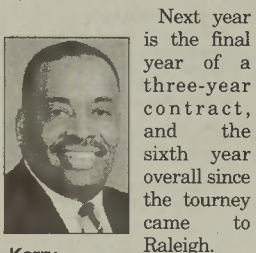


CIAA tourney object of cities' desire

By Bonitta Best
THE TRIANGLE TRIBUNE

RALEIGH — The 2004 CIAA tournament had another banner year, with over 100,000 fans in attendance during the weeklong event. Its impact on Raleigh's economy was estimated at more than \$11 million



Kerry

Next year is the final year of a three-year contract, and the sixth year overall since the tourney came to Raleigh.

What does the future hold between the city and the third-largest basketball tournament in the country? Commissioner Leon Kerry answered that and other questions in an interview with The Tribune.

Tribune: Any thoughts on where the tourney will go after next year?
Kerry: It all depends on Raleigh. Raleigh could be conservative and lose it. But it should be here, we can control the costs of the arena, do some things differently. We've had our best years here, it's the heartbeat of the CIAA because we've got three schools here, plus Virginia and Maryland are close.

Tribune: After five years, is Raleigh starting to take the tournament for granted?
Kerry: The contract can be ostentatious where you're not being taken for granted. They can't come with the same contract. It's really up to them. They've got a \$10 million economic impact on this.

Tribune: Basically, it will come down to which city has the best package, correct?
Kerry: Yeah that's it. The board of directors make the decision. I give input, but I don't vote, I don't make the decision.

Tribune: Every year it seems more people complain that the CIAA is becoming more corporate and less fan-friendly.
Kerry: People will complain and say it's more corporate. Let me tell you something: The corporate side of it takes you to where you need to be.

Tom Joyner is corporate, Ebony is corporate, and if you get national recognition from corporate, so be it. Everybody is trying to do what we're doing — the white conferences, the other black conferences, so I don't buy into that. You need corporate dollars to make it run. Corporate dollars do a whole lot of things, buy jobs for kids, etc.

Tribune: Did you catch flak about raised ticket prices?
Kerry: No. I think we should have raised them a little bit higher because they

sold too quick. We're underpriced.

The ACC is \$286 a week. My highest seat is \$150, I'm still underpriced.

Tribune: Are the parties and events starting to take away from the basketball?
Kerry: We're always trying to do something different and innovative to keep it interesting. Everybody has a basketball tourney but they don't have an event. That's why it's so critical to have a venue like this.

We have plenty of hotels, restaurants and shopping, and people are going to have fun. They save all year for this. We want to try to keep it that way.

Tribune: What is the conference doing to offset Winston-Salem State and N.C. Central possibly leaving for Division I?
Kerry: We're positioning ourselves. We had a meeting and chopped up some ideas. We're going to charge for membership, charge for people leaving.

There are some schools in Division I that want to come back to Division II so...
One thing we've learned is regardless of who leaves, we want to maintain some of their fans. They've got to get a new group when they move on. We're trying to maintain our old group and a couple of things have changed for us.

We've got 30 percent of our audience that attended CIAA schools. The other 65 percent are hooked when they come once.

Tribune: Will NCCU and WSSU be given a grace period?
Kerry: According to the board of directors, they are no longer members as soon as they make the announcement. The board said they didn't want Division I kids playing against our kids while they're building up their teams. They can go play independent, do whatever they want to do.

Tribune: Where can the tournament go from here?
Kerry: If we can stay steady like this for the next 10 years and make it grow and provide scholarships for kids... I'm always thinking outside the box.

Tribune: Will you be here in 10 years?
Kerry: No, no, I probably won't. But I want to set the pace for the others so it won't be hard to follow. I'd be a fool to tell you I'll be here 10 years, you don't know. I'll be here as long as I can.

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