



# NATIONAL NEWS

By DARLENE SUPERVILLE  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

## Congress votes to honor mother of civil rights

WASHINGTON — Rosa Parks, who stoked the civil rights movement by refusing to give up her seat on a segregated bus, would receive Congress' most prestigious civilian honor under legislation sent to the White House on Tuesday.

The House voted 424-1 to award the 86-year-old Alabama native the Congressional Gold Medal. The Senate passed the measure Monday on an 86-0 vote. President Clinton is expected to sign it.

Republicans and Democrats lauded her as an American heroine.

"She is an ordinary citizen with extraordinary courage," Rep. Spencer Bachus, R-Ala., said. "She had the fortitude to claim for herself the most ordinary, the most basic of civil rights — to be treated fairly and equally."



Parks

Rep. John Lewis, D-Ga., said that "one, simple, defining act" by Parks began a nonviolent revolution in the South that led to the end of segregation.

"Rosa Parks taught me and an entire generation the power that one individual can have in standing up for what is right and for what is just," added Lewis, a civil rights veteran who was beaten bloody during protest marches in the 1960s.

Mrs. Parks watched the debate on television while traveling in Los Angeles.

"Mrs. Parks is very excited to have this honor," said Anita Peek, executive director of the Rosa and Raymond Parks Institute for Self-Development. Mrs. Parks co-founded the nonprofit in 1987 in Detroit, where she now lives, to benefit young people.

A seamstress in Montgomery, Ala., Mrs. Parks was arrested in December 1955 for refusing to give her seat on a segregated city bus to a white man. The arrest led to a yearlong bus boycott by blacks that endured until the Supreme Court ruled the city's bus segregation law was unconstitutional, and it was changed. The Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., then a local minister, led the boycott.

Mrs. Parks moved to Detroit in 1957 after she lost the sewing job, couldn't find work and her family was harassed and threatened. She joined the staff of Rep. John Conyers, D-Mich., in 1965 and worked there until retiring in 1988.

She now travels the country lecturing on civil rights.

A guest at Clinton's State of the Union address in January, Mrs. Parks has received numerous awards, including the Presidential Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor, and the Spingarn Award, the NAACP's top civil rights honor.

Lawmakers initially used the Congressional Gold Medal to honor military leaders but began bestowing it in the 20th century to recognize excellence in a range of fields, the arts, athletics, politics, science, entertainment.

The first such medal was approved in March 1776 for George Washington for "wise and spirited conduct" in the Revolutionary War.

More than 320 medals have been awarded.

Recent honorees include Frank Sinatra, Mother Teresa, South African President Nelson Mandela and the "Little Rock Nine," the group who braved threats and jeers from white mobs to integrate Central High School in Little Rock, Ark., in 1957.

Rep. Ron Paul, R-Texas, voted against the bill, which authorizes up to \$30,000 to pay for the medal and the sale of bronze reproductions to recover the costs.

The bill is H.R. 573.

## Man charged in 10 church arsons

By MICHAEL J. SNIFFEN  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

WASHINGTON — A 36-year-old Indiana man with an interest in satanism was indicted Tuesday on charges of burning 10 churches in Indiana and Georgia, including one in which a volunteer firefighter died, the National Church Arson Task Force announced.

It was the largest number of fires charged to one individual during the task force's nearly three-year-old investigation, said Treasury Undersecretary James Johnson, the task force co-chairman. The task force has opened investigations of 752 church fires, bombings or attempted bombings and has charged 331 individuals in 249 of those attacks.

The defendant, Jay Scott Ballinger, who was arrested last February on a federal complaint charging him with seven southern Indiana church fires, is a white man charged with setting fire to predominantly white churches. Acting Assistant Attorney General Bill Lann Lee, task force co-chairman, said at a news conference at the Justice Department.

Ballinger has admitted to federal agents that he burned 30 to 50 churches in 11 states between 1994 and 1998, according to an affidavit by Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms agent Scott D. McCart. In that February document, McCart said satanic materials were found in Ballinger's Yorktown, Ind., home. Ballinger traveled with his girlfriend, Angela Wood, 24, of Atlanta, as she worked as a stripper in several states.

Wood and another man, Donald A. Puckett, 37, of Lebanon, Ind., have told federal agents they took part with Ballinger in burning an Indiana church where they painted an upside-down cross on the steps as part of a satanic ritual, McCart's affidavit said.

A federal grand jury in Indianapolis returned 12 counts charging Ballinger with the seven Indiana fires. A separate federal grand jury in Atlanta returned six counts charging him with three 1998 fires in northern Georgia.

In one of those, at New Salem United Methodist Church in Commerce, Ga., volunteer firefighter Loy Williams, 27, died, and three firefighters were injured.

