

Roundtable backs out of C Kids Day, talks Y2K

By PAUL COLLINS
THE CHRONICLE

Two days before the second annual C Kids Day youth summit, some members of the Black Leadership Roundtable of Winston-Salem/Forsyth Forsyth County expressed opposition to the summit because ultraconservative Armstrong Williams was one of the scheduled speakers.

The discussion took place at a meeting of the roundtable last Thursday night after Tabitha Bell, a member of the roundtable and coordinator of the youth summit, gave a report about the upcoming summit.

Bell reported that, because the executive committee of the roundtable had expressed opposition last month to Williams, "I'm not doing it (the summit) under the Black Leadership Roundtable."

She was proceeding under the auspices of an organization called C Kids, a subsidiary of an organization called Chronicles 29. She is executive director of C Kids and Chronicles 29, both of which put on wholesome entertainment, arts and educational activities.

Williams is a regular on talk shows nationwide, a syndicated columnist who appears in more than 100 newspapers and the host of his own Washington-D.C.-based radio talk show "The Right Side with Armstrong Williams." Some local African American leaders have condemned Williams' ultraconservative views and cited a sexual harassment suit filed against Williams by a male employee (a suit Williams says has been dropped).

At the roundtable meeting last Thursday night, Bell said of Williams: "He is very opinionated. His opinions are sometimes not suitable and not acceptable by a lot of African Americans and Caucasians alike."

But Bell said that Williams was only a small part of the summit, and she thought too much focus was being placed on him. Bell said that the youth summit needed to take place because children are homeless, children are hungry, children are dying. "We can't get hung up on the speaker."

Two other people - an official from the U.S. Department of Labor and an official from the N.C. Department of Labor - were scheduled to speak at the summit about labor laws affecting youths, Bell said.

Khalid Griggs, co-convenor of the roundtable, said: "I'm going to try to put this as tactfully as I'm capable of putting it... (It was) the clear decision on the part of the roundtable this event was going to stop. The decision of the executive committee (of the roundtable) is being circumvented by getting another sponsor."

Griggs said that Tabitha Bell "is C Kids." He said, "Putting it (the youth forum) under C Kids, and the same person is responsible for both... to me it is circumventing the decision made by this organization to can the program."

Joycelyn Johnson, a member of the roundtable and a Winston-Salem alderwoman, said that she, too, understood that "we would not have anything to do with it."

Bell responded, "We can't can a program that's not just ours." She said other organizations are involved, including the Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Human Relations Commission, which provided input and support.

"Our children are dying and anybody who can help our children needs to have a platform," Bell said.

Griggs said he agreed with Bell philosophically about the need to help children, but he disagreed with having Williams as a speaker.

Johnson said she was concerned that the human relations department was involved in a program in which the ultraconservative Williams was a speaker, "without the other side" being represented.

The roundtable took no official position about the summit during the public portion of the meeting, but near the end of the meeting the roundtable went into closed session, then adjourned; then the executive committee of the roundtable went into closed session, then adjourned. After the meetings, several members of the roundtable and its executive committee declined to comment about the roundtable's official position about the summit.

In an interview Monday, Bell said that the summit took place on Saturday and Williams and two labor department officials were speakers. Bell said that Williams' speech was inspirational, not political.

"His general topic was, if you respect your parents, your days will be long and more fruitful. Put God first," she said.

She acknowledged that the executive committee of the roundtable had a special meeting last month in which members of the committee said they could not support the summit because Armstrong was going to be a speaker, and the roundtable was "backing out" as one of the organizations helping put on the summit.

After the committee meeting, Bell said, she talked with some of the other organizations helping coordinate the summit and some of the entertainment groups scheduled to perform, and they told her that they would stand by whatever decision she made about holding the summit.

She said she decided to stand by Williams. "I try to teach children leadership (skills)," she said. What kind of message would she be sending the youths if "at the last minute I say I don't want to do it (the summit)? I had to back that speaker... I stood by him. I believed in him."

Bell said she heard Williams give a motivational speech in 1996. "I knew nothing about his political views. I said kids need to hear this."

Bell said that Williams, too, stood by C Kids Day by going ahead with his plans to be a speaker at the youth summit despite the opposition.

