

Michelle Chenault receives NASA grant

V. Michelle Chenault, a Bowman Gray School of Medicine graduate student, has won a prestigious \$18,000 grant from the National Aeronautics and Space Administration.

Chenault, who is on leave as assistant professor of medical technology at Winston-Salem State University while she earns her doctorate, will be studying weightlessness, still a critical concern to space scientists.

She'll be looking at fluid balance changes in the rat, which is an animal model for weightlessness, under the direction of Dr. Phillip M. Hutchins, professor of physiology.

Her project is part of an interdisciplinary program called



Chenault molecular and cellular pathobiology, and her adviser is Dr.

Lawrence Rudel, professor of comparative medicine.

Chenault noted that during weightlessness, researchers now know there are hormonal, cardiovascular and kidney changes as well as skeletal and muscular changes.

Body fluids also shift during weightlessness. "Astronauts have long reported low back discomfort, sinus congestion and puffy faces as fluids shift from the legs to the chest and head areas," she said. It is these changes that she'll be studying in rats.

Chenault is the daughter of Roy and Vivian Chiles of Shaker Heights, Ohio, where she grew up.

She graduated from Val-

paraiso University in Valparaiso, Ind. in 1975, and received her master's degree from Central Michigan University in Mount Pleasant in 1978.

She taught at Bowling Green State University in Bowling Green, Ohio, before joining the Winston-Salem State faculty, where she teaches clinical chemistry to medical technology students.

For the past two years, she has been on a fellowship provided by the Board of Governors of the University of North Carolina. WSSU is one of 16 universities in the UNC system.

She is married to Myron M. Chenault, president of Trad Leasing on North Point Boulevard, and they have one son, Reece, 7.

Issue of cross-racial adoptions stirs debate

• This is the second in a two-part series on the adoption of Afro-American children.

By ROBIN BARKSDALE
Chronicle Staff Writer

Lilly Gwynn has taken several adopted children into her home. She has become a parent to four adopted children ranging in age from 7 to 14 and she has provided them with a home, lots of love and care. She has helped reduce the list of Afro-American children waiting in foster and agency care for an adoptive home.

But, according to social services agencies, families like Mrs. Gwynn are rare. There seem to be few Afro-American families who are ready to adopt children into their homes. According to statistics available from local agencies, the number of Afro-American children in adoptive care is increasing and those children are remaining in adoptive care for a longer period of time than their white counterparts. Agencies report also that there are white families waiting to adopt children while the search continues for a pool of Afro-American families who want to adopt children.

Walter Marshall, president of the local NAACP branch, said that that information may be misleading. Marshall contends that social work agencies have not done all they can do to encourage Afro-American families to adopt children. He said agency policies serve as deterrents to Afro-Americans. Marshall said that he is familiar with several instances of Afro-American persons who looked into adopting children but either were turned down or found that there was too much red tape involved in adopting.

"Some of the kids they have up for adoption have had chronic problems and people are probably reluctant to take those kids," Marshall said. "I don't think they have any babies that they can't place. Some of the policies that social services has are totally out of line and out-dated. I think that's part of the problem."

Mrs. Gwynn said she is proof positive that adoptions can work out.

"I don't feel any different than I did being a biological parent," said Mrs. Gwynn, who has three biological children. "Some time during the process all the little things and problems all seem to regulate themselves."

Mrs. Gwynn compared her waiting process to the waiting process that any expectant mother would go through. She said there is the usual amount of anticipation and that the only difference is that "mine were able to speak when I got them. But it was all worth the wait."

A report published by the state's Adoption Resource Exchange does indicate that there are fewer Afro-American babies available for adoption. But the report also shows that those babies grow up in adoptive care and are adopted at a disproportionately low rate. Forsyth County social services, for instance, is still attempting to place an Afro-American child who was put up for adoption when he was two years old. He is now seven years old and in school, but a permanent adoptive home has not been found for him.

Mary Lou Biesecker, director of the adoptions unit at the Forsyth County Department of Social Services, said that the agency's policy on adoption requirements is more flexible than most people suspect. There are no specific income requirements for adoptive parents - they are asked only to be self-supporting. Adoptive parents live in all parts of town, Mrs. Biesecker said, including the city's housing projects.

"Basically, we ask that our adoptive parents be able to support themselves and the child," she said. "We allow single people to adopt children who are at least two years of age and we don't require parents to be rich or to live in a big house in the finest part of town. We look for anyone who is truly interested in adopting a child and who will be able to offer that child love and care."

Mrs. Gwynn said that she is aware that there are a lot of "old cliches" still circulating about adoptions. A single parent herself, she said that many people are unaware that single parents can adopt children. Many prospective adoptive parents, she said, are concerned about how the adopted child will turn out. Mrs. Gwynn said that "you don't get any guarantees how any children are going to turn out. All you can do is love them and raise them the best you can."

Biesecker said her department staff is in the process of recruiting more adoptive Afro-American families and plans to upgrade their efforts during the summer. She said she is baffled by the shortage of Afro-American families willing to adopt because the agency has a large pool of Afro-American families who act as foster parents to the children. Marshall, however, is not as surprised by what he said is a perceived shortage of Afro-American families willing to adopt.

"Because of the extended families that we had in the black community, blacks never really put their children up for adoption," said Marshall. "Adoption is a new phenomenon for us. We're not accustomed to knowing a lot about adopting children. Just like we've had to learn about other things, it's going to take us a while to adjust to something as new to us as adopting children."

The problem of the growing numbers of Afro-American children waiting for homes has not gone completely unnoticed. Emmanuel Baptist Church is one church which has opted to participate in the "One Child, One

Church" program founded by Father George Clements, a Catholic priest in Chicago. Clements adopted two children and organized an advocacy group which encourages each church in the country to have one family which has adopted a child. Mendez said that several members of his church have adopted children and that he hopes more will look into it.

"We've had some who have

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COMMUNITY NEWS DEADLINE

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