Because of that death, Ballinger could face the death penalty if he is convicted and Attorney General Janet Reno authorizes seeking that penalty. Otherwise, the Georgia fires carry a minimum penalty of 50 years in prison.

The Indiana fires carry a total minimum penalty of 90 years in prison and a maximum of 210 years. Ballinger also faces a top fine of \$3,000,000.

He is in custody at a federal medical facility in Minnesota, Lee said. Wood and Puckett were not indicted Tuesday, Lee said. They were

See Arson on A8

# Students spend night out for homeless

By T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

A group of college students gave up a night on the town for a night of pseudo homelessness as they slept on the lawn at Hobby Park, with only a blanket between them and cold, damp earth.

Last Friday, the students took part in "One Night Without a Home," a fund-raising event to raise awareness of the problem of homelessness.

"This is a chance to tell people to open their eyes; homelessness is still a problem," said Sarah Holthouser, the event's founder and organizer. "Homelessness is not the glamorous topic anymore. It's a hard topic to sell to people because they think (homeless people) are lazy or they are alcohol and drug addicts."

The event was inspired by "The Many Faces of Homelessness," a forum featuring representatives from the National Coalition for the Homeless that was held at the Main Branch Library last August.

Holthouser, a junior at Salem College, says the forum inspired her to take action. She recruited other Salem students and began making the rounds at other Triad colleges to distribute literature about the "One Night" project.

The idea was to show that college students — a group often labeled as self-absorbed — are concerned about the plight of the homeless. Students from schools as far away as UNC-Asheville sent in \$25 to register for the event, although Holthouser said that anyone was welcome to participate in the event whether they paid the fee or not. Corporate sponsors also contributed money, blankets and other supplies. All total, the event raised about \$1,000 for local homeless shelters and programs.

But raising awareness, Holthouser said, was equally as important.

At about 9 p.m., two hours after the event started, only about 30 people had made their way to the park, far less than the 150 or so who had pledged their money and participation.

Organizers, though, said they were not daunted. Because of scheduling conflicts, they expected people to arrive up until midnight.

"There were a few snags. Students have a hard time giving hours and hours of their time to anything," Holthouser said.

The students were asked to do more than just sleep outdoors for six hours.

They were asked to open their minds and take an active part in a long list of activities that organizers had planned throughout the 13-hour event.

Participants were asked not to bring any outside luxuries, like tents and sleeping bags or any outside food. The idea, organizers said, was to bring the participants as close to the homeless experience as possible.

They were treated to a "shelter-type meal" of rice, beans, and bread; and because homeless people are often chased away from their outdoor domiciles by law enforcement officers or business owners, organizers said they planned to wake participants throughout the night to make them move themselves and their blankets to other parts of the park.

But good intentions aside, the participants enjoyed many frills that the homeless seldom experience.

They had round-the-clock access to the bathrooms and water fountains at the park. Their meal, chitchat and activities were all accompanied by infectious music, provided by a stereo complete with tape and CD decks. And a Winston-Salem police officer stood watch over the group to keep them safe throughout the night.

Organizers were the first to admit that no matter how hard they tried, they could only create a slight simulation of what it is like to be homeless. They say unless you actually live through homelessness, it is impossible to truly understand the situation. "Our intent is not to try to re-create a homeless person's lifestyle but to give people an idea of what it would be like," said Aisha Dew, a Salem student and event coordinator.

The event was far from a party for the students. After dinner, they wrote letters to U.S. Senators Jesse Helms and John Edwards urging them to push for programs for the homeless.

They were also treated to a host of speakers, including employees and residents from local homeless shelters, an official from NCH and Mayor Jack Cavanagh, who stopped by the event to show his support.

