

Luncheon bash honors Corpening's retirement

Family and friends of Winston-Salem's retired Mayor Wayne A. Corpening gathered Wednesday morning at the Stouffer Winston Plaza Hotel for a reception and luncheon that kicked off a day of celebration in his honor.

The special reception began on the 15th floor of the hotel where officials unveiled a newly-named suite in honor of former Mayor Corpening.

"It gives me great pleasure to dedicate this suite in the name of Mayor Wayne Corpening," said Thomas L. Marelo, general manager of the Stouffer Winston Plaza. "Mayor Corpening worked tirelessly during the early part of the decade to bring a premier hotel into downtown Winston-Salem and all of the employees of the Stouffer Winston Plaza thank him for being instrumental in

the success of our hotel." After the reception in the newly-dedicated suite, the group moved on to the hotel's The Quill restaurant where the former mayor's friends paid tribute by telling stories about the mayor and his career.

Former Mayor Corpening also was praised for being instrumental in bringing several other projects to the city, such as the expansions at the

Benton Convention Center, Lawrence Joel Veteran's Memorial Coliseum, Mercantile Plaza, renovations along Trade Street and the new downtown strollway to Old Salem.

"All of Winston-Salem, and especially downtown, owes a great deal of respect to Mayor Corpening for his service as mayor for so many years," Mr. Marelo added.

Wood, aldermen sworn into office

But the new mayor was thrown a curve when the board rejected her proposal and, in a surprise move, opted instead for a slate that features Northeast Ward Alderman Vivian Burke as mayor pro tem. In accepting the second recommendation, the aldermen also eliminated Mrs. Newell from her position as chair of the finance committee and appointed Mr. Womble as chair of the General Committee. West Ward Alderman Robert S. Northington Jr., who made the motion suggesting the second set of assignments, was appointed chair of the Finance Committee.

Mrs. Burke, Mrs. Harpe, Mrs. Pleasants and Mr. Wright supported Mr. Northington's motion.

The announcement of the assignments came after speeches by

both the newly elected officials and those leaving office.

Mrs. Wood discussed several problem areas which she said should command immediate attention from the board. She issued challenges to each of the committees to begin to address issues of pressing concern.

Vacancies on the city's drug enforcement teams should be filled immediately, she said, so that the city can begin to chip away at its drug problem.

Mrs. Wood said that "one of the city's oldest and bitterest issues, the location of the transit center," must be a top priority for the Public Works Committee. She promised city residents to maintain open-door policies in city hall and to allow

forums of which all citizens may be a part.

"You not only have a place at this table, it is your table," she told the capacity crowd that overflowed out of the chamber and into the hallways on both sides of the room. "In turn, I ask you to be equally open in presenting your concerns. This is about building trust among those who may have lost trust for one another . . . and building a community founded on cooperation."

In bidding farewell, Mr. Hairston said that the board had failed to alleviate many problems during his term of office.

"Four years ago when I came on the board, the city of Winston-Salem had a lot of problems. It still has a lot of problems," he said. "We

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live in two cities, one black, one white. One east, one west. We, on this board, were not able to bring the two cities together. I do hope this board will be able to do that. Racism is a terrible thing and it governs us from birth to death. Hopefully, we will rise above black and white and treat each other as individuals. This is my prayer."

But Mrs. Newell begged to differ with Mr. Hairston on his assessment of the divisiveness of the city.

"I don't believe we have two cities, I believe we have one city, Mr. Hairston," she said. "We have a lot of dissimilar wants, but we have a lot of similar wants, too."

Walter Holton, chair of the local Democratic Party, had not returned phone calls at presstime.

Blacks outraged over 'defection'

Northington's motion.

But several Afro-American leaders and members of the Democratic Party have said they feel "betrayed" by the fact that Mrs. Burke supported a motion that reduced the number of Afro-American committee chairs and placed key committees, such as the Finance Committee, previously chaired by Mrs. Newell, in the hands of Republicans.

Rep. Annie Brown Kennedy said the opportunity for progress that Afro-Americans gained through their vote in the last election, has been nullified by Mrs. Burke's decision to lend her support to the Republican board members.

"On Monday night, Vivian Burke put her personal interests above the good of her constituents and the Democratic Party and voted with the Republicans, which resulted in the other black aldermen losing important committee chairs," said Rep. Kennedy. "Vivian Burke failed to vote in the best interests of her constituents and the black community as a whole, and, as a result, has set us back as a people and as a community. The recent mayoral election was a crucial election for African-Americans in the City of Winston-Salem. With the election of Martha Wood as mayor, we as a community had the rare opportunity to make real progress during the next four years. But our progress has been tremendously stifled by the vote of Vivian Burke."

But Mrs. Burke does not consider her action a display of party disloyalty.

"I don't have any problem with the way I voted," she said Tuesday afternoon. "As minorities we need to learn to be sophisticated in what we do in politics."

