

# Fire death points out many dangers

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like that." That was one of the tips presented during a community meeting Tuesday night at Devonshire Elementary School.

Butler taught math at Piedmont Middle School before volunteering to transfer to West Charlotte this year when Piedmont's ninth graders were moved to the high school.

His death shocked students and fellow faculty members at both schools. The students have begun raising donations for the family.

Butler's portrait was displayed on a bulletin board in the West Charlotte office this week. The funeral was Saturday.

Other fire safety tips presented by Lowery and other fire officials Tuesday are:

- Install smoke detectors and keep batteries fresh.

- Plan a fire escape route and practice it with family members twice a year.

- Keep an eye on smokers. Careless smoking is the leading cause of fire deaths in North America.

- Cook carefully. Never leave pots and pans unattended.

- Give portable space heaters plenty of space, at least 3 feet from anything that will burn.

- Keep lighters and matches away from children. Buy

child-resistant lighters.

- Use electricity safely. Unplug an appliance when it smokes or has an unusual smell. Replace cracked or frayed electrical cords. Don't overload extension cords or run them under rugs.

- To escape a fire, crawl under the smoke.

- If your clothes catch fire, don't run. Stop where you are, drop to the ground, cover your face with your hands and roll over and over to smother the flames.

# Medal of Honor long overdue for vets

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free."

A single tear rolled down Baker's left cheek as he listened to Clinton. He received a standing ovation as he entered the East Room and took a seat before a crowd that included Defense Secretary William Perry, Veterans Affairs Secretary Jesse Brown, retired Gen. Colin Powell, Joint Chiefs Chairman John Shalikshvili and a number of soldiers in uniform.

Baker said he never thought about receiving the Medal of Honor - the military's highest award for bravery in battle - because he considered his heroic exploits his duty.

"I was a soldier and I had a job

to do," he said.

But Clinton said Baker and the others belong alongside the nation's greatest war heroes, including Sgt. Alvin York, Eddie Rickenbacker and Audie Murphy.

"It's a long time coming," said Fox's widow, Arlene Fox of Houston. She said she harbors no bitterness toward the Army for its treatment of her husband, who is buried in Whitman, Mass. "I don't dwell in negativity. It's a very proud day."

Rivers' commanding officer, former Capt. David J. Williams, said he wrote a medal recommendation for Rivers and felt humiliated when it was denied.

"The Germans, I knew my enemy. But racism is a hard

enemy to defeat," Williams said. "This man was a cut above. He was a great soldier."

Baker was a 25-year-old lieutenant leading his platoon through a maze of German bunkers and machine gun nests in hopes of capturing an enemy stronghold near Viareggio, Italy.

German artillery began to rain down, and the commander of Baker's all-black company in the 92nd Infantry Division went for reinforcements. Baker and his men stayed behind and beat back three enemy attacks; two-thirds of them were killed or wounded.

When he realized reinforcements were not coming, Baker ordered his surviving men to retreat. They destroyed two

German machine gun nests on the way out.

Baker served 28 years in the Army, retiring in 1968. He worked for the Red Cross and ultimately moved to northern Idaho, where he enjoys hunting. He laughed Monday at the memory of his confrontation last year with a mountain lion that was stalking him.

"He's in the freezer," Baker said.

# Ebonics a hot topic in, out of classroom

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Oakland's intentions. Like most adults, students are skeptical of any plan to accept Ebonics in the classroom. Oakland officials say that was not their intent. Neither is their plan a scheme to get additional federal monies.

According to the school district, it merely plans to educate teachers about Ebonics to better prepare them to work with African American students.

Oakland's plan follows a four-year slide in reading and language scores among students. The district is 53 percent African American and 71 percent of black students are classified as lacking basic communication skills.

The Oakland program came out of a study commissioned last year to deal with the sharp drop in test scores.

"The Oakland Unified School District is not replacing the teaching of Standard American English with any other language," district officials responded after initial and widespread criticism to the proposal. "The District is not teaching Ebonics."

Instead, the district maintains, it "is providing its teachers and parents with the tools to address the diverse languages the children bring into the classroom. The district's objective is to build on the language skills that African American students bring to the classroom without devaluing students and their diversity."