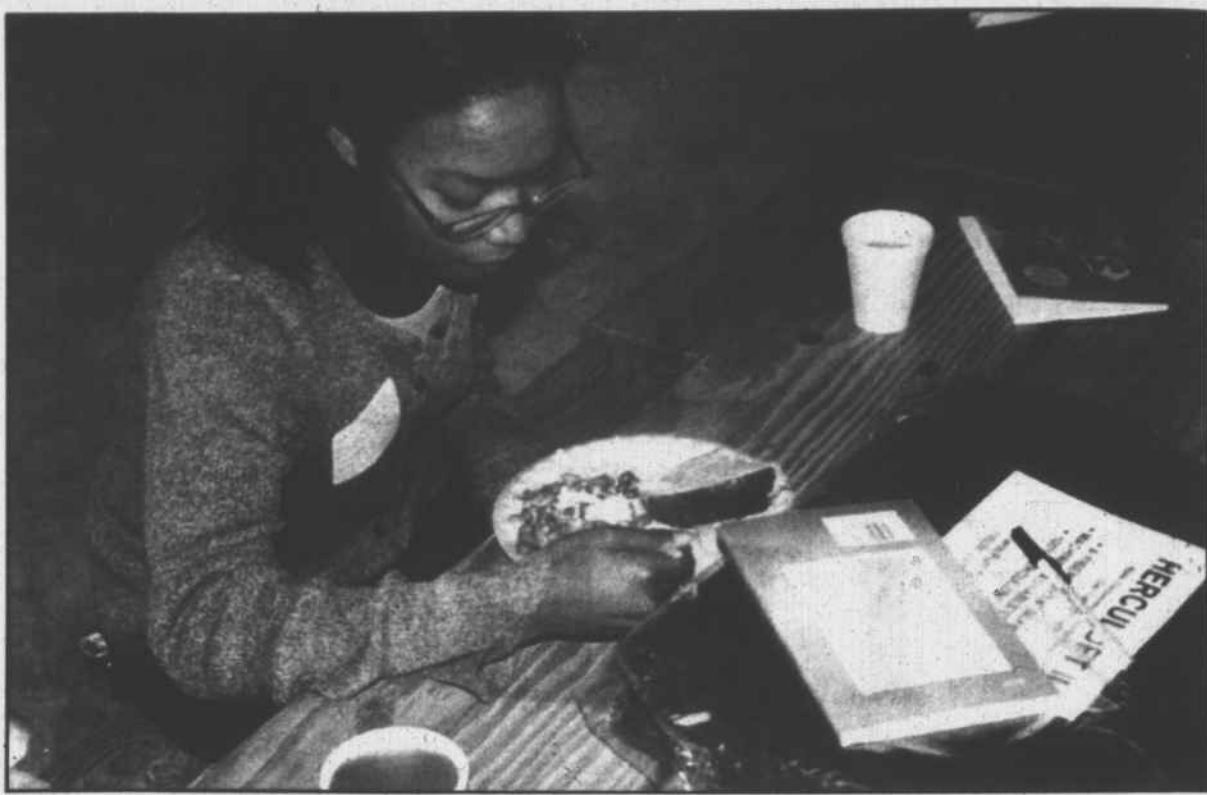


Photo by T. Kevin Walker

Keisha Bolden, a freshman at N.C. School of the Arts, eats beans, rice and bread. Organizers wanted the students to experience a homeless shelter-type meal.

"What resources we have with the five colleges we have here," Cavanagh said proudly, quickly scanning the faces of many of the students. "We have never seen the schools come together like this."

The students had various reasons for coming to the event. Some said they'd seen the horrors of homelessness firsthand and it had left a lasting impression. Others say they grew up shielded from the problem but wanted to come out and do their bit for society.

Jeff Hann, a senior at High Point University, joined members of Alpha Phi Omega, a fraternal community service organization, at Hobby Park.

"I'm not sure what to expect tonight," he said looking toward the low-trimmed grass that would serve as his bed. "I grew up going camping a lot, so now it will be camping minus the tent."

Keisha Bolden and Liz Sargeant, both freshmen at N.C. School of the Arts, prayed that rain wouldn't set in to accompany the already 45-degree temperature.

But even with the undesirable weather conditions, they said they didn't regret giving up their dorm room for the night.

"I want to help other people; and this is a way we can do that," Bolden said.

Jessica Atkinson, a Salem senior, said although issues like date rape and affirmative action dominate the political landscape of most colleges today, the plight of the homeless has not completely vanished, especially for those who have known people who were homeless, or close to it.

"I think it all depends on who you are. Whatever your experiences have been will dictate what your big issues are, whether it's drugs, rape...Your focus tends to be on the issue that most affects your life," she said.

Michael Stoops, the director of field organizing projects for NCH, has crisscrossed the country speaking at events like "One Night Without a Home."

On this night, Stoops brought along a slide show that depicted homelessness at its ugliest. Stoops said events like the "One Night" project do good, if only to show people that the homeless problem is alive and well.

"Having an event like this shows people that homelessness is a year-round issue. Often we only think about homeless people at Christmas, Thanksgiving and

Easter," he said.

Stoops, who has visited Winston-Salem several times before, gave the city high marks for its many homeless programs. He also praised the city's police force, which he says doesn't harass and hassle homeless people like cops in other cities.

But nationwide, as the number of homeless people tops three million, Stoops said far too often organizations are putting a Band-Aid on the problem of homelessness. But it's a problem that he says requires major surgery.

"We've come a long way in 20 years, but it's going to take more than putting people in shelters and giving them a meal," he said. "It's going to take constant job training and counseling; people have to realize that."

Although the students packed up and returned to their homes, the "One Night" project didn't end at 8 a.m. Saturday.

Holthouser plans to take the plight of the homeless to local schools. Organizers of the event will sponsor a poetry and essay contest among middle and high school students to inspire teens to think about the problem of homelessness.

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