of Business is one of five in the state with a nationally accredited undergraduate program.
- The state has appropriated \$8.5 million for a new engineering school building.
- Standards of excellence have increased in all major areas, especially in nursing where eight years ago only 13 percent of the nurses taking the national nursing exam passed.

The booklet also names some of A&T's most famous graduates, including Dr. Ron McNair, the first black astronaut to participate in a space shuttle mission; Dr. Edward Treadwell, section head of rheumatology and assistant professor of medicine at the East Carolina University Medical School; Dr. James Hefner, provost of Tuskegee Institute; and the Rev. Jesse Jackson, who became the first black American to mount a serious presidential bid.

All of that has been done, Fort says, while A&T, like other black colleges, was and still is going through a transitional period.

"The name of the game is demand for excellence," said Fort in a recent interview with the *Chronicle*. "Taking diamonds in the rough and polishing them, that's a noble gesture, but that alone won't do it."

"... I have to steer the course and make sure that history is something we preserve ... but history alone won't get the student in the door to take that exam. You have to combine history with vision ... and programs to get them beyond the gate."

But Fort is the first to admit that making those accomplishments hasn't been easy.

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Chancellor

"It can become a situation where in some cases you take a lot of heat; take a lot of flack," he says. "But my vision is that of enhancing the institution's mission. If an institution can't meet the busy and growing list of challenges, ... barriers and criterion, ultimately it will tread water or it will wither and die or be merged. And I don't intend to see that happen to this institution."

"If we do more than just survive, we have got to do more than meet those challenges."

Many of those challenges, says Fort, are things the university has no control over.

"Now, there is less concern for color, but how accountable you are," says Fort.

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Should we cover church matters?

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ing while impaired and pending charges of drunken driving and possession of marijuana, Eversley said the members actly wrongly in notifying the press.

The story involved the Rev. Emery Clark Jr.'s arrest for drunken driving on two separate occasions and his congregation's vote to allow him to remain as the church's pastor -- although it was not unanimous.

"I think the members of the church did make a mistake and the newspaper should not have given the story front-page treatment," Eversley said.

"I think there's always the danger the press will be manipulated by a small minority, or an employee with something that may not be publicly newsworthy. I don't think if it was a white church, it would have appeared on the front page (of a daily newspaper)."

But in October 1983, *The High Point Enterprise* gave front-page coverage to the arrest of a white

Baptist minister on drunken driving charges. The pastor there resigned.

A Question Of Leadership

Moreover, *Chronicle* Editor Johnson contends that there's a significant difference in the power of a black minister and the power of his white counterpart.

"Black ministers often are spiritual and political leaders," Johnson said. "They're even more powerful than black elected officials because they don't have to answer to white people. They get their power strictly from the black community. Look at the Rev. Jesse Jackson. He's never held a public office but he wields enormous political power."

But Goodwin said the media's treatment of such stories affects public confidence in those media -- and that, in the Clark case, he knew many people who lost confidence in the *Chronicle*.

"I think you can beat a dead

horse," Goodwin said. "Here's a man who's been put in the paper because he is known -- and it helps circulation. Other people do this stuff all the time and you never hear about it. How much play do you want to give something like this?"

But to Robinson, who agrees that such stories sometimes increase newspaper circulation, the fact that a minister -- a community leader -- is involved is all the more reason to cover it.

"When it's a minister, you definitely should go after it,"

Robinson said. "That man is a resident of the community and his occupation happens to be the ministry. He's innocent until proven guilty, but we must state 'Joe Blow has been charged.' If he's proven innocent, then print that, too."

But by then, Eversley maintains, an innocent person could have suffered irrevocable harm. And the harm such a story would do would not justify its benefit to the public.

"Freedom which is not disciplined is chaos," he said.

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