Last year, the three coordinating organizations involved with C Kids Day were the Junior Roundtable (the teen committee of the Black Leadership Roundtable; Bell is chairman of the Junior Roundtable), Chronicles 29 and Children Against Racism and Violence.

This year, because of the controversy surrounding Williams being a speaker, the Junior Roundtable and Children Against Racism and Violence withdrew as coordinating organizations, Bell said, noting that she thought that was unfortunate for the youths.

"I had to do all the program by myself with input and support of the Human Relations Commission," Bell said.

In other business at the roundtable meeting last Thursday night, Kevin S. Lyons, a civil engineering supervisor for the city of Winston-Salem and a member of the city's Y2K committee, said that most of the city's systems have been tested and are Y2K compliant. The remaining systems are scheduled to be tested by the end of September.

"We do not anticipate problems with any mission critical items; service disruption is not anticipated," Lyons said. "Contingency plans are in place in the event of a computer or power failure."



Johnson



Griggs



Photo by Damon E. Ford

Belinda Tate arranges the sculpture "Dogan Dancer" at the Diggs Gallery. Tate, a Winston-Salem native was named art director of the gallery last month.

Winston-Salem native takes helm at Diggs

By DAMON FORD
THE CHRONICLE

Winston-Salem State University's Diggs Art Gallery has a new art director, Belinda Tate.

The Winston-Salem native takes over for Brooke Anderson, who accepted a new position in New York. Tate will officially begin work on June 1 and is very excited to do so.

"This is nice because the people I enjoy can become a part of what I do," she said. "My family can come to the gallery and participate in some of the things I do."

Her first art exhibition at Diggs will kick off with a reception June 3 and will remain open until Sept. 4. Some of the featured art works include paintings by Synthia Saint James and sculptures by Augie N'Kele and Greensboro's own Mark Brown.

"I'm very happy to be able to make a contribution to the university, the students and the broader community through the reach Winston-Salem State has locally," Tate said. "It's important to me that the Diggs

Gallery has become such an important vehicle for art education not only in Winston-Salem but in the state. I'm honored to become a part of that tradition."

Already Tate has formulated a few new ideas for Diggs, including broadening the artistic scope of the university. "We've already had great art work to display. The schedule for the next two years is absolutely fabulous in terms of the art that's coming here, but there are other things that can be done in helping the audience interpret and learn more from the art," she said.

One way to accomplish this is through theater in which actors and actresses interpret art. Another is with music and movement, which would encompass some dance programs.

"As a cultural and artistic institution, those kinds of things are viable to a place like this," she said.

Though she worked in banking for five years, Tate has an extensive background in art.

While studying for a degree in art at Yale University, she took a course in British art and architecture at the Paul Mellon Center in London, England, one summer.

Later she interned at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., creating a directory of African American art resources for international exhibitions and assisting the head curator on three exhibitions for U.S. ambassadors to France, Botswana and Jamaica. During the school year Tate worked in the Yale Center for British Art.

Since returning to Winston-Salem in 1994, she has served on the boards of directors of Diggs Gallery and Delta Fine Arts.

Tate says her interest to look further into the field was piqued when she was given the opportunity to learn about African American women during The Reconstruction. Many of these women, such as sculptor Augustus Savage, became artists and are considered pioneers for

women in the art field.

"I began to look at these early African American artists and saw them as heroes doing non-traditional things, and I had never heard their stories before," she said. "I did not know that there were women who were leaving slavery and going to Paris to study in the major art salons. It was a part of my history that had been kept from me."

From these women Tate felt a sense of duty to perpetuate the study of art for others. More important, she says there's a vast history that African Americans can learn about themselves through art.

In her eyes a picture is worth a thousand words.

"It's one thing to read about the horrors of slavery (or) the injustices of civil rights, but it's another thing to see it conveyed in a painting, photograph or in an artistic form," Tate said. "It may touch something in you that may bring forth an emotional response that reading it in a magazine article wouldn't."

6:47 p.m.

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CORRECTION

In a photo that appeared in last week's issue of The Chronicle, Vanard Valentine was incorrectly identified. Valentine is the stepfather of Telisca Penn, Iota Phi Lambda's Miss Debutante '99.

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