



Reading Olympiad participants show off their medals at an awards ceremony at the Adam's Mark West hotel.

Urban League presents medals of reading

By COURTNEY DANIEL
The Chronicle Staff Writer

The Winston-Salem Urban League, through their Reading Olympiad program, has been active in trying to inspire middle school students, especially African Americans, to read. Reading Olympiad director Alberta McMillian believes that increasing students' proficiency and interest in reading is critical to their academic success.

"Reading is most important because it is the basis of all subjects taught in school," she said.

The 1997 edition of the Olympiad recently wrapped up with an elegant awards banquet at the Adam's Mark West hotel, marking eight years that the program has set about the task of promoting reading. The Reading Olympiad is at heart a contest. All the participants keep a running tally of the books they read and are rewarded with a certificate and a bronze, silver or gold medal depending on the final number of books. The top 15 readers receive cash prizes of as much as \$100.

For many of the students the money was an instant incentive to read as much as possible.

"The program was all right before tonight (the presentation of money)," said Princess Garner a gold medalist and winner of \$100 dollars. "But now it's good, great, wonderful, excellent."

The obvious perks of monetary gain not withstanding nearly all the participants said that they would continue to read for personal pleasure.

"I think it was a lot of fun to read the books," said Machion Carter, also a winner of \$100 and a gold medalist in the Olympiad. "I think I'll keep reading even after the program is over."

Neshae Wilson, winner of one of five \$25 prizes, agreed about the benefits of the program with or without the cash reward.

"It (the Reading Olympiad) is a very educational program for African-American kids to get into," she said. "It teaches us to take time out to read and to leave TV alone. And the reading really helped me."

Students earn more points for

books by black authors, and McMillian believes that this bonus is a way to increase exposure to Black history and culture. She believes that the tales of African Americans give black students a sense of self-knowledge and self-worth that will benefit them immeasurably.

"Our main focus has always been the reading," McMillian said. "But we also understand that it is equally important for African-American students to learn about their history and culture. Those students who understand their heritage will undoubtedly have an expanded self-image."

The children are helped in their pursuit of literary mastery by adult mentors, called chat persons. Chat persons discuss books with the Olympiad participants, schedule library tours and special events, and usually become very attached to the student they "chat" with. McMillian believes that this is an added bonus of the program.

"We also realized that adult mentors could be positive influences on the children in the Reading Olympiad," she said. "It is important for young people to be able to relate positively with adults."

"And for those adults who get involved, it becomes impossible to 'chat' with a child and not become a part of that child's life. Even after the program, you want to know how their doing in high school? Are they taking the right courses? How did they do on the PSAT, the SAT? And for that young person, they have gained an ally ... a guide."

The Olympiad not only involves adult interaction outside the home, but attempts to involve parents as well.

"We want parents to take part in the Reading Olympiad as well," McMillian said. "The program encourages parental involvement by rewarding family activities with contest points."

McMillian believes that the program is a true manifestation of the African proverb, "It takes a village to raise a child."

"The program is like surrounding this child with people who want to see them succeed, in the home, in school and in the community," said

McMillian. "This program is very much like the 'village'. We put the child in center and nurture and protect them."

The assertion that the program involves the entire "village" is not an idle one. Corporate sponsors like Pepsi Service Center and Wachovia Bank of North Carolina meet city-county services like the Winston-Salem Forsyth County School System and Library to advocate the Reading Olympiad and support its participants. Kappa Alpha Psi Fraternity Inc., a national organization, gives it support along with countless volunteers from throughout the community.

The effects of the program on students even after they leave the program are seen citywide by curriculum coordinators in area middle schools.

"The program is wonderful," said Judy Dixon coordinator at Wiley Middle School. "Because the program is open to everyone in middle school regardless of reading ability, it really inspires kids, who haven't been interested in reading in the past, to develop a love for it."

Dr. Marie Williamson, curriculum coordinator at L.E.A.P., says that those benefits are not only reaped by those involved with the contest, but by other students who see their classmates reading.

"We put out a shelf with books for the kids to read whenever they want," she said. "I have noticed that even students who are not in the program will read the books."

The coordinator at Northwest Middle School, Brenda Furches, believes that the program turns her students into discriminating readers.

"I think the neatest part about the program is that the kids start reading authors," she said. "When the students like a book by Virginia Hamilton, then they read all her books."

The hopes of the Reading Olympiad, McMillian, and the countless volunteers are all summed up by silver medalist and \$50 dollar winner, Willa McGill.

"The reading was a lot of fun," she said. "I didn't think I was going to win, but it was fun just reading, and I'm going to keep doing it."

NOTE TO GREENSBORO AND HIGH POINT READERS:

Welcome to the pages of *The Chronicle*. While flipping through, you may notice that the majority of our news comes from the community. We feel this is our greatest strength. By allowing input from people who

are not professional reporters but are intimate with local news because they are part of it, *The Chronicle* indeed becomes a community newspaper.

As we expand, we would like to invite you in Greensboro and High Point to share your news with us and be a part of the family. Send community news submissions to:

The Chronicle
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Our deadline for receiving community news is Monday at 5 p.m., so mail things in plenty of time, or fax it. Please see "Community News Guidelines" to help insure that your news is included.

