

Community News B1



Exchanging cultures/promoting goodwill

WFU professor to teach in Niger

By YVETTE N. FREEMAN
Chronicle Staff Writer

Dr. Debra Boyd-Buggs is African-American, and although she was born and raised in Washington, D.C., she also considers Senegal, West Africa as her home. And for the next year, the country of Niger will also become her home, as a result of a Fulbright Fellowship.

Boyd-Buggs, who is an associate professor of French and African Studies at Wake Forest University, was awarded the grant by the J. William Fulbright Scholarship Board and the United States Information Agency, in March, to lecture and conduct research.

"It's to promote cultural exchange; to promote goodwill between nations; between the United States and other nations. It's a great opportunity for a scholar, or professor or student in this country to go and share and learn about another culture, and also to take whatever it is that they have, to share with those people. So it's a wonderful program," stated Boyd-Buggs.

She will be one of about 1,800 U.S. grantees who will travel overseas for the 1991-92 academic school year under the program.

While in Niger, Boyd-Buggs will teach American Literature at the Université De Niamey in Niamey, and although she will be doing a service to the United States, she will also be fulfilling a personal goal. She says that she is currently working on a manuscript on "Islam and the creative imagination in Francophone West African fiction. And teaching in Niger will give me an opportunity to examine the literature of Niger, which is primarily a Muslim literature. And I would like to incorporate the literature of Niger in this extensive study that I'm doing." Boyd-Buggs added that she wants "to make some type of lasting contribution to the field, so that other people who come after me can use this book to learn more about the people of Niger, and about the literature of Niger, which is a literature that's not well known in the United States primarily because it's in French."

Boyd-Buggs has been teaching at Wake Forest for two years now, specifically African and Caribbean literature in the department of Romance languages. She was a North Carolina Scholar (Post-Doctoral Fellow), at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for two years. She also taught for one year at North Carolina Wesleyan College in Rocky Mount prior to coming to Wake Forest.

She received a Bachelor of Arts degree in French from the University of Iowa; Master of Arts degree in French Literature from Rutgers University; and a Ph.D. of Philosophy in Romance Languages and Literature from Ohio State University.

She moved to North Carolina in 1986 when her now former husband took a job in Raleigh. It was then that she applied for the fellowship at UNC-Chapel Hill. "The post-doctoral fellowship was a marvelous opportunity for recent black PhDs, or young black people who had recently received a Ph.D., to have an opportunity to do research," she stated.

This will not be the first time Boyd-Buggs has traveled to Africa. In fact, this will be the second Ful-

African art says that I love something about my own tradition."

Boyd-Buggs will be leaving for Niger around the end of August, and will be taking her two sons, Jordan who is 10 years old, and Pascal, who is two years old, with her.

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— Dr. Debra Boyd-Buggs

bright award that she has received. She said, "I was a Fulbright Researcher; 1983-84 in the country of Senegal. I was what you call the junior researcher. I was writing my dissertation at the time, and I did complete a dissertation on the Senegalese novel." However, even though she this is not new to her, she says receiving a second Fulbright is just as exciting as the first.

There is no doubt that Boyd-Buggs will fit right in with the people of Niger. Here at home in the states, she prefers to wear her hair braided, as well as wear African clothing. "I've always loved African clothing. It's more comfortable. It's more convenient. And also, it does fit in with my life. My life at this point, is closely linked with my preoccupations with an Afrocentric approach to education; with helping and getting other black people to appreciate and to love their Africanity. And I think if I'm an example of that, then as a result of my wearing African clothes all of the time, there's then a lot more interest in African clothes among the people that I'm in close contact with," she commented.

She also stated that she does not mind the fact that some young African-American people wear the traditional African clothing as part of a trend or fad, without regard to appreciating African-American history and heritage.

She added that she is also a lover of African art. "One of the things about us as black people is that we've hated ourselves and hated who we are. We wanted to reject our identity because we were taught that this was something negative; this was something inferior; this was something primitive. So for me to love

She says this will be a great opportunity for her, especially being an African-American, and that more African-American educators should apply for opportunities to learn and teach abroad, particularly in the African countries. She, herself, plans to continue applying for fellowships, although there is a limit to the number of Fulbright awards a person can receive. She said, "One of the objectives of the Fulbright Program is to give different people opportunities to go abroad to study. So they don't keep giving it to the same people all the time."

When she returns from Niger next summer, she says she plans to continue working on her manuscript and teaching. But she says "the main thing that I want to do though, is to take students overseas to study. That's one of my primary objectives. I want to do two things. I would like to have an exchange program for students and then possibly every two years, just take groups of people who are interested in going to Africa on educational excursions."

In addition, she said that she has been involved in the campus ministry at Wake Forest for the two years that she has been at the university, and that some time in the future, she "would like to be able to pull together



Photo by Mike Cunningham

Dr. Debra Boyd-Buggs looks forward to teaching American literature to students in the country of Niger.

my academic interest and my concerns in the ministry, and be able to put those two things together in some way. That's what I would like to be able to do as a life-long activity."

But currently, she is working on translating a novel by a Senegalese writer, and she says once that is completed, she hopes to begin translating a novel by a writer from Niger.

About 5,000 Fulbright grants are awarded each year to U.S. students, teachers, and scholars to study, teach and conduct research in more than 130 countries around the world.

For more information about the Fulbright Program, contact: Office of Public Liaison, 301 Fourth St., S.W., Washington, D.C. 20547, or call (202) 619-4355.

