

The Bennett Banner

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Students disillusioned after fire

by Erica Salter

An honors dorm once filled with student activity stands temporarily condemned because of a fire.

The 52-year-old building, Merner Hall, was the scene of a fire on Jan. 12 that destroyed several second floor rooms and damaged others.

Some former residents of Merner relocated to other dorms, but "are angry after having to adjust to new living conditions," said freshman Aprell Hamilton, who had to move.

"It's quite an adjustment to move from Merner, which was quiet and peaceful, to Barge, where all hell breaks loose 24 hours a day," said senior Yvette Freeman.

Others, like freshman Patrice Holt, looked on the bright side and said, "I will always be loyal to Merner,

but the rooms are bigger" in Barge.

Donations of money and clothing from the Red Cross, alumnae, churches, businesses and community residents have been received and used for Merner renovations and to help displaced Belles.

The financial contributions for the Merner Fire and Student Relief Funds totalled almost \$2400 as of Jan. 20. Pledged money that has not been received is not included in this total.

The students will not be reimbursed for the possessions that were lost or damaged in the fire. They found out, after the fire, that Bennett's insurance did not cover their belongings or any other student's. Only the buildings are insured.

"Administration kept saying, 'Don't worry. Bennett has insurance' and led us to believe that our stuff was insur-

ured," said sophomore Jacquelyn Griffin. "It wasn't until Bennett's lawyer came that we realized we would not be reimbursed."

The 37 students received reimbursements of \$40 from Bennett to purchase clothes and laundry change, "which wasn't nearly enough," said Freeman. "So, everything that I needed, I had to buy myself."

They also received clothes, books and supplies from the bookstore, but besides this they have not gotten any of the money contributed by the various organizations and people.

Responding to whether Bennett did everything possible for the students, Holt said, "the administration eventually realized that their approach wasn't productive and remedied it quickly." However, "the students and faculty have been very nice

about helping us. Our Bennett sisters came to our rescue with beds, clothes and hugs."

"I feel that the fire could have been prevented if the dorm had been properly updated and inspected," said Freeman. "Most of the dorms are over 40 and 50 years old and they're only able to handle a certain amount of electricity. So, with students who naturally have televisions, radios, irons and other electrical appliances, of course, there are going to be problems, and Bennett should have made sure that a fire of that magnitude didn't happen. The whole situation could have been avoided."

Some former Merner residents expressed disillusionment with the college's policies.

"Bennett waits until a tragedy hits to try to react," said Griffin.

"After the initial anger, I

wasn't surprised," said Holt. "I just want everyone to realize they aren't protected either."

Fortunately, the fire began during class and lunch time, at about 1 p.m. It began in a second floor room occupied by sophomore Michelle Dumay.

The alarm sounded after Dumay unsuccessfully tried to put out the fire. Some residents learned that the fire doors were locked so, "everyone went out the front door," said Griffin.

The firemen extinguished the fire in less than an hour, but not before some rooms were destroyed, others damaged and the dorm filled with smoke.

The fire started in a circuit and was deemed electrical.

Merner sustained \$750,000 in damage. The college intends to reopen the building in the fall.

Former dropout finds life's beauty

by Iris Becton

You may have wondered who the Bennett student is who works with the maintenance crew on campus.

She is Jennifer Chollette, a freshman majoring in social work. She's been through trials and tribulations but is much stronger because of them.

At the age of 14, Jennifer dropped out of school in New York and ran away from home because she wanted to explore life on her own. She hitchhiked to California. She stayed there until the juvenile authorities sent her back home where she was placed in a group home by family court. The girls at the home had all kinds of problems. "Some were in gangs, some had family problems and the others had dropped out of school," said Chollette.

The home was in upstate New York in a town a little smaller than Greensboro. It was like a college campus; the only difference was all the

girls were taught in one classroom. Jennifer "stayed there maybe a month and ran away," hitch-hiking back to New York City.

She says being on her own was fun at first because she "stayed with friends and other runaways." When she didn't have somebody to stay with, she lived on the streets. She survived by doing "odd jobs like helping people with numbers running or pick-pocketing." Jennifer says, "The gangs just stuck together and provided for each other. When one had, everybody had. It was like a little family."

Chollette met Jennifer Woodson who helped her change her life. Woodson did a documentary on runaways. Chollette was featured in it. She says that after seeing the documentary on TV she decided that wasn't the kind of life she wanted to live anymore and she wanted to try to do things the right way.

