

California has its second black speaker of State Assembly

SACRAMENTO, Calif. — Assemblyman Herb Wesson (D-Culver City) was unanimously elected as speaker of the California State Assembly last week, becoming only the second African American in the history of the state to ever hold that powerful position.

Wesson, 50, will be officially sworn into the position on Feb. 6, taking the place of Assembly Speaker Robert Hertzberg (D-Sherman Oaks), who will be forced out by term limits this year.

During his acceptance speech, the speaker-elect mentioned the life challenges he had to encounter, growing up in a working-class community where gangs and racial discrimination were not uncommon.

"It's been a long road from the rough-and-tumble streets of Cleveland to this hallowed hall," said Wesson.

"Two years from now (when the term is up), I want people to say Herb Wesson was truly a members' speaker," he added.

Wesson will join Willie L. Brown Jr. as the only African Americans ever to serve as speakers of the California Assembly. Brown, now mayor of San Francisco, held the position for 16 years after being elected in 1980.



Wesson

Black motorist gets \$800,000 settlement in assault by New Jersey trooper

TRENTON, N.J. — A black woman who said she was assaulted by a white state trooper during a traffic stop has reached an \$800,000 settlement with the New Jersey Turnpike Authority.

The authority's lawyers approved the settlement last week.

Kindra Wright was arrested in 1998 by Trooper John Ioia, who apparently mistook her for one of the people involved in an argument near a turnpike rest area.

When Wright attempted to return to her car, ignoring Ioia's orders to stop, the trooper handcuffed her, lifted her by the hair and pushed her face first into the ground, according to her lawsuit. Wright said she suffered a fractured jaw, several broken teeth and cuts to her face.

John Hagerty, a state police spokesman, said Ioia was involved in "several incidents" that led to disciplinary hearings and a 14-month suspension. He can return to duty in May after undergoing an evaluation and hearing on his fitness for police work, Hagerty said.

The charges filed by the trooper against Wright, including resisting arrest, were dismissed.

"At the height of racial profiling on the New Jersey Turnpike, a member of the state police victimized an African-American female who was guilty of nothing other than being an African-American female on the turnpike," said lawyer William Manns Jr., a member of Wright's legal team, which included Johnnie Cochran and Barry Scheck, who represented O.J. Simpson.

Wright, 28 of Newark, said she was glad to settle the matter.

"I've been through enough trials with this," she told The Star-Ledger of Newark. New Jersey agreed to federal monitoring to review allegations of racial profiling in 1999, a year after two troopers on the turnpike fired on a van carrying four unarmed minority men, wounding three. A report Jan. 18 found no incidents of racial profiling over a three-month period.

Earlier statistics showed officers stopped far more blacks and Hispanics than whites, but found more whites carrying drugs and weapons.

Miss Sierra Leone dies amid controversy

FREETOWN, Sierra Leone — Anniemaude Cole, 22, who was crowned as Miss Sierra Leone in December 2001, died in Freetown last Monday of burns she sustained almost a week earlier under circumstances still shrouded in mystery.

It is still not clear whether the fire burns resulted from an accident, were self-inflicted or whether the beautiful lady was the victim of domestic abuse.

Miss Sierra Leone had denied in an interview on radio UNAM-SIL that the burns, which reportedly covered 62 percent of her body, were the result of a suicide attempt.

Things started going wrong soon after she won the crown early last December.

Her family complained that the organizers of the pageant had failed to deliver on most of the promised prizes, including a new car, bedroom furniture, a one-year wardrobe, a return ticket to London and money in a bank account.

Only one Jackson remains on ballot

CHICAGO — The "other" Jesse Jackson, a Chicago truck driver who sparked controversy when he placed his name on the November ballot to run for the U.S. House, has dropped out of the race.

Evangeline Levison, the "other" Jackson's attorney, told election officials late last week that because of the recent deaths of his wife and grandson, Jackson, 68, would abandon his challenge to the seat now held by Jesse L. Jackson Jr.

Rep. Jackson (D-Ill.) had filed a lawsuit against his opponent's campaign and alleged that it was spawned by state Sen. William Shaw and his twin brother, Cook County Commissioner Robert Shaw. The candidacy of the 68-year-old truck driver was designed to confuse voters, he charges.

The Shaws have denied their involvement in the "other" Jackson's bid for Congress.

Rep. Jackson dropped legal charges stating that his rivals had used the man in an attempt to cost him votes in his South Side Chicago District, according to the congressman's attorney, Burt Odelson.



Jesse Jackson Jr.

