



Black Theatre Festival will be 'marvtastic'

By JERI YOUNG
THE CHRONICLE

Forget March Madness. The real frenzy for members of the North Carolina Black Repertory Company hits in July and ends the first week of August. At stake is the company's biennial National Black Theatre Festival.

The festival will draw an estimated 40,000 theater enthusiasts, critics and scholars to the city for

five days of productions by the best black theaters in the nation.

More than 20 companies will have a chance to showcase their talents at more than 13 venues across the city. This year's lineup includes legendary actress Ruby Dee starring in her play "My One Good Nerve: A Visit with Ruby Dee." Based on Dee's book by the same name, the play is a compilation of short stories, humor and poetry and has garnered stellar reviews on both coasts. The festival, slated to kick off

with a star-studded gala Aug. 2, is a little more than a month away, and Larry Leon Hamlin, NCBRC's artistic director and founder, is starting to feel a little pressure.

"You should see us at 2 a.m. or 3 a.m. gathered around a table," Hamlin said with a chuckle. "The phones aren't ringing off the hook, and we can get some real work done. You can really go over things with a fine-tooth comb."

This year marks the 10th anniversary for the festival and the

20th anniversary of Hamlin's repertory company. For the Reidsville native, both milestones are nothing short of "marvtastic" - Hamlin's own creative combination of the words "marvelous" and "fantastic."

The idea of holding a festival was born in the late '80s when Hamlin was researching an article on black theater companies in the South for a magazine. Hamlin thought there were only 50-60 black companies in the nation. To his surprise, he found more than 200. And

most of them suffered from a chronic lack of funding and a grossly inaccurate reputation for lacking professional talent.

"I was touched by the screams of frustration from the black theater companies," Hamlin said. "Most didn't have office space, money or even the bare necessities."

Hamlin also found that black theater companies were closing at an alarming rate, and most of the companies teetered on financial

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CHRONICLE

1974 - Celebrating 25 Years - 1999

THURSDAY, JULY 1, 1999

Thousands gather for AME Zion conference

Bishop stresses need for church leadership

By DAMON FORD
THE CHRONICLE

Last week, thousands of members of the African Methodist Episcopal Zion church gathered in Winston-Salem for the 109th Session of the Western North Carolina Annual Conference.

The six-day conference was filled with meetings, committee reports and worship services. The Rev. James Sloan and his congregation at Goler Metropolitan AME Zion served as the host church.

"I thought (the conference) was a tremendous success by way of attendance and issues dealt with," said the Rev. Horace Walser, presiding elder of the Winston-Salem District.

The conference started off with educational workshops Tuesday morning and ended Sunday with a morning worship service at the Benton Convention Center.

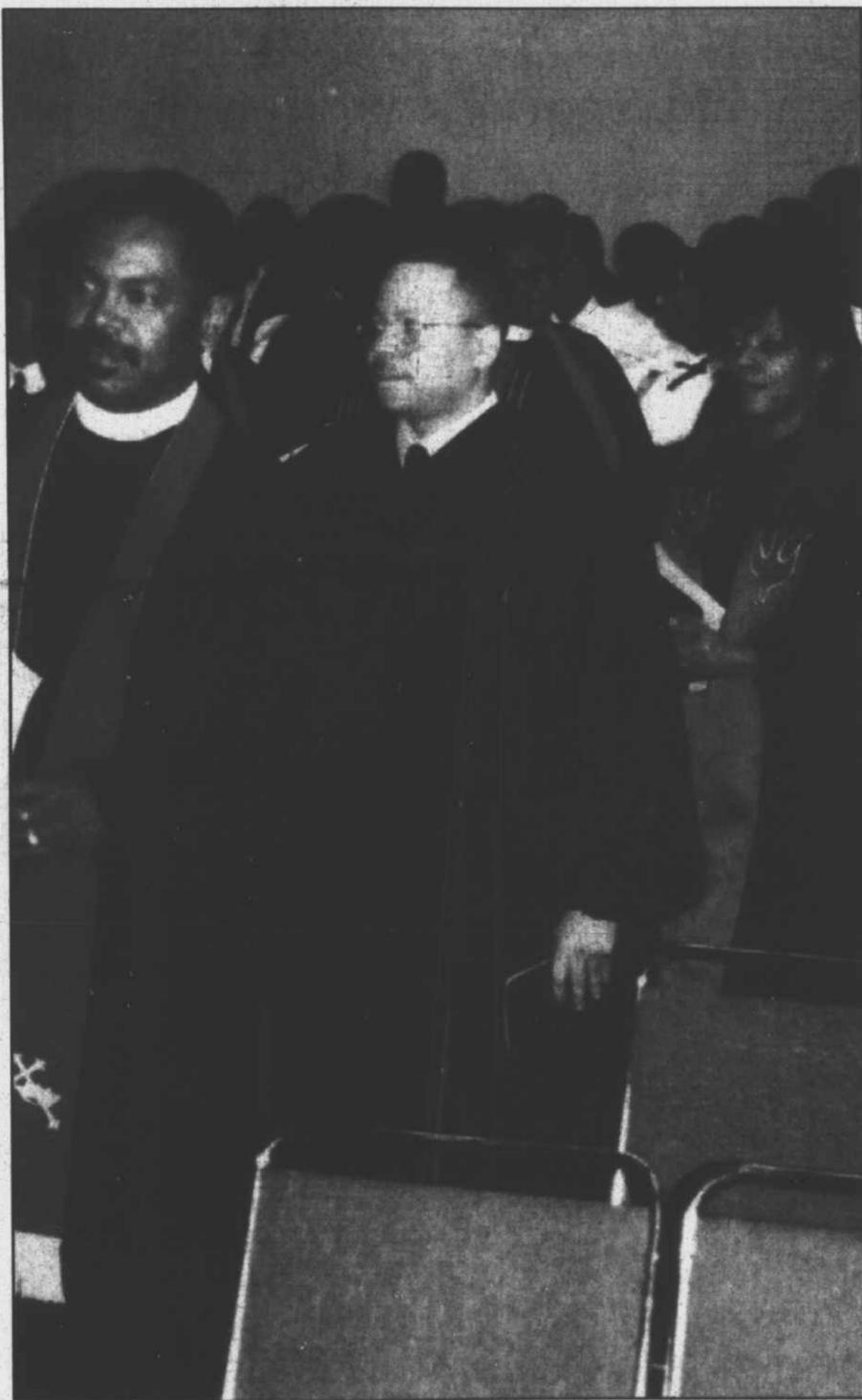
"The highlight of the conference is the opportunity to fellowship with other believers and members of the AME Zion Church," said Anita Harvell, a conference delegate from Union Bethel AME Zion in Charlotte. "The unity of all our brothers and sisters in the Lord is definitely something to be proud about."

