

Give props to the sisters

Black women had an impact on history, too

MELODY MICERE STEWART

In the spirit of Ma'at



Harriet, Sojourner, Maria Stewart, Phyllis Wheatley, Madame C.J. Walker, Ida B. Wells Barnett, Mary Church Terrell, Maggie Lena Walker, Mary McLeod Bethune and Fannie Lou Hamer. African American women. Black women who made serious history.

March is Women's History Month. The contributions, courage and commitment of women of African descent should be celebrated and observed in our community as an extension of last month's observances of black history.

The reasons why should be obvious. Black women have been the backbone of the freedom struggle in African American history. Beginning with the brutal legacy of enslavement, black women chose to survive, bearing children, raising them and seeing them sold off or killed. But they endured. While many worked on the Underground Railroad, it was Harriet Tubman who distinguished herself as a "conductor" to be reckoned with. Born enslaved as Isabella, Sojourner Truth traveled, exhorting all those who would listen to come to the truth regarding the humanity of black people. She extended the path of female oratory first started by Maria W. Stewart, Sarah Parker Remond, Frances Ellen Harper, Mary Shadd and Mary Bibb — all public speakers during the early 1800s.

It has been said, if you educate a woman, you educate a nation. Black women understood the role of education in the fight for freedom and responded by creating learning opportunities wherever they could. The list of distinguished African American women educators is particularly lengthy and includes Lucy C. Laney, Nannie Helen Burroughs, Charlotte Hawkins Brown and Mary McLeod Bethune who all founded schools. South Carolinian Septima Clark toiled during the days of agitative segregation, helping to educate an entire community, preparing black citizens to read, vote and be counted.

While the political power of black women is yet to be fully tapped, it has been noted that without black women, there would not have been a civil rights movement. From Rosa Parks to Daisy Bates to Ella Baker to Fannie Lou Hamer — most of the names of the valiant, determined and fearless women we will never know. Women who have served with great courage in the political arena include Mary McLeod Bethune, Shirley Chisholm and Patricia R. Harris. And let us not forget the first black women judges — Jane Matilda Bolin and Constance Baker Motley.

Clearly, the history of African American women is a definitive statement on the health and well-being of an entire race. Educator Anna Julia Cooper said it best in 1892, "When and where I enter, in the quiet, undisputed dignity of my womanhood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole... race enters with me."

Neighborhood revitalization

Continued from page 1A

go back into the same environment," Moore said. "We bring in (Narcotics Anonymous), (Alcoholics Anonymous) and the 12-step program. We create a sense of pride. We are trying to break the cycle."

Said Martin: "This is my life given back to me. I was living with my sister. We were not getting along. We were fighting all the time. I had to get out of there."

Martin, like so many others, came to Charlotte seeking greater job opportunity, but began selling drugs to help take care of her son.

"I just made the wrong choice at that time," Martin said. "I wish I hadn't done it, but you learn from your mistakes."

Martin's arrest was her first offense, making her a good candidate for the Structured Day program, which uses strict rules and ample assistance to rehabilitate non-violent offenders without sending them to prison.

Adams, one of three caseworkers for the program, said finding housing participants is the most difficult challenge.

"A lot of times, the clients we work with live in government housing," she said. "Once they get charged, they can no longer

do that. Housing is one of the most difficult obstacles we have to face. Through the regular system it is hard to get housing. If you have any criminal records, you cannot get housing."

Citing Martin's case, Adams said: "Prison was not necessarily going to help her. What she needed was a job and healthy surroundings. One of the goals is to give them skills they need so they don't have to sell drugs."

"Phyllis has been a role model client. That's one of the reasons we recommended her to Donnie. We want to help people who want to do right. Phyllis was doing everything we asked her to do."

Cummings Avenue, a section of Lincoln Heights north of LaSalle Street, is a community of small duplexes, houses and apartments — low-cost rental properties in various states of deterioration. The area has become known for illegal drug sales along its streets and several housing units. Violence visits regularly and random gunfire often pierces the silence of the night.

Fighting Back, the county's drug and alcohol prevention program, and other groups, such as the Northwest Corridor Community Development Corp. have taken a special interest in

revitalizing the community. That interest is due in part because of Cummings Avenue's strategic location near the Beatties Ford Road/LaSalle Street intersection, a major commercial area in the Northwest Corridor.

Moore admits attracting someone with a drug conviction may sound unusual, but it fits the program's goals since revitalizing communities usually means revitalizing people.

He's also working to provide apartments in the area for women from the Salvation Army's women's shelter.

All residents will be able to access a range of services, from parenting training, to Narcotics Anonymous and Alcoholics Anonymous. "We are putting together programs to help people," Moore said.

Moore's office is itself a symbol of revitalization. Fighting Back's Alert Center at 1716 Cummings Ave. was once used for drug sales and prostitution, but is now the base for legitimate services.

Budget needs increase

Continued from page 1A

school system is actually less than it was 10 years ago.

In 1988, the county spent \$972 per student, but only \$957 in 1996. He said spending as a share of the county's property tax collections has declined from 51.7 percent to 38.7 percent.

"We are not going to cut our way to excellence," L'Orange said.

Smith said that with employers demanding better-prepared students, improving student achievement is urgent.

"We have got to find a structure to do a better job," he said. "We are not just asking for more for cutesy projects."

Smith said he is not removing support from site-based decision-making and creativity, but he wants a more structured curriculum.

"If it all worked, we wouldn't be having our reading scores below grade level for the last six years," he said. "We must have a clear understanding of what we expect. That's true in business. Every McDonald's looks and operates about the same."

Smith's cuts include elimination of fifth grade band, since sixth-graders have moved to middle schools. Fifth- and sixth-graders used to take 45-minute band classes twice a week. The change would save nearly \$1 million.

Another major change would be the combining of Highland and Tryon Hills elementary schools into one K-5 school.

Smith noted that one of the biggest increases is the \$4.7 million used to reduce K-3 class size in elementary schools with high numbers of underachieving

students.

Anticipating opposition and questions about his budget, Smith said it can be defended.

"The budget is put together in a goal-directed fashion," he said. "There are no grandiose ideas that spend money and has no impact on teachers and students. The spending is for specific programs that touch children."

•The new high school in Matthews will be named after a teacher killed in a January fire.

The school will be named after David Butler, who taught at West Charlotte High and Piedmont Middle schools. Butler, a respected and popular teacher, died in a house fire in January.

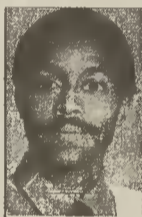
Family and friends presented the school board

with a 500-signature petition requesting that the new high school at N.C. 51 be named for Butler. It is believed to be the first school named for a teacher.

Another name had been chosen, but the Charlotte-Mecklenburg school board decided to name the new school, which opens in August, David W. Butler High School.

Proposed names had included New Century High School, Carolina Central Senior High School and Century Senior High School.

Butler's wife, April, is a teacher at Tryon Hills Elementary.



Butler

The Charlotte Post

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