

BUSINESS FOCUS

Briefs

Wake Forest ties for best private law school for your money

In its March 2002 issue just out, the National Jurist, a magazine for law students, has selected Wake Forest University School of Law as "tied for top honors" as the best private law school for your money.

The selection was based on low tuition, high bar pass rates, percentage of graduates unemployed after graduation, median grant levels, clinic slots available, and faculty-to-student ratios.

Wake Forest fared well in all categories. In the top tier law schools, Wake Forest has one of the lowest private school tuitions. About half of its students have clinical experiences before graduation, far above the national norm. Moreover, no graduating student has ever failed to be able to take a clinic elected by the student. The faculty-to-student ratio of 12 to 1 is in a handful of the very lowest in the country.

Over the last several years, bar passage rates have consistently been above the state norm and employment rates after graduation have been significantly above the National Association of Law Placement national averages.

In the article, Ellen Persechini, president of the Wake Forest Student Bar Association, says she is glad she looked into the school environment and factors such as class size in choosing Wake Forest. "I think the faculty is very accessible, and the class sizes are small."

This honor as the best private law school educational value (tie) is just one of several national honors won by Wake Forest over the last two years. In that time, it has received the American College of Trial Lawyers Emil Gumpert Award for Excellence in Teaching Trial Advocacy, shared the ABA Harrison Tweed Award for the Best Pro Bono Project between a law school and a local bar association for its Domestic Violence Advocacy Center, and won the National Public Interest Law Organization Award for best orientation program.

Aetna, other companies are named in slavery lawsuits

HARTFORD, Conn. (AP) — FleetBoston and seven other corporations are named in lawsuits seeking damages for abuses suffered by slaves and accusing the companies of profiting from slavery.

One lawsuit — which names financial services firm FleetBoston, Hartford-based Aetna Inc., and railroad company CSX Transportation of Jacksonville, Fla. — was to be filed Tuesday in U.S. District Court in New York, USA Today reported.

Another lawsuit to be filed Tuesday in federal court in New Jersey names five other companies, The Hartford Courant reported.

Ed Fagan, a Livingston, N.J., lawyer who is among a team of attorneys representing the plaintiffs, declined to name the five other companies.

Deadria Farmer-Paellmann, a 36-year-old New York activist, law school graduate and legal researcher who has linked corporations and slavery, is the plaintiff of the New York lawsuit. The complaint requests that the case be brought before a jury on behalf of all blacks in the United States who can claim slaves as their ancestors — which would be most of the country's 36.4 million blacks, USA Today reported.

The complaint also alleges that black Americans continue to suffer the effects of 2 1/2 centuries of slavery followed by more than a century of institutionalized racism.

Farmer-Paellmann's research led to an apology two years ago from Aetna.

Aetna officials said the practice of insuring slaves to their owners 150 years ago was wrong, and they expressed "deep regret." But they said the company does not want to be held liable for something that happened so long ago. Aetna has spent nearly \$36 million over 20 years on programs in black communities, Aetna officials said.

Chamber opposes effort to divert highway funds

The Greater Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce has announced its opposition to an effort by the N.C. Metropolitan Coalition to transfer \$90 million from the Highway Trust Fund that is designed to build loop roads and bypasses throughout the state. In a letter sent last week, the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce is notifying the N.C. Metropolitan Coalition as well as Gov. Easley and the Forsyth County legislative delegation of the chamber's opposition to the N.C. Metropolitan Coalition's recommendation to transfer \$90 million from the Highway Trust Fund.

The N.C. Metropolitan Coalition, which is made up of 19 mayors from some of the state's largest cities, has identified the Highway Trust Fund as one area that the group says Easley could tap to help solve the state's growing budget shortfall. The Metropolitan Coalition has recommended nearly \$600 million from state trust funds and reserves to replace money being withheld to local governments by the governor.

The Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce has a longstanding position of supporting the integrity of the Highway Trust Fund. The fund is designed to build loop roads, bypasses and most recently has been used to renovate and repair roads across the state. The Winston-Salem northern beltway and the widening of U.S. 158 to Walkertown are the two key transportation projects in Winston-Salem that would be put in jeopardy by the transfer of \$90 million from the Highway Trust Fund. Both projects are eligible for Highway Trust Fund money.

North Carolina's Highway Trust Fund is funded by the gas tax and highway related user fees. The fund was established in 1989 with the understanding that once Highway Trust Fund eligible projects were complete, the fund would be closed and the fees and taxes that contributed to the fund would be reduced as a result.

Kmart is reaching out to minorities

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

TROY, Mich. — Ailing Kmart Corp. launched a new marketing campaign Monday that targets black and Hispanic shoppers.

The campaign, which will be released in stages, begins with radio advertising in markets with a strong black consumer presence. The 30- and 60-second spots feature original music by Chaka Khan and BeBe Winans.

"Music plays such an important role in the lives of the African-American community, and the world in general," said Khan, known for such songs as "I'm Every Woman" and "Ain't Nobody."

In the coming weeks, television commercials will be released in black and Hispanic markets, with Spanish-language spots featuring music by Jose Feliciano. The TV ads will launch April 7.

As with the retailer's recent general consumer campaign, the tag line for the new ads will be "Kmart. The Stuff of Life," or "Kmart. Las Cosas para La Vida."

The radio ads play up that theme, with lines such as "Kmart, with all its great brands, is shining a brand new light on the stuff of life. The stuff you just can't do without."

The Troy-based retailer filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy protection in January, after lower-than-expected holiday sales, downgrades by several credit rating agencies and a slumping stock price. Kmart has struggled to compete with less expensive Wal-Mart Stores Inc. and trendier Target Corp. in the discount market.

