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Tampa leads in reaching out to black businesses

By James Clingman

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Black businesses get help from 'Dollar Day' event," was the headline in the Tampa Tribune earlier this month. The article, written by Kathy Steele, contained one line that stood out like a beautiful ripe apple at the top of the tree. In addition to the positive aspect of supporting black-owned businesses, the story included this line: "Mayor Pam Iorio issued a proclamation naming the third day of each month African-American Dollar Day." I could hardly believe what I was reading; the Mayor of Tampa is encouraging the support of black businesses — by all citizens. That's right, this campaign is not just aimed at black consumers; it calls for all consumers to shop at black businesses and help them to grow and create more jobs.

"We are encouraging all races to spend money in black businesses," said Randolph Kinsey, legislative aide to State Sen. Les Miller, (D-Tampa). Kinsey continued, "We hope if we can get it going on one day, it can blossom into something that will happen everyday."

Now, that's what I call progressive, and it makes all the sense in the world because it ultimately benefits the entire city of Tampa.

I assume the mayor of Tampa, with the name Iorio, is Hispanic, or Latino, if preferred. I also know that Tampa is not a predominantly black populated city. So why would the mayor do something that some folks consider divisive and some of the more ignorant folks in this country consider "racist?" She is doing it because it's the right thing to do and because it makes good business sense. Why is it so difficult for us to do what is right, and take the negative objections out of the equation?

I applaud the mayor of Tampa, and I applaud the city of Tampa for this progressive effort. And I encourage consumers to follow through and do their part to make the effort a rousing success. The politicians have made their move, now it's up to the people to complete the task.

Now, I must wonder what cities will follow this move by Tampa. How about your city? I also wonder how many consumers, black, caucasian, Hispanic and otherwise, will support efforts such as these, especially when their city officials ask them to do so. Why not put it to the test? Ask your mayor to issue a similar proclamation in support of black businesses, and continue to seek support from consumers for those businesses as well.

As for the black business owners, please do your part, too. See that your business is worthy of consumer support. Make sure your employees treat your customers with respect. Assure that quality products and services are sold in your establishment. Open on time and always do what you say you will do. Business is all about relationships; we need more positive relationships between consumers and black owned businesses. The Tampa effort is a great start to build those relationships; it's up to the businesses and consumers to maintain them.

Despite the positive step taken by the mayor, an additional and very important point was made in the article by Kim Mallard, a black business owner, who said, "An African-American Dollar Day will help increase people's awareness." Mallard also hopes elected officials and small business organizations will make more money available to support new businesses. That is one of three critical ingredients required for business start-ups and continuous growth. The other two are access to education and information along with access to the opportunity of business ownership.

There are several outstanding efforts to promote support for black businesses around the country, and while there may be another mayor who has also issued a Black Dollar Day proclamation, this is the first one I have seen. Nonetheless, isn't this the positive first step we should see in more of our cities? Shouldn't more of us jump on board this train, regardless of who gets the credit for the idea, and move black business ownership and job creation forward? I think so.

Therefore, I strongly encourage you to get busy in your city with a similar campaign. Our cities and this country cannot afford to alienate and isolate black-owned businesses. Black business growth should not be stagnated; it should be vibrant. Black-owned businesses should be strengthened instead of weakened through unfair treatment and discrimination. Black consumers have supported the business of others in this country for hundreds of years; it's time — no, it's way past time that our businesses receive reciprocity in the marketplace.

To paraphrase Booker T. Washington, the millions of black people in this country can either be a drain on the economy or an asset to the economy. Business ownership and job creation are vital to the asset base of this country. What Tampa has done, followed by the support of all consumers in that city, will surely lead to the latter option cited by Washington. Thanks, Mayor Iorio, and thanks, Tampa, for giving us this wonderful example. But, it's only a proclamation; it must be followed by action. As Arsenio Hall used to say, "Let's get busy."

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MEANWHILE DOWN SOUTH...



NAACP LDF chief sets an example

GEORGE E. CURRY



During my seven years as editor-in-chief of Emerge, no story we published had a greater impact than Reginald Stuart's "Kemba's Nightmare." As you will remember, Kemba Smith is the young lady who was sentenced to 24.5 years in prison for a peripheral role in a northern Virginia drug ring. Under federal mandatory sentencing guidelines, Kemba, who was 24 at the time of her sentencing, was ineligible for parole. President Clinton ended Kemba's nightmare by granting her clemency shortly before leaving office in 2000.

Although we ran the first of three "Kemba's Nightmare" stories nearly eight years ago, no matter where I go today, someone invariably will bring up Kemba and how that story had impacted their life.

I am always quick to remind people that while I am proud that Emerge was the first publication to tell Kemba's story, Elaine R. Jones, president and director-counsel of the NAACP

Legal Defense and Educational Fund (LDF), was the person most responsible for Kemba's freedom.

After reading the first cover story, Jones placed LDF's legal apparatus behind her fellow Virginian, representing Kemba in various legal venues and ultimately making the formal request to Clinton for clemency.

Because of this and many other cases I have covered involving LDF since Jones took over the helm of the association in 1993 — the same year I became editor of Emerge — I was particularly saddened to learn that Elaine Jones has decided to step down as head of LDF. I don't use the word "retire" because I don't know if this passionate activist will ever be capable of retiring from the fight for justice.

I have enormous respect and admiration for Elaine Jones; Ted Shaw, her likely successor, and the staff at LDF. Like Elaine, who had rejected an offer to join a prestigious law firm in New York in order to advocate full-time on behalf of the poor and disadvantaged, many LDF lawyers could be partners in major law firms. Instead, they chose to work at Thurgood Marshall's old organization, litigating some of the same issues that he

addressed before joining the United States Supreme Court.

