

# Despite all the controversy, ESR director upbeat

By T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

Colorful, beautiful flowers sprout in Twana Wellman's mental garden.

They are nourished every time she sees the lobby of the Experiment in Self-Reliance packed with clients, and they grow with each of the agency's success stories.

But her lovely garden is not without weeds. They manifest each time critics take aim at her beloved ESR, uprooting some of her flowers

and making others eyesores.

For the past two months, the weeds have been at battle with the flowers and, at times, it has seemed that the weeds have had the upper hand.

But Wellman says the garden will endure.

"I won't get messed up along the way with the weeds that are in the flower bed," she said. "I have to enjoy the smell and the fragrance of the flowers; the weeds will take care of themselves."

Wellman - the executive director

of ESR, a nonprofit that helps the homeless and working poor, is taking the agency's most recent setback with her trademark optimism. During a four-hour marathon meeting last week, the Board of Aldermen rejected a proposal that would have awarded ESR a nearly half million dollar contract to provide services to those in the welfare-to-work program.

The money is part of a federal grant, but ESR's bid for the contract had to be OK'd by the city's Workforce Development agency

and the aldermen. The Workforce Development board voted to grant the contract to ESR, but the majority of the aldermen want to explore other options.

Although technically the agency has really not lost anything - the contract would have meant new funds for the agency - Wellman says she is disappointed and surprised that a majority of the board did not like the idea of awarding the agency the contract.

"I'm frustrated by it. People don't really understand how this

impacts the people we serve," Wellman said Monday in her office with ESR board member C.P. Booker present. "This particular pot of money would have helped us reach out to people with specific needs."

A splintered Board of Aldermen voted to send the proposal back to Workforce Development, the city agency that first picked ESR to receive the contract. The agency will come up with a seldom-used voucher proposal for the services, in

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WINSTON-SALEM GREENSBORO HIGH POINT

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# CHRONICLE

1974 - Celebrating 25 Years - 1999

THURSDAY, JULY 15, 1999

## BLR holds gala

Organization vows to continue to serve black community

By T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

Amid the steady beat of African drums, the city came together for a mammoth birthday bash last week.

The Black Leadership Roundtable of Winston-Salem and Forsyth County celebrated its two-year anniversary at the Urban League on Friday, with well over a hundred members and well wishers.

It was an evening of elegant pageantry and great fanfare, where African attire did more to brighten the room than the dozens of scattered candles placed on tables.

"This is our party," announced

N.C. Rep. Larry Womble, convener of the Roundtable. "When you come to our meetings, you will think that we are very, very serious all the time... But we celebrate one month out of the year."

And celebrate they did. Ordinary folks, politicians, business people and ministers packed the party. They talked, ate and danced the night away.

The tone - or rhythm - of the event was set by the Otesha Creative Dance and Music Ensemble. Members of the ensemble pounded Congo drums as others danced to the rhythms.

The audience clapped and cheered its approval, but unknown to some of them, they became part of the show.

"In the African tradition there are no spectators," Otesha member Hashim Saleh said - as members of the ensemble grabbed party-goers and led them to the dance floor.

Fittingly, BLR's special guest for this year's bash was Rachel Gbenyon-Diggs, the Liberian ambassador to the United States. Gbenyon-Diggs - glorious and majestic in



Womble



Photo by T. Kevin Walker

Liberian Ambassador Rachel Gbenyon-Diggs signs an autograph for a youngster during a reception last week. Gbenyon-Diggs talked with local leaders and participated in a town hall meeting.

## Liberians grill ambassador at meeting

By T. KEVIN WALKER  
THE CHRONICLE

The Liberian ambassador to the United States urged Liberians in the "Diaspora" to bury whatever feelings of discontent they have about the presidency of Charles Taylor and focus solely on the monumental task of rebuilding their war-ravaged homeland.

"Many of the problems we have in Liberia, I don't feel are Taylor-made," said Rachel Gbenyon-Diggs, who was appointed by Taylor in 1997. "The Liberian people gave us Charles Taylor. There is nothing any one of us can do about it until we go to the ballot box, as the constitution calls for."

Gbenyon-Diggs' words came

during a town hall meeting Saturday at Goler AME Zion Church. The meeting was one of the ambassador's last stops on her whirlwind tour through the state and Winston-Salem. A day earlier, she arrived in Raleigh and met with Gov. Jim Hunt; she then addressed the General Assembly.

After arriving in Winston-Salem in the afternoon, Gbenyon-Diggs met with Mayor Jack Cavanaugh and had several meetings with local business owners and community leaders. Last Friday night, Gbenyon-Diggs was the guest of honor at the Black Leadership Roundtable's second anniversary celebration.

But her appearance at Goler was different from the others.

The crowd of 45 or so who attended were overwhelming Liberians. While the mostly American crowds that Gbenyon-Diggs had faced the day before seemed awed simply by her title and majestic elegance, the Liberians came to talk serious business.

For more than three hours, they grilled the ambassador about the state of Liberia and the Taylor administration - an administration that many of them say is unstable and violent.