Nearly 135 churches make up the Western AME Zion Conference. The churches are broken down into six districts in Statesville, Salisbury, Lincolnton, Charlotte, North Charlotte and Winston-Salem, which has 21 churches in and around the city.

Across the world more than 1 million people are a part of the AME Zion church. The beginnings of America's oldest black church go back to 1796 when a group of slaves were told they were no longer able to worship with their masters.

Historic black figures such as Harriet Tubman and Sojourner Truth were staunch

See AME Zion on A11



AME Zion ministers march into the Benton Convention Center for Sunday's closing worship service. Thousands of members of the church gathered in Winston-Salem last week for the denomination's annual conference.

1998-1999 End of Grade Proficiency Percentages for Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools

	African American		White	
	1998	1999	1998	1999
Grade 3 to Grade 4	35.3	45.4	78.9	85.3
Grade 4 to Grade 5	45.0	54.5	82.3	86.7
Grade 5 to Grade 6	47.2	48.2	83.9	82.4
Grade 6 to Grade 7	42.5	50.8	80.3	85.0
Grade 7 to Grade 8	43.8	49.4	77.5	82.0

Blacks are narrowing the gap with whites on test scores

By T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

It's been a long time coming, but school system officials say change is finally afoot.

Year by year and percentage point by percentage point, African American students here and across the state are closing in on the test scores of their white counterparts.

The school system - after being dogged by months of not-so-glorious publicity - decided to create some positive advertisement for themselves, holding an early morning news conference last week to tout the impressive strides black students have made over the years.

"Our African American students have been gaining faster than our white students in almost every grade level," said Superintendent Don Martin.

Martin is referring to the percentage of black students who have been proficient on end-of-grade math and reading tests. The end-of-grade tests are administered yearly in grades three to eight.

The figures that the school system released show that the percentage of black students who are proficient on the tests is growing faster than the percentage of whites who are proficient.

The results are not a shot in the dark, officials say. Using a "longitudinal comparison," which officials say is the most unbiased way to present the data, the data measures the growth of the same students over a three-year period, from 1996 to 1999.

"There is no masking of poor scores here," Martin said, speaking to those who may find the figures too good to be



Brown



Martin



Johnson

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Black farmers appeal settlement

Group says loophole in decree renders it moot

By DAMON FORD
THE CHRONICLE

A group of black farmers is appealing a controversial settlement aimed at making up for years of discrimination by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. The Durham-based Land Loss Prevention Project and the Lawyers Committee for Civil Rights, based in Washington, D.C., issued a notice of appeal earlier this month of the \$350 million consent decree approved by U.S. District Court Judge Paul Friedman.

Stephon Bowens, executive director of LLPP,



Grant

See Black Farmers on A11



A group of youths practice their swing Tuesday at Reynolds Park Golf Course. The youths took part in a golf clinic sponsored by school board member Victor Johnson.

The next Tiger?

School board member teaches youths life lessons and golf during month-long clinic

By T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

When Victor Johnson joined the city-county school board in 1996, he went in search of a way to make a positive impact on young people. Johnson said sitting on the board is only a small way to show a strong commitment to the children he's charged with educating.

He wanted to walk the walk and talk the talk. His search was brief. When it ended, Vic Johnson's Golf Clinic began. The month-long summer clinic has been going strong for the last three years, teaching dozens of 8- to 14-year-olds the ins and outs of a sport that is foreign to many of them.

"It is the only sport black kids do not play," Johnson said. About 80 young people have signed up for the clinic this year. They hail from public housing communities and various churches and recreation

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