



David K. Flomo with Selena Polson-Mappy and Christian Kolleh. Photos by Kevin Walker

**UBCAA**

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Officers were elected during UBCAA's three-day national convention at the Winston-Salem Urban League. The gathering – which drew a about 100 attendees, some from as far away as California – included business meetings on Friday, July 11 and Saturday afternoon; a dinner and ball on Saturday night; and a closing BBQ on Sunday hosted by Flomo and his wife at their home.

During his three-year term as president, Flomo said he wants to increase UBCAA's membership from 350 to 1,500 and build bridges between residents, schools and businesses in this country and Bong County, which, like much of Liberia, is still struggling to regain its footing after a decades-long civil war ended in 2005. Tens of thousands of Liberians fled the country during the fighting; many came to the United States.

Now that there is peace, Flomo said Liberians from around the world are beginning to move back.

"People are going home; they are establishing businesses and helping the country to rebuild," he said.

UBCAA gives Liberians who choose to remain in this country an opportunity to do their part to help their families, friends and former neighbors. A fundraising component of this year's convention benefited two Bong County elementary schools. The goal was to raise \$1,500 for books and



UBCAA California Chapter President Sam Sondah traveled the greatest distance to attend the conference.

school supplies by the convention's end.

"They continue to struggle," Christian K. Kolleh, the outgoing UBCAA national president, said of students in Bong County.

Kolleh, a resident of Minnesota, said that while UBCAA helps native Liberians retain their cultural identity, what largely attracts members to the association is its mission to reach back to help.

"There is a great desire of people in our community and association to make an impact on our brothers and sisters back home," he said.

Selena Polson-Mappy said help from Liberians living abroad is essential. Polson-Mappy is the superintendent of Bong County, charged with overseeing the day-to-day operations of county agencies and services. She attended the conference to give UBCAA members a first-hand account of the situation back home.

She said hundreds of new investors have imbued

the county with funds, improving the business climate. Polson-Mappy said there have also been improvements in security – a service essential to war-weary residents – and agriculture. But the need is still great, she said.

"It's good that we see that there are people interested here in lending a helping hand," she said.

In the past, UBCAA had a legal component to help members with U.S. citizenship issues. Kolleh said that remains a struggle for many Liberians, even those who have called the United States home for 15-to-20 years. During the height of the civil war, most Liberians were granted temporary residency status that had to be renewed regularly. Now that the fighting is over, Liberians who have built their lives and raised their families in this country are in a state of limbo, said Kolleh, who will officially become a U.S. citizen later this month.

"It makes anybody with a desire to do something in the long-term have doubts," Kolleh said of those with temporary residency status.

Flomo, a former president of the Liberian Association of the Piedmont, said as president, he will again make addressing residency issues a priority. He also wants Winston-Salem to play host to a national gathering of the Union of Liberian Associations in the Americas (ULAA), an umbrella organization that includes UBCAA, all the other county associations and dozens of other groups.

**Bond**

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bond tax increase.

The New South Community Coalition, which is made up of neighbors and neighborhood associations from throughout the South Ward, is calling on the City Council to adopt what it calls a "no frills" bond referendum that would cap the tax increase to no more than 1.5 cents by scaling back some projects.

New South Community Coalition Chairman Robert Leak III said the "no frills" plan was devised after an hours-long meeting of more than 20 residents from various neighborhoods. During the meeting, attendees ranked bond items in terms of importance. The Coalition's proposal would cut \$10 million from economic development and \$13 million from parks and recreation.

Leak said economic development dollars should be invested with local, small businesses and companies that commit to paying their workers decent wages.

"We need to make sure that we are bringing jobs to our city that are going to stay and be able to pay their employees enough to live above the poverty level," Leak said.

The Coalition's proposal would reduce the size of the bond (the portion that would be voted on) from \$139.2 million to \$118.45 million.



Garrity

Leak said that the referendum should be focused on the needs of residents and not just what the City Council wants.

But leaders say the bond proposal was designed to address the needs and concerns of residents.

City Manager Lee Garrity said by phone last week that council spent a lot of time hearing from residents.

"They had several workshops in March and April discussing all of our capital needs. In May, we had nine public meetings where we went out to different neighborhoods in different wards to get feedback for the projects," he said.