The Chronicle (USPS 067-910) was established by Ernest H. Pitt and Ndubisi Egemonye in 1974 and is published every Thursday by Winston-Salem Chronicle Publishing Co., Inc., 617 N. Liberty Street, Winston-Salem, NC 27101. Periodicals postage paid at Winston-Salem, N.C. Annual subscription price is \$30.72.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to:

The Chronicle, P.O. Box 1636
Winston-Salem, NC 27102-1636

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Reading chain links city with world

Forest Park, Reynolda House join 13th national African American Read-In Chain

BY FELEcia P. McMILLAN
COMMUNITY CORRESPONDENT

More than a million African-American literature enthusiasts around the country participated in the 13th national African American Read-In Chain on Sunday, Feb. 3, and Monday, Feb. 4, as designated by their hosts. Norma Corley, guidance counselor at Forest Park Elementary School, and Julie Hunter, music teacher at Forest Park Elementary School, served as hosts for the more than 60 celebrity readers who came out to read to the children.

At the Reynolda House Museum of American Art, Kathleen F.G. Hutton, coordinator of education, directed the unity circle of readers to share their favorite passages from their favorite books by African-American authors. The purpose of this event is to make the celebration of African-American literacy a traditional part of Black History Month festivities.

The first African American Read-In Chain was sponsored by the Black Caucus of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE). In 1991, NCTE joined in the sponsorship. The Read-In has been endorsed by the International Reading Association. More than a million readers of all ethnic backgrounds and from 49 states, the West Indies, Germany, and many African countries have participated. Dr. Jerrie C. Scott from the University of Memphis College of Education is the founder and national director.

Corley and Hunter selected role models from various professions to share with the students at Forest Park.

"My emphasis was on broadening their horizon," Corley said. "We often push for special projects so that the AG (academically gifted) students can be exposed, but exposure to African-American literature is needed regardless of the level. At this school, some of the kids may not have the money and support to engage in some community activities. We want them to meet some of Winston-Salem's finest."

"I want to rebuild our village," Corley said. "I want to give the kids a dream. That may seem like a cliché, but the Bible says that without a vision the people perish. By bringing in such high caliber people from the community, I want the students to see that these people are willing to come here and take time off from work, even rearrange their schedules just for the kids."

Some of the readers brought special books to read to the children and others selected children's books from the media center basket Corley and Hunter provided. Still others were very original and shared with the youths from their wealth of experiences.

Storyteller Cynthia Bradger shared various tales and invited the children to repeat positive affirmations with her, such as "I can achieve if I believe in myself."

Doria McLaughlin, human resources, Wake Forest University, read "What Kind of Babysitter Is This?" by Delores Johnson. McLaughlin enjoyed interacting with the fourth-grade students.

"It was fun. I had the students to introduce themselves, but they really responded when I read poetry by Dr. Maya Angelou and

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Little Miss Forest Park Jocelyn Briseno greets readers Daisy Rodriguez and the Rev. Bechard Moorefield as the school's guidance counselor, Norma Corley, looks on.

Photos by Felecia McMillan



Bertha Roundtree listens as Kathleen Hutton of Reynolda House reads a Langston Hughes selection.

years ago. Hutton is pleased that the event fits in so well with the goal of celebrating the arts, music, literature and culture.

"It is just pure pleasure to participate in the Read-In Chain. Hearing the variety of readings is such a feast," Hutton said.

Dr. Elaine Carter, 76, drove from High Point to participate in the chain. Although she is a docent at the Greensboro Historical Museum, she loves to come to the Reynolda House for various reasons.

"I am a garden nut, and I love to wander in the gardens here. I also love the lectures on history, art and music. When we were in school, we read and learned speeches and essays. When I was in the third grade, I learned 'Twas the Night Before Christmas,'" Carter said. "This is all a part of learning. You keep this computer (the brain) going and it will serve you well."

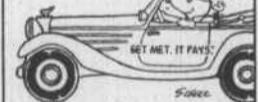
One reader shared Margaret Walker's poem "For My People," and Carter recalled meeting Walker in the 1940s at Fayetteville Teachers College.

"We all just rocked when she read along," Carter said. "All of us could identify with playing in the back yard as children."

John Hallmark Neff, executive director of Reynolda House Museum of American Art, praised the Read-In Chain for its merits.

"The Read-In Chain is essential. Reading brings people together in a very moving way. At the Reynolda House, we are very tied into the community, and this is one event to punctuate the year," Neff said. "We are not limited to African-American history during a particular month. We try to have African-American art throughout

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