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Because of a new technique in cataract surgery performed at Southeastern Eye Center by Dr. Epes, patients like Betty Stone are able to return to their normal activities immediately. This procedure takes less than seven minutes and only eyedrops are used to numb the eye. Betty Stone returned to her normal activities immediately after surgery, and she didn't even need to wear a patch.

"After surgery, I was amazed I could see the clock... everything looked brighter."
- Betty Stone Ferrum, VA

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ECONOMIC

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board of aldermen.

With an incorporated entity in East Winston's corner, projects that lack capital could be funded, and partnerships could be created between the city and private entrepreneurs.

"It allows you leverage with the city," said Bradshaw.

Many in the community are feeling a lack of leverage as of late, at least where economic development and East Winston are concerned.

Until Tuesday night, city officials had not committed in writing plans to distribute any of the \$6 million economic development bond to East Winston. The former description for what and where the proposed funds would be used read, "to assist in the acquisition and development of new business sites in designated industrial opportunity areas and in the downtown area."

The description was expanded

for the packets handed out by city staff at the community bond information meeting held at the Rupert Bell Recreation Center. The bond now includes the Enterprise Community as a targeted development area.

The Enterprise Community covers approximately 15 square miles in the central and northeast section of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County. This area was identified as a potential recipient for federal grant money, which the city applied for in 1994.

Though Winston-Salem was not selected as an Enterprise Community, the city has looked at ways of implementing the plan.

The task force wants to make sure those plans don't end with community development.

African Americans needed to learn the difference between economic and community development, said Bradshaw.

Community development, in the form of housing and recreation

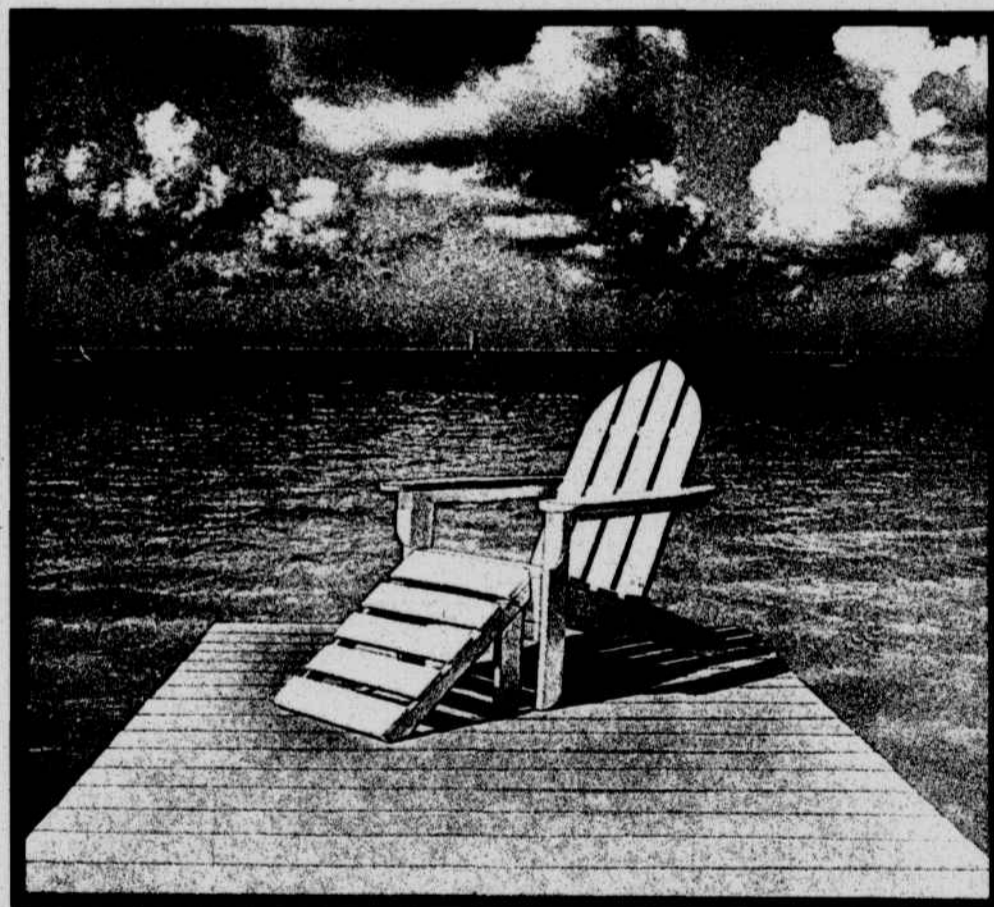
bonds, is immediately essential for the low-income minority community, Bradshaw said. However, he added, economic development ensures the future of the community.

Due to its vague description, some members of the task force have opposed the \$6 million economic development bond.

"If I knew there was even two dollars going to East Winston, then yeah, I could go to the polls and feel good about it," said Gregory Burrell.

Chair person Norma Smith agreed, but added that her opposition to the economic development bond did not necessarily reflect her attitude toward the other items.

Each of the five bond items — economic development, streets and sidewalks, housing and redevelopment, recreation and the convention center — will be listed individually for the June 24 vote.



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