Leight said the council tried to weigh the needs of the city and residents with

concerns about tax hikes.

"There is a balancing act," said Leight, who represents the South Ward. "You don't want people to be over burdened to the point that they crash but people demand a certain level of service. Do we stop providing some of those services in order to keep from raising the taxes? That is just substituting a fee for part of what your taxes take care of."

After the meeting, Montgomery, who represents the East Ward, said the issues raised by the coalition are valid.

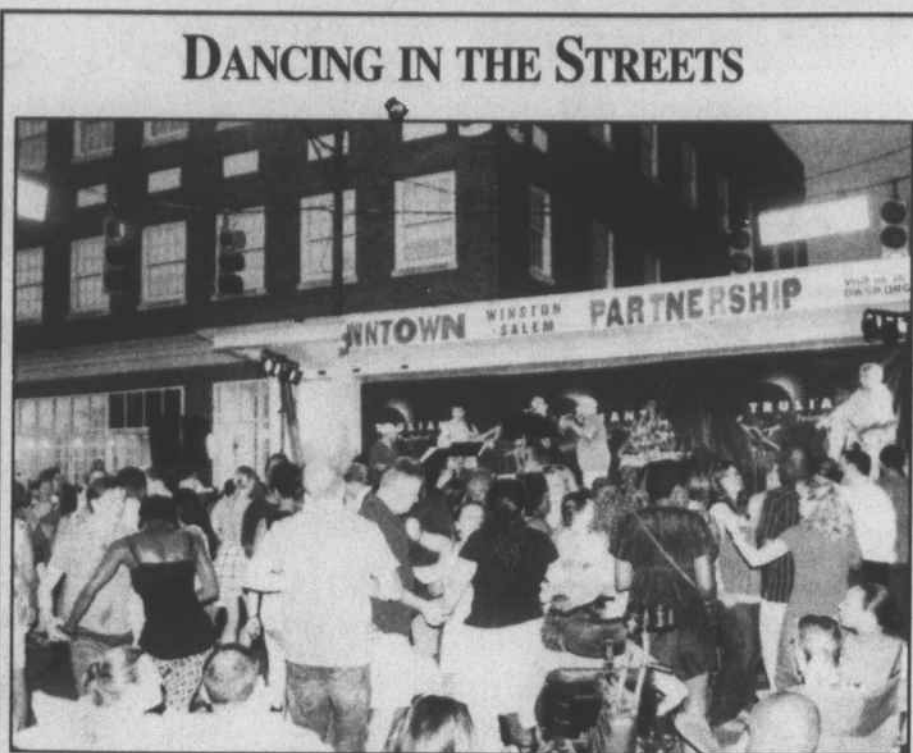
"I think there were some legitimate questions," he said. "I think what the (city) council did, and the groups that we had take a look at what we are doing, was take a holistic approach to say, 'What are our needs and how can we accomplish a portion of that with the proposed bond referendum.'"

There will be a public hearing on the proposed bond referendum on Aug. 4 at City Hall at 7 p.m.


Read more about the proposed referendum at <http://www.cityofws.org/departments/budget/2014-bonds>.

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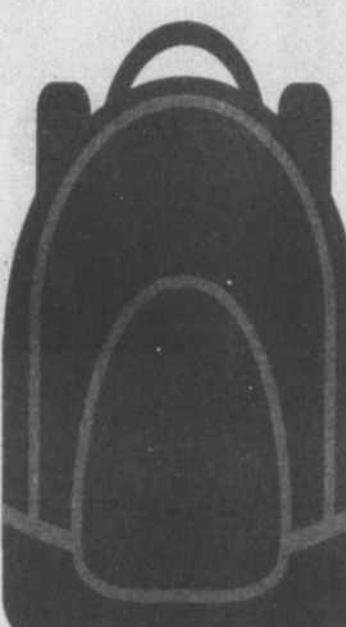


The Latin rhythms of West End Mambo attracted a large crowd to Saturday's Summer on Trade concert. The band, comprised of musicians from North, South and Central America and the Caribbean, played a lively set that included classic salsa, bolero and guaracha numbers. Outdoor summer concerts are held every other Friday from 6-9 p.m. in Corpensing Plaza and each Saturday at Trade and 6th streets from 7-10 p.m.



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