There are no plans to attempt a similar program in Charlotte or surrounding areas.

But misunderstanding of the Oakland's intentions aside, a separate debate concerns the proper status of Ebonics or Black English in the American society.

A growing body of academic research has accepted Black English as a separate language, with roots in the West African languages. Some scholars are now studying what happens to those who speak it in the educational system.

But many scholars remain skeptical.

Duke University professor Lee D. Baker thinks Oakland officials are seeking a unique method to raise more money and the issue is "more political and economic than it is cultural."

"Ebonics is not a language," Baker, a professor of cultural anthropology, said. "It is one of many variations that there are within the English language. As African Americans we have a rich language pattern that is

part of our culture, an integral part of our culture. We should teach parents and kids that there is nothing wrong with the language, it just should not be spoken in a job interview, for example. Tax dollars should be used to teach standard American English."

Baker has written about the subject of cultural linguistics, focusing on forms of address.

Johnson C. Smith University professor Donald Mager, who includes a unit on Black English in his course on the English language, said the media misinformed readers and viewers about Oakland's intentions.

"The media got it all wrong at the beginning," he said. "A lot of people think slang is Black English. That is not the case. A dialect stays the same from generation to generation."

Black English meets criteria for language used by linguists, Mager said, including a static grammatical structure and its use in written discourse. Mager noted that while Black English is not often found in newspapers or magazines, it is often used in literature, including the award-winning writings of Langston Hughes and Gwendolyn Brooks as well as dramatic productions.

"If you put Langston Hughes' poems in a standard literature book, you may need some footnotes, like you would with Shakespeare," Mager said.

Mager makes a distinction between Black English and Ebonics, which he says deals mainly with the sounds of the language.

Students who speak Black English don't understand the words they are sounding out when they begin learning to read. "They don't recognize the word because that's not the way they pronounce it," Mager said. "The child knows 'dis,' not 'this.' When seeing 'this' in the first grade reader, they read it correctly, but do not know it as the same as the word they know as 'dis.'"

"The teacher hears the child say 'this,' and assumes they are learning to read properly, but they are not.

"Ebonics wants to help kids bridge that gap," Mager said. "The teacher has to translate words back into words they know from their spoken background. If teachers are not sensitive to that, they don't recognize that's why the child is not learning to read."

"I understand the program is to get teachers better prepared to deal with students coming into school from a black background...to understand that if

the student is not getting it, it is not because the student is lazy or ignorant."

The West Charlotte students agreed much of their problem in learning English grammar could have been solved with intervention in elementary school.

"Grammar should be instilled in elementary school," said Amber Harper, a 17-year-old West Charlotte senior. "They didn't cover a lot of stuff. In high school, they are talking about literature. They need to focus on grammar."

After acknowledging the difficulty with high school grammar, the students engaged in a lengthy discussion of where Ebonics and other cultural factors fit into the educational picture.

Amber said how a student talks can lead to labeling by teachers, who then don't work as hard to teach that student.

"I was labeled as a bad student (because of her attitude)," she said of her earlier schooling. "I moved from class to class. Teachers didn't want to teach me because they heard I was a bad student. A lot of teachers are like that. They put labels on you."

Amber's classmates agreed that the relationship between teacher and student played a major part in how well student perform in the classroom.

Shirma Stover, 17, said she would get mad with her third grade teacher when she would present lessons in a way she couldn't understand.

"I had the attitude that if she didn't teach it a certain way, I resisted," Shirma said. "I'd get mad with her. I wouldn't do (the work)."

"If you don't have caring teacher willing to work with you enough to help you with grammar or whatever, you are not going to learn," Shirma said. "English is the hardest language to learn."

Ursula McLean said students must also work harder. "It goes both ways," she said. "Students have to be willing to learn and teachers have to be willing to teach. Students take teachers for granted...and are (sometimes) disrespectful."

Added Meredith, "Teachers remember that at grade time."

Coties Cuthbertson, 17, agreed, but added, "Respect is something that is earned."

Cuthbertson even ventured that that's one way Ebonics could help students, "because if you see the teacher trying, you will work harder. Teachers need to learn how to help the kids more."

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