At the age of 15, with Woodson's help, Jennifer went

to a boarding school and stayed there for three years and got her high school diploma from John F. Kennedy High School.

There she learned a lot about herself and she found out just how beautiful a person that she really is both on the inside and outside. Her most important lesson was knowing that whatever she does she'll always need God's help. She values life and tries not to be materialistic or take things for granted. She says, "If I hadn't been able to see the real beauty in life, I wouldn't be alive today."

After getting her high school diploma, Jennifer went to nursing school for a year and then took a year off to decide if she wanted to attend college. Meanwhile, Woodson was in touch with some people from the United Negro College Fund and Jennifer spoke with them and was granted a scholarship. With the help of her guidance counselor from the high school that she dropped out of, she decided to attend

college and they chose Bennett together.

She chose Bennett because she wanted to get away from New York and the scene there and come here where it was quiet. But she found out that it's not as quiet as she thought it would be.

She says she chose her job as a "groundsperson" because she likes being close to nature and because it keeps her in touch with reality. She likes to observe the squirrels and see how they survive. She says she felt like a squirrel when she was living on the streets because she was always trying to survive.

Chollette sometimes thinks about dropping out of school, but she says it would be pretty selfish of her if she dropped out of college now because it wouldn't be fair to the kids out there that she would be able to reach.

She knows that she could help somebody. Even if she only reaches one out of a thousand, she says, "That's the one that counts."



Looking to help others: Freshman Jennifer Chollette has a special reason for wanting to become a social worker. A former runaway, she wants to give something back. (photo by Freeman)

Sit-In commemoration provides inspiration

by Lorraine S. Patton

Action is the only answer and 30 years ago on Feb. 1, 1960, four young men from A&T State University decided to act out against racism and prejudice by sitting at a white-only lunchcounter at F. W. Woolworth's, which is located in downtown Greensboro, and asking for service. When they did not receive service, they sat until closing, but returned bright and early the next day to sit again.

Feb. 1-4, 1990, was the time set aside to commemorate and celebrate the courage and power that the Greensboro Four had. Citizens, students from A&T and Bennett gathered to bask in the Four's glory but to also interact and organize so that the Four's dream — equality for everyone regardless of skin hue —

will become a reality. The theme for the weekend was "Stepping Stones to Freedom" and it served as a guide for everyone.

The festivities began early Thursday morning with the reenactment of the sit-in by the Greensboro Four. During the reenactment, a student march, beginning in the Holland Bowl on A&T's campus, was making its way down Market Street. Just as in the old days, Belles were there participating and showing their concern in our fight for freedom.

At Woolworth's, after the march had arrived, bronze footsteps were unveiled, and the crowd was the first to see the changing of the street to February One Place. At 11:45 a.m. a commemorative luncheon was held in the A&T Student Union Ballroom

where the keynote speaker was Harvey Gantt, former mayor of Charlotte. After the luncheon, honored guests, activity participants and over 200 Aggies gathered in the Student Union Quad to witness the dedication of a memorial built in the honor and name of the Greensboro Four. At 7 p.m. on Thursday, Bennett College was co-host of an open-forum, featuring one of the Greensboro Four, Mr. Franklin McCain Sr. and civil rights leader Floyd McKissick, father of Ms. S. Charmaine McKissick-Kemp, director of the Interdisciplinary Studies Program.

Friday night a gala banquet was held in the Sheraton Ballroom to honor not only the Greensboro Four but also those who inspired, helped and encouraged them. Among the honorees were Mr. Hobart

Jarrett, who not only was the featured keynote speaker for the affair but who was a faculty member of Bennett College during the sit-in movement and Ms. Gloria Wise Brown who was serving as Bennett College's SGA President in 1960.

As the weekend came to a close at a city-wide ecumenical service at Shiloh Baptist Church on Sunday, one could not help but be moved while listening to the message by Bishop Cecil Bishop of the AME Zion Church which was entitled "Action is the only Answer."

My Bennett sisters, we can gather in the name of the Greensboro Four and Martin Luther King from now until the day we breathe our last breath but we must realize that all injustices, not only the blatant ones but those

which are subtle will not cease to be until we not only address the problem but act on the problem because action is the only way.

A friend returns

by Iris Becton

A familiar face has returned to the college as assistant president of student affairs.

Ms. Jimmie Gravely graduated from Bennett in 1971 with a major in business administration and has worked in many capacities here.

The former director of academic advising wanted to come back and "share some of the knowledge" she has "of the outside world with the

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