Military Notes

The following soldiers recently landed at Iskenderun, Turkey to assist with international relief efforts for Iraqi refugees while serving with Marine Service Support Group 24, which is based at Camp Lejeune.

The group is part of the Mediterranean Amphibious Group (MARG), headquartered in Norfolk, VA. The MARG included the USS Guadalcanal, USS Austin and USS Charleston.

- Marine Lance Cpl. Lance T. Wallace, son of Shirley A. Ayers of Kernersville. He is a 1986 graduate of East Forsyth High School. He joined the Marine Corps in April 1988.

- Marine PFC Joseph P. Farabee, son of Lillie M. Farabee of Winston-Salem. He is a 1989 graduate of Carver Senior High School. He joined the Marine Corps in June 1990.

- Marine Lance Cpl. Shannon L. Williams, son of Vernell E. Williams of Winston-Salem. He is a 1987 graduate of North Forsyth High School. He joined the Marine Corps in August 1987.

- Marine Lance Cpl. Bradley F. Smith, son of Frederick H. Smith of Winston-Salem. He is a 1989 graduate of Seneca High School in Seneca, S.C. He joined the Marine Corps in September 1989.

* (Note: Smith is serving with the 24th Marine Expeditionary Unit based at Camp Lejeune.)

OUR FOLKS IN THE PERSIAN GULF

By YVETTE N. FREEMAN
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When the most Americans look back and remember the Persian Gulf War, they primarily think of the "heroes" in terms of the men who risked and even lost their lives in the conflict with Iraq. Although men do make up the highest percentage in the U.S. armed forces, women also account for a certain percentage in the army, navy, marines and air force, and many of them also risked their lives, alongside their male counterparts, and should be duly acknowledged as the "heroines" of Operation Desert Storm.

One such "heroine" is 42-year-old Katherine Johnson, who is a native of Winston-Salem, but currently resides in Phoenix, Arizona. She was stationed in the gulf as an operating nurse with the Army's 403 Combat Support Hospital unit, which is based in Phoenix. Of the 300 members in the unit, who are all officers, Johnson is one of five African-Americans. She is a lieutenant.

"I'm in charge of the enlisted. That means I'm supervisor and director of the enlisted soldiers. There are scrub techs and there are also circulators, and...I was overseer of those people," she said.

Johnson arrived in Saudi Arabia Thursday, January 3 at 5:30 a.m. She found out there was a possibility of going to the gulf back in November when her unit was put on alert. "They put us on alert for three hours. Then they told us we were going, and I almost fainted. I couldn't believe," she stated.

Johnson says she didn't want to go because "...I was afraid for my life. I didn't know what to expect." However, her disposition did change once she got there, although she says she was still afraid. She said, "I had to do a lot of praying...and fasting and asking God to take care of me while I was there. But once I got there and saw the living conditions of the Saudi Arabians and the Iraqis; EPOWs (Enemy Prisoners of War), I was glad that I went because most of those people are very malnourished people."

Treating the EPOWs was part of Johnson's duty as well as treating any injured U.S. and allied soldiers. During her stay, she says her unit treated about 150 EPOWs, who had primarily been injured after stepping on land mines. She also said that they were glad to have been captured. "Most of them...were glad to be captured. They wanted to be injured and they wanted us to take care of them because they said the living conditions they lived in were beneath the kind of conditions we're used to living

prisoners during an armed conflict must treat them for their injuries; Johnson says at first she was hesitant about having to treat soldiers who were supposed to be the United States' enemy.

But she says "Once I saw what bad shape they were in, I was proud to take care of them. At first I was hostile because I didn't want to be there, and once I found out how they lived, I realized how proud I was to be an American citizen."

Johnson's unit was stationed only 30 miles from the Kuwait border and says they could hear the bombs dropping continuously throughout the war. No one in the unit was hurt or killed during the war, however it was after the war was over that Johnson says members of the unit got careless, which resulted in serious injuries. In one instance, she said two officers were seriously injured when a cluster bomb exploded in the tent next to hers. She said a female African-American officer suffered brain damage and another lost his arm in the explosion. She says it was only luck that no one else was injured or killed.

Johnson arrived back in the United States April 21 and says she was elated to be home again. "I could kiss the ground," she said. "I used to say 'I wonder why the Pope would want to kiss the ground.' It's just so stupid. But now I understand why when he gets off the plane, he kisses the ground."

She also received a Congressional Commendation Medal for her service in the gulf during the war.

Now that Johnson is back home, she plans to continue pursuing a master's degree in Nursing from Arizona State University, and she says she hopes to one day work with teenagers, particularly African-Americans, to help prevent teen pregnancy. She will receive that degree next year. However, for now, she says she will continue working as an Operating Room Nurse at the Veterans Administrative Hospital in Phoenix.

Katherine Johnson is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Joe Austin of Winston-Salem.



Photo by Mike Cunningham

Katherine Johnson, shown here with her father, Joe Austin, recently returned from the Persian Gulf, where she was an operating nurse.

under. So they were proud to be captured," she said.

She noted in particular that several of the EPOWs were only children forced to serve in the Iraqi army. She said "One EPOW...was only 13 years old. That's how young they were. He told us that the Iraqis came and took him away from his family, and they told him if he didn't volunteer to go, they would assassinate his family."

Johnson also stated that many of the EPOWs were so malnourished that it was difficult to really distinguish how old they were.

However, despite the fact that it was her duty to treat the enemy prisoners of war, because of the Geneva Convention treaty, which states that any country that takes