

Death of a black business

By Christian Morrow
THE PITTSBURGH COURIER

PITTSBURGH — Tredessa Dalton is a case study - literally - in what should not happen to a business. When M.B.A. candidates from the University of Pittsburgh studied her BP gas station at the intersection of Frankstown Road and Robinson Boulevard in Penn Hills, they pointed to four things businesses need to avoid. Dalton could not avoid any.

"They said; you can't lose your customer base-East Hills (housing community left during renovation); you can't impede customer access-they begin road construction right in front of the station," she said. "Don't lose extra income-Penn Hills tells all the vendors, artists, shoe, shirt and hat vendors they have to leave the lot, and then competition-two Get Gos open within a mile."

The station, one of the most visible Black-owned businesses in the area, closed June 13.

Even in the face of a colossal collapse after only 18 months of ownership, Dalton, a Pittsburgh native who owns a highly successful janitorial business in New York City, can still laugh.

"It wasn't anybody's fault, I guess. But I'm not dead yet," she said. "Whatever you do, keep going. People in business have to know that."

Dalton said the six months of repairs to Frankstown Road and Robinson Boulevard, which blocked both entrances to the station and forced motorists to avoid the intersection, began almost immediately after she purchased the business and consumed all her capital.

The loss of vendors, however, was the biggest blow.

"I kind of feel I let the community down," she said. "They attracted people. It was a gathering place; it was unique with books, paintings, incense, and clothes unique to African Americans. The community needs something there."

In a move born from desperation, Dalton sold gas at cost to try to generate customers for the convenience shop. Not only did it not work, it damaged her ability to purchase additional fuel.

She was put on pre-pay status with BP, but could not generate the \$40,000 required to purchase two weekly tanker loads. She received her last fuel in April. From then on, it was a spiral of diminishing returns. The state lottery shut her off for non-payment, cigarette and snack vendors went unpaid, and customers vanished.

Jim Tarply, who worked at the station for 10 years, said the selling of gas at cost was the station's swan song.

"It was too much Mother Hubbard, one week we're out of milk, the next week there's no regular gas, or maybe no premium," he said. "But (Dalton) didn't really understand the business. You only make \$800 on every \$20,000 you spend in fuel. You need \$35,000 in store sales."

Nancy Maricondi, executive director of the Petroleum Retailers and Auto Repair Association, said it can be a vicious circle.

"At best there's a five-cent margin on a gallon of gas and credit cards can eat that up," she said. "You need the store sales, but if they don't come in for gas, they don't buy at the store."

Dalton said she is not dead yet. She has a group of young African-American men will

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HEARTSTRINGS UNIVERSITY



PHOTO: CALVIN FERGUSON

Wialillian Howard teaches informal and part-time wedding planners the keys to business success at HeartStrings Wedding University. Graduates of the 55-hour program earn certification as professionals.

Wedding bells always ring at planner school

By Janell J. Lewis
THE CHARLOTTE POST

SO THE QUESTION HAS been popped and a little bling is on her finger. Now what to do about planning the wedding? You could struggle and put a lot of stress on yourself, ask a creative friend to help you out, or you can hire a certified wedding consultant who's actually had formal training.

Wialillian Howard, president of Wialillian & Company, helps teach the art of wedding planning through Wialillian's HeartStrings Wedding University certificate program.

For three years, Howard has offered an intense course of classes for those interested in mastering the logistics of the wedding ceremony business.

"This is a business. This is not a hobby," Howard said.

"Folks tend to look at the ceremonial side as opposed to the business side."

With the average wedding averaging \$40,000, preparation for weddings can sweep couples and families like a tornado without proper consultation. Howard trains students to provide some ease to couples in need within a program that's a part of only seven such in the country.

"The wedding planner has to be a liaison that keeps the peace," Howard said. "Everybody wants that weekend to be perfect."

ReNee Troy-Mebane, a HeartStrings graduate, stumbled upon the university when she heard two former students introduce themselves at an entrepreneurs meeting. She wanted to know how she too could become certified in some-

thing she enjoyed doing.

"The level of information I gained as well as the outside class project...was really intense," she said. "With 53 hours of class, that definitely makes you credible."

When Troy-Mebane completed the course, she was equipped with the necessary tools to begin her own wedding consulting business, Blueprints for Successful Events. Like many informal planners, she had put together parts of weddings for family and friends before completing HeartStrings.

Howard's program provides training for planners as well as developing a wedding business. Howard said the program also aims to reeducate people who never thought planning weddings could be

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"The wedding planner has to be a liaison that keeps the peace."

HeartStrings President Wialillian Howard

Nigeria challenges major oil companies

By Stefania Bianchi
INTERNATIONAL PRESS SERVICE

BRUSSELS — Ethnic communities from Nigeria's Niger Delta are challenging the Nigerian government and some of the world's biggest oil companies over the level of greenhouse gases emitted during oil production.