Gbenyon-Diggs knew the meeting would not be a walk in the park. During her introduction statement, she vowed to answer every question truthfully, and while acknowledging that she was a Taylor appointee,

Gbenyon-Diggs said she came as a representative of the nation of Liberia, and not necessarily of Taylor.

"I'm the messenger, and I bring the message... Usually the messenger gets beheaded," she said. "Liberia does not belong to Taylor. Liberia does not belong to me. Liberia belongs to all of us."

Taylor ascended to power in 1990, after forces led by him overthrew President Samuel Doe.

Doe - who came to power himself 10 years earlier by way of a coup - was killed.

Doe's killing led to years of civil unrest, but a cease-fire has been in place in the country since

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## Agencies give relief from heat

By PAUL COLLINS  
THE CHRONICLE

Even though it's been a bit chilly lately, hot weather is coming back. And some local agencies are providing air conditioners for people with medical needs.

Sunnyside Ministry of the Moravian Church has a new program this year that is providing air-conditioning units for people with medical problems who cannot afford to buy them.

"We have provided six air-conditioners so far, and we only have about six left... They are reserved for very young children and elderly people who have severe medical problems," director Roma Combs said. "We've had to turn down some requests because the medical need wasn't severe enough."

Sunnyside Ministry serves the 27107 and 27127 zip codes in Forsyth County and some areas in northern Davidson County.

Applicants must present a letter from a doctor that they need air conditioning because of a severe medical problem; a picture identification; something with their Social Security number printed on it; a piece of mail showing the applicant's address; verifiable information about the entire household's income (such as pay-check stubs); receipts showing how up to 80 percent of the income has been spent in the last 30 days.

Sunnyside Ministry also interviews the applicant and verifies the information on the application.

If an applicant qualifies, an air-conditioning unit is provided at no charge.

The air-conditioning unit is small; it can cool only one room.

"We don't usually have this kind of hot weather," Combs said of the recent heat wave. "It's really dangerous for some people."

A lot of elderly people who live on fixed income face a dilemma when hot weather comes: they must choose between running their air conditioning (if they have air conditioning) and buying medicine, Combs said.

Sunnyside Ministry also provides free 20-inch window fans to people who qualify. Sunnyside has already distributed 20 or so fans this year, Combs said. Sunnyside Min-

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## Fiery Civil rights leader, James Farmer, 79, dies

By J.Y. SMITH  
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

James L. Farmer, 79, the founder of the Congress of Racial Equality and the moving force behind some of the most dramatic episodes of the civil rights era of the 1960s, died yesterday at a hospital in Fredericksburg, Va.

No further details were available, but Mr. Farmer had diabetes, which led to the amputation of his legs.

Mr. Farmer was a preacher by training, a pacifist by conviction and a union organizer by profession. In the Nixon administration, he served as an assistant secretary in what is now the Department of Health and Human Services. He also was an author and lecturer. In later life,

despite his ailments and the loss of his eyesight, he became one of the most popular professors in the history of Mary Washington College in Fredericksburg.

As a civil rights leader during some of the peak years of the movement, Mr. Farmer was one of the "Big Four," ranked with the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., the head of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference; Whitney Young, executive director of the National Urban League; and Roy Wilkins, of the NAACP.

The moral foundation of his career was a belief in "the beloved community" envisioned by King, an integrated society in which all races share a sense of humanity and justice. His means for achieving it was

nonviolent protest in the manner of Mohandas K. Gandhi, leader of India's struggle for independence.

Although most of his work was in the mean and dangerous streets of a segregated America, Mr. Farmer became a familiar figure in the corridors of power - he claimed credit for suggesting to President Lyndon B. Johnson the outlines of affirmative action, a centerpiece of Johnson's Great Society program.

In 1961, Mr. Farmer won national attention by organizing a Freedom Ride from Washington to Jackson, Miss. He and a dozen companions challenged a reluctant federal government to enforce Supreme Court decisions outlawing segregation in interstate bus facilities.

The episode was a defining

moment. Television carried unforgettable images of a burning bus and of racist mobs attacking peaceful demonstrators. Volunteers flocked to the South. Pressure mounted to dismantle Jim Crow laws. Unable to remain on the sidelines, the Kennedy administration joined the struggle, and ultimately the infamous "white" and "colored" signs that labeled terminal facilities went down.

In January 1958, President Clinton awarded Mr. Farmer the Medal of Freedom, the nation's highest civilian honor.

Mr. Farmer started CORE in 1942 with an interracial group of students at the University of Chicago. Applying Gandhian principles, its volunteers would "substitute bodies for exhortation" in fighting racial

prejudice, in Mr. Farmer's words.

CORE members sat at tables at a segregated Chicago restaurant and insisted on being served. Mr. Farmer believed this was the first of the civil rights sit-ins. Over the years, CORE, a thoroughly integrated group, targeted barbershops, swimming pools, community centers and housing developments. There were voter registration drives.

In 1947, CORE moved into the South with a freedom ride called a "Journey of Reconciliation." Sixteen CORE members set out to test enforcement of a Supreme Court ruling that desegregated seating on interstate buses. Mr. Farmer, busy with union work, was unable to take part. The group was arrested in

See Farmer on A2



Farmer



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