Steven Feuling, Kmart's senior vice president of marketing, said the retailer appeals to the multicultural marketplace.

Multicultural consumers make up 39 percent of Kmart's customers each week, with blacks and Hispanics making up 32 percent of its shoppers.

"We understand the value of these very loyal consumers and know our continued commitment to their shopping needs and their communities is a crucial element in Kmart's growth and success," Feuling said in a statement.



Chaka Khan



Photo by Courtney Gaillard

Left to right: Mark Rigsby, Ph.D., and Philip A. Berry address WSSU students at the BEEP seminar.

Top black executives visit WSSU classrooms

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD
THE CHRONICLE

Students at Winston-Salem State University were given a chance to receive expert advice from local and national African-American executives from top corporations and government agencies through a career awareness and planning seminar called the Black Executive Exchange Program (BEEP) on March 20-21.

The program, sponsored by WSSU's Office of Career Services, involves two-day classroom visitations by BEEP executives, who give candid talks and answer questions from the students themselves. BEEP gives students an opportunity to network and plan for life in the job force after graduating.

Representatives were on hand from the Federal Reserve Bank of New York, Philip Morris, DuPont, Colgate-Palmolive and Knoxville city government, to name a few, to make presentations to students studying for degrees in business, communications, computer science and other disciplines.

Executives of BEEP, a component of the National Urban League, aim to serve as role models to black students by vis-

iting four-year historically black colleges and universities (HBCUs) around the country. Efforts to diminish the gap between the classroom and boardroom are made as they discuss the numerous issues facing students in the real world.

Mark Rigsby, human relations manager for Knoxville, Tenn., city government, and Philip A. Berry, vice president of global employee relations for Colgate-Palmolive Co., spoke with students in Dr. Greg Taylor's Structure System Building class.

"I think it's important for you to understand that the world is out there for you," Rigsby said to the small class of business students. Emphasizing the importance of a career path, Rigsby explained that it may take several tries and various jobs to reach the level of professional status and satisfaction that one aspires to obtain.

Rigsby studied communications as an undergraduate and went on to receive a master's degree, certain that he would become a successful journalist despite his father's advice to look into education. When that did not happen, Rigsby soon found himself teaching his first

year out of graduate school and found it to be a very noble and rewarding profession.

"Never say what you're not going to do because there are jobs that you will say you're not going to do and you may have to," Rigsby said. Oftentimes a college degree does not guarantee an automatic seat in a plush job with exceptional benefits. "Don't limit yourself and don't ever belittle a profession or a career."

Berry also shared experiences from his own early work history, recalling days when he worked for IBM in high school during the late 1960s. Pulling out a palm pilot from his suit jacket, Berry said, "Technology is changing all of the time. So it's extremely important that you set goals for yourself, and graduating doesn't mean that you stop learning; your learning is just beginning."

Since 1969 BEEP's mission has been to share learning and experiences across generations, cultivate new leaders and inspire achievements "beyond the possible" through committed involvement and operational excellence. The 32nd annual BEEP Conference will take place June 13-15 in Atlanta.

Minorities file suit against automobile plants

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

DETROIT — Minority workers at two General Motors Corp. plants have filed a \$10 million discrimination lawsuit that includes allegations that a white co-worker once dressed in Ku Klux Klan garb and nooses were hung near workstations.

The Circuit Court suit was filed March 15 on behalf of 14 black, Hispanic and American Indian workers at the plants in Pontiac, Mich., and one person whose job application was rejected.

In addition to the \$10 million, the suit seeks class-action status and \$7.4 billion in punitive damages.

"I know the amount we seek is astonishing, but so are these incidents," said the workers' lawyer, H. Wallace Parker.

Supervisors made racial slurs, the company discriminated in hiring, a white worker dressed as a Klan member and nooses were hung around the plant between 2000 and last year, the lawsuit said.

At the height of the country's racial turmoil before the civil rights movement in the 1960s, blacks were often harassed, beaten or even hung by members of the white supremacist group.

The worker who dressed in Klan garb was suspended for 30 days without pay. After that incident, GM said it went over its nondiscrimination and diversity policies with all workers at the plant.

"GM does not condone these acts, which are not indicative of the work environment of Pontiac or elsewhere at GM," spokesman Tom Wickham said.

He said the company believes some incidents cited in the suit did not occur.

Automakers Ford Motor Co. and Mitsubishi Motor Manufacturing of America also have recently faced discrimination complaints.

Two Philip Morris execs receive honor

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

NEW YORK, N.Y. — The YWCA of the City of New York has inducted two senior African-American executives from the Philip Morris family of companies into the ranks of its Academy of Women Achievers, a distinguished group of more than 2,000 of the country's most prominent women recognized for their outstanding professional accomplishments.

Tina Walls of Miller Brewing Company and A. Shuanise Washington of Philip Morris Management Corp. were among the 80 executive women chosen to join



Walls

the academy's Class of 2001.

"The Philip Morris companies are truly fortunate to employ these remarkable women, who

day in and day out exhibit an extraordinary passion for what they do, delivering results for our company and shareholders and quality for our customers," said Shirley Harrison, vice president of diversi-



Washington

ty management for Philip Morris Management Corp. "Tina and Shuanise set a sterling example for all Philip Morris employees,

particularly the many women within our organization, and their outstanding contributions in their respective fields have helped the company maintain its position as the nation's leading consumer

products company."

Walls is vice president of corporate affairs at Miller Brewing Co. Walls, based at Miller's Milwaukee, Wis., headquarters, has held a variety of government and public affairs positions with the company since 1985. Before joining Philip Morris, she worked for the Colorado Legislative Council. Walls received her bachelor's degree from Mills College in Oakland, Calif., and graduated from the Rocky Mountain Program for Senior Executives in State and Local Government and the Execu-