Communities in the oil-rich Niger Delta region of the country filed a legal action against the Nigerian government, the Nigerian National Petroleum Corporation and the Shell, Exxon, Chevron, Total and Agip oil companies June 20 to stop gas flaring in the area, saying it violates their human rights.

Flaring is the process of burning off surplus com-

bustible vapors from a well, either as a means of disposal, or as a safety measure to relieve well pressure, and is the biggest source of air emissions from offshore oil and gas installations.

Flaring has been prohibited in Nigeria since 1984 under the Associated Gas Reinjection Act. This act only allows companies to flare if they have field-specific, lawfully issued ministerial certificates. Despite requests, Friends of the Earth which is supporting the Nigerian communities in their legal battle says none of these have ever been made public.

The environmental group says more gas is flared in Nigeria than anywhere else

in the world.

The flares contain a cocktail of toxins that affect the health and livelihood of local communities. This has exposed Niger Delta residents to an increased risk of premature deaths, child respiratory illnesses, asthma and cancer over the past 40 years, environmentalists and local people say.

The Nigerian arm of Friends of the Earth says the emission of these toxins violates the Delta residents' rights guaranteed under Nigerian law, such as the right to live in dignity, and to enjoy health and a satisfactory environment.

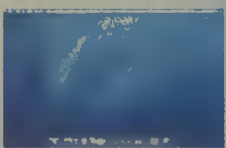
Reverend Nnimmo Bassey, executive director of Friends

of the Earth Nigeria, says the filing of the legal case is "a major step in our collective effort as citizens of Nigeria" to make oil and gas corporations and the government behave responsibly.

"For too long we have witnessed the atrocious flaring of associated gas by profiteering oil corporations that hold the people in utmost contempt. We are calling on the law to defend our impoverished citizens," he said in a statement.

In a report 'Gas Flaring in Nigeria: A human rights, environmental and economic monstrosity' launched Monday (June 20) to coincide with the legal case, the

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Apple's iMac desktop computer is powered by IBM's PowerPC. Next spring, Intel takes over as the computer's brain.

TECH

Processor change will make Macs faster

By Winfred Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

But it is Jobs, CEO of the spunky computer company, made the announcement at Apple's Worldwide Developer Conference June 6. Tongues have been wagging ever since.

There was some speculation days before the conference but it was just that.

Most were still surprised when Jobs made the announcement - especially IBM, which had reportedly tried to contact him weeks before the conference, which was also broadcast on Apple's web site.

Developers were even more surprised to see Apple's new operating system Mac OS X Tiger up and running on an

Intel powered Mac, which meant this deal must have been in the works for a long time.

Jobs said the OS X was designed from its inception to work with an Intel chip. He also said the company had gone as far as possible with the IBM-based PowerPC chip.

"It's been 10 years since our

Lawsuit alleges Ford bias

By Bankole Thompson
THE MICHIGAN CITIZEN

DETROIT — Racism is still alive and it is rearing its ugly head at Ford Motor Company, according to a claim brought against the automaker by a citizens group called the Coalition for Corporate Justice and Equal Opportunity.

The group is charging Ford of discriminatory practices against African American workers at several of the automaker's plants and within its staff functions.

"If William Clay Ford Jr. is a man of integrity and honesty as he said he is, I don't think he will want a negative rating on his leadership," said the Rev. Kenneth Flowers who heads the group. "We want to find out which supervisors are acting in a racist manner against black workers."

Flowers said employment data are "distorted and altered," on a regular basis to disadvantage Blacks even if such measure violates accounting rules.

"White employees with fewer credentials earn more pay than African-Americans with credentials doing the same job," Flowers said. "High achieving African-Americans receive low performance reviews while less achieving whites receive top achiever status."

Jackie Gilchrist, a black woman who works for the automaker as a customs specialist said despite earning a degree in engineering, an MBA and a law degree, it took 12 years before she was promoted. At that same time, Gilchrist said two white workers with only high school diplomas were promoted before she was considered.

"Names of black workers are missing from the list of promotions," Gilchrist said.

Sometimes subordinates who openly criticize and refuse to follow instructions from Black supervisors are often rewarded by promotion, the group charged.

"When you look at the papers, you see a parade of African-American executives. They do not represent African-Americans within the ranks," Gilchrist said.

Tracy Flaggs, Marilyn Patterson, Vinnie Newton, all African-American women working for the automaker, also are suffering a similar fate according to Flowers.

"I've got involved in this because of (Flaggs)," Flowers said. "This is nothing personal. It is about racism and inequality."

"The steel walls of racial discrimination are still solid," Rev. Charles G. Adams, pastor of Hartford Memorial Baptist Church, said during a recent rally to galvanize petition signers.



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