Mr. Northington said that he had discussed with Mrs. Burke the possibility of making a motion to appoint her mayor pro tem. Mr. Northington said that Mrs. Wood approached him shortly after her election and asked for his input on committee assignments and a candidate for mayor pro tem. He suggested both Mrs. Burke and Mrs. Newell for the mayor pro tem position, he said, "and that was the end of the conversation." He said there had been conversations among some of the aldermen with respect to board appointments and that "the five of us that voted for the motion felt that that was a reasonable recommendation."

Mrs. Newell said that she had "no problem with changing the committee appointments of a mayor. We've done that before." But she said that she was concerned by the shift in party loyalty and the confusing messages being sent to the Afro-American community in particular.

"The community is confused. Some of them feel that Martha has betrayed the black community. They feel that she has not put us on committees as chairs. We have fewer now than we did before she

was mayor and they feel she has let the black community down," said Mrs. Newell, noting that her phone had been ringing constantly with calls from voters in reference to Monday night's meeting. "Martha has not done this. What I find astounding and what has flabbergasted me is that one of us, one of our black elected officials, Mrs. Vivian Burke, was the person used to actually oust top blacks from chairmanships. I am hurt. I think Vivian has done a disservice to the black community."

On Tuesday afternoon, Mrs. Burke said that she had not been contacted in person or confronted with any such negative feedback as described by Mrs. Newell. Therefore, she said she would not comment on charges that she had "betrayed" her constituents or anyone else.

"Those who feel betrayed should talk with me," she said.

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-- Virginia Newell

"There are so many people who would not feel I have betrayed anyone. It's a shame to spread information like they did in the mayor's race. My loyal supporters or those who have something to say about betrayal would not use the press. They wouldn't hide behind the press."

Still, some Afro-Americans feel Mrs. Burke "sold out" the Afro-American community to obtain the position as mayor pro tem.

"As a female and as a black person who got out and worked and asked people to come out and vote for her, I feel like I have been raped with my clothes on," said Earline Parmon, who lives in the Northeast Ward. "The Democratic Party has been defected from, black people have been defected from. The party should be outraged. She should not better herself at the expense of the black community. This is a serious mistake. I feel terrible about all of the people we have begged to come out and vote. It's a slap in their faces. Martha Wood won three times in her (Mrs. Burke's) own ward. Three times the people picked Martha despite the fact that Vivian Burke supported her opponent. That was their mandate. The only possible explanation for her actions is that she (Mrs. Burke) feels that she can do whatever she wants."

Mr. Womble said that he respects Mrs. Burke's right to exercise her vote in any manner that she chooses. But he did say he has some

concerns about the "organizational structure" of the committee assignments.

"The mayor, Mrs. Wood, met with each of the aldermen before making her recommendation and sought their input," he said. "No one else ever even did me the professional courtesy of talking with me about what was going on. That concerns me."

The mayor pro tem serves in the absence of the mayor at the mayor's request. Because of the largely ceremonial nature of the position, Mrs. Parmon said that it becomes even more baffling why Mrs. Burke would sacrifice key committee appointments for the position.

"An informed person knows that that position carries no power. None," said Mrs. Parmon. "Well-informed people know that just being a mayor pro tem does not help the black community. Chairing committees that will determine where the money goes is what helps the black community."

But Mrs. Burke said that she was asked to serve as mayor pro tem and that she was able to maintain her position as chair of the Public Safety Committee in the process. She said, too, that she sees this as a victory for Afro-American women.

"This is not my first time being asked. The other times I did not accept because I would not have been able to continue to chair a committee. This time I was able to continue as chair of the Public Safety Committee," Mrs. Burke said. "I decided it would be good for the black community to have a black female in this position. We've had blacks before but never a black female as mayor pro tem. I feel this brings distinction to the Northeast Ward. It adds distinction for black women. It gives the black community, young blacks, something to work toward. It makes elderly blacks feel good to know of these types of accomplishments."

Responding to Mrs. Parmon's charges, Mrs. Burke said, "Earline just got into the ward and I have been helping her for quite some time . . . when others didn't even know she existed. Her loyalty is to the Southeast Ward."

Mr. Malloy said that he is disappointed about the effect Mrs. Burke's vote will have on the overall Afro-American community and described her actions as "despicable."

"Black people had the opportunity to do something to move this community ahead," said Mr. Malloy. "We had finally put together a progressive coalition that could move this city forward." Mrs. Burke's actions, in collaborating with the others on the board, is against the mandate of the people. She slapped us all in the face. I think Mrs. Burke has hurt black people throughout Winston-Salem.

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It's tantamount to treason as far as loyalty to black people. I hope people don't stand by and let this happen."

Mrs. Parmon said that she plans to meet with Northeast Ward residents to discuss all possible options. She said that a recall would be one of the options discussed.



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