After graduating from Howard University with a degree in political science, Jones spent two years in the Peace Corps teaching English in Turkey. She then applied to the University of Virginia's law school, though the state's policy had been to pay for blacks to study out-of-state rather admit them to all-White Virginia universities. The Norfolk, Va. native was accepted and became the first African-American woman to graduate from UVA's law school.

Just two years out of law school, Jones was the LDF lawyer that litigated "Furman v. Georgia," the landmark U.S. Supreme Court case that abolished the death penalty in 37 states. Of course, she has since participated in thousands of other cases involving discrimination.

In a real sense, Elaine Jones represents a different level of civil rights activism. At one point, we focused on marches and demonstrations to highlight a particular problem. Jones and others have taken that protest to a higher level. They have moved from demonstrations in the streets to challenges in the suites, attacking deeply-ingrained institution-

al racism. And the beauty of Elaine Jones is that she chose this career path rather than one in corporate America that would have given her more creature comforts and fewer headaches.

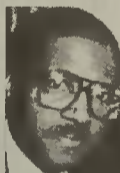
There is also a lesson in the roles that LDF and Emerge magazine played in winning Kemba Smith's freedom. I am not a lawyer and I don't play one on TV. Elaine is not a journalist, though she has a better chance of being one than my becoming a lawyer. Each of us used our professional skills to address a problem confronting our community.

In the case of Emerge, we told Kemba's story, even after a couple of other black magazines she had contacted refused to investigate her plight. Once we published "Kemba's Nightmare," Elaine Jones vigorously pursued every legal option open to Kemba, including seeking presidential clemency. It was the combination of a magazine and a legal advocacy group doing what they do best that led to Kemba's release. And that's what we all should be doing.

GEORGE E. CURRY is editor-in-chief of the NNPA News Service and BlackPressUSA.com. His most recent book is "The Best of Emerge Magazine."

High stakes in S. Carolina primary

RON WALTERS



I recently talked to the Rev. Jesse Jackson who had just come from South Carolina, the town where he was born. He made a significant point, as he usually does, about the fact that it has been a long road from the time when the black vote was of no consequence to where it is now the subject of fierce competition.

Indeed, the South Carolina press revealed that in recent weeks, Al Sharpton was said to have been in the state so much that he seems to be living there, traveling from city to city with large black populations, to black churches, black colleges and civic clubs, in an effort to wrap up the black vote for his bid. This is important because of his expected poor showings in Iowa, where he didn't campaign, and in New Hampshire, where he appeared, but also made little effort. His low totals were expected because of the black population in these states was 2 percent in New Hampshire and 3 percent in Iowa, respectively.

The South Carolina primary, then, will be his second attempt, after coming in second in the Washington, D.C. primary election, to appeal

strongly to the black vote and as such, win some delegates. And since this primary is also the gateway to the South, it is important that Sharpton fare well in a state where the black vote is 30 percent of the population

and 50 percent of the Democratic Party's electorate. If Sharpton proves that he can attract significant amount of the black vote, then perhaps others in the region will consider supporting his candidacy.

John Edwards is also competing for the black vote, going to black churches, visiting high profile ministers and civic leaders and asking for their support. A senator from North Carolina, he was born in South Carolina and "speaks their language." Coming from a dramatic second-place finish in the Iowa caucuses, Edwards made a splash as a positive candidate with a forward-looking vision and television rated charisma. No wonder that he polled second only to Kerry, who won the Iowa caucuses, with the ladies.

Gen. Wesley Clark has also been to South Carolina, because he is both from the South and has a military background, both of which

are tailor-made for the state's military oriented electorate. South Carolina has an Army, Navy, Air Force and two Marine bases, in addition to The Citadel, one of the best known military academies in the country.

Clark has also succeeded in attracting the attention of some blacks who are veterans, and who are more sensitive to the more moderate style of his campaign. But Clark has also deployed black legends like Rep. Charles Rangel (D-N.Y.) and former U.N. Ambassador Andrew Young to go into the state and campaign for him.

John Kerry is a question mark and from all accounts, is not furiously trying to rebuild his base in South Carolina after having pulled out of the state to concentrate his meager resources on winning Iowa and New Hampshire. Now he is vulnerable and having to rely essentially on black surrogates in the state who have contacts and to raise money to field an advance operation there, now that he has established that he is electable as the front-runner.

Kerry starts out behind, not only with regard to resources and timing, but as the quintessential "Northern Yankee" that many Southerners love to hate. So, Kerry will have rough going in this more conservative state, even among Democrats.

All of this places Rep. James Clyburn in the catbird seat. He had endorsed Rep. Richard Gephardt (D-Mo.) for the Democratic nomination for president, but after Gephardt lost, the question was whom would Clyburn endorse. At the point of his decision, 19 of his colleagues in the Congressional Black Caucus had endorsed Howard Dean, but with Dean's flame-out in Iowa, which effected his showing in New Hampshire, Clyburn has the field to review and the telephone calls were coming hot and heavy. At this writing, he has not endorsed anyone, but whomever he chooses will benefit from Clyburn's lofty reputation in the state and the fact that he has four field offices as well.

So, there is much ado being made over South Carolina and blacks appear, because of their impact on the outcome to be in the driver's seat, a point which begs the question what are the stakes black South Carolinians and others situated like them and how have they been organized to make the various candidates aware of it? This is a bargaining moment if I ever saw one, but will leadership come through to get the most out of it?

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