

## Locals

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she will send directly to Princeville officials.

"This is what I need to do," she said. "This is what we all need to do."

Two weeks ago, she knew little about the town. Now, Muhammad has become an expert on the town's history, which she rattles off with ease.

Founded in 1865 by freed slaves, the town is believed to be the oldest town in the nation chartered by blacks. Before Floyd, the town boasted a historic community building, town hall and cemetery.

But the proud town wasn't without its problems. The vast majority of the town's 2,100 residents have an annual income of less than \$11,000. Fifty-four percent of the town's families are headed by single females.

Fifty-six percent of its senior citizens, many of whom have lived in the town their entire lives, live below the poverty level.

The flooding made life even more difficult. Homes, businesses and the town's historic landmarks were lost in a deluge that crested at more than 37 feet.

Even the town's dead were not immune: The floodwaters unearthed caskets from the cemetery, creating an environmental nightmare and destroying the oldest portions of the cemetery.

"Princeville is so important," Muhammad said. "We need to know about this place and help these people. Princeville is something that really needs to be saved. It's a reminder of where we come from. It's a definition of where we can go

in the future if we're just mindful of that."

Muhammad isn't alone in her bid to restore Princeville to its rightful place in history.

The Black Leadership Roundtable, local churches and a host of organizations are collecting items and money for the tiny town.

The predominantly black town has finally found a place in the hearts of African Americans, local leaders say.

"(Blacks) have a moral obligation to help our own," said School Board member Vic Johnson. "We've never done this like we should. We have cities like Winston-Salem, Greensboro and Charlotte making big dollars and we need to be helping out."

Johnson has spearheaded efforts to raise money at his church, St. Paul United Methodist, and is active in the fund-raising efforts for Princeville. The retired educator says that the flood and its aftermath have generated a history lesson for blacks about the town.

"We're still in the teaching process," Johnson said. "Even as an adult, I never really knew about Princeville. But when it was hit, it gave me a chance to go back and learn as much as I could about it. That was my responsibility. My other responsibility is to teach other African Americans about it."

And across the county, blacks are taking the message to heart.

During Monday night's Board of Aldermen meeting, the board passed a resolution to add Princeville to the list of Eastern North Carolina cities it will provide aid to during what experts believe will be a long, arduous return to normalcy.

The resolution, introduced by Alderwoman Joycelyn Johnson, passed with little debate.

"All of these cities down in this area are saying we have problems, but not like Princeville," Johnson said. "They did that without any coercion because they realized (Princeville) needed so much."

City officials are unsure what form the aid will take. Already, law enforcement officers and paramedics have been sent to the area and city officials are prepared to do what's necessary to get the town back on its feet.

"They just need help across the board," said Johnson, who has been in touch with elected officials from Princeville. "This is not a high-wealth community."

Larry Womble, convener of the Black Leadership Roundtable of Winston-Salem/Forsyth County, says any efforts to help the town are needed. Already, the roundtable has begun a fund drive that has netted more than \$3,000 for the town.

A similar effort sponsored by the Minister's Conference has raised more than \$35,000 through donations from local churches.

"An immediate impact would be some money," Womble said. "We're going to take the money down there and let the people decide how it will be used."

For the rest of the week, Muhammad and her trash can will work MLK and New Walkertown. This weekend, she'll hit the road, working Livingstone College's homecoming in Salisbury, N.C.

"We're going to trot our trash can on down there and see what we can get," she said.

Johnson said the important thing



Photo by Bruce Chapman

Above, a house in Princeville is surrounded by receding floodwaters. Below, Naasira Muhammad collects change at the corner of Martin Luther King Drive and New Walkertown Road.

is to help out in some way.

"This is us we're dealing with," he said.

Donations for the Black Leadership Roundtable's Princeville Hurricane Relief Fund should be sent to P.O. Box 1354, Winston-Salem, N.C. 27102. Checks should be made out to Princeville Hurricane Relief Fund. Naasira Muhammad will collect donations for Funds for the People of Princeville, North Carolina at the corner of Martin Luther King Drive and New Walkertown Road on Thursday and Friday. Donations may also be made to the Princeville Historical Society at Mechanics & Farmers Bank.



Photo by Jeri Young

## Computers

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According to the report, black spending on Internet services jumped 140 percent from 1997 to 1998, compared with a 57 percent increase for whites. The growth rate for computer hardware purchases was 196 percent for blacks and 6 percent in white households, while black spending on cable television services rose 14 percent in comparison with 9 percent growth for whites.

Total earned income for black households was \$441 billion last year, an increase of 12 percent over the 1997 amount, the report says. Target Market News' findings are based on records from the U.S. Department of Commerce and the Labor Department, said Ken Smikle, president of the firm.

Smikle said he hopes the purchasing statistics will prompt the computer industry to close the so-called "digital divide" created by the nonexistence of high-speed Internet capabilities in certain low-income communities.

"The digital divide is the half-empty portion of the glass," Smikle said. "I think the computer marketplace and corporate America need to understand the enormous opportunity they have in blacks who are immersed in the Internet and all of the technology involved in it. Hopefully the computer industry won't have to go through a hard learning curve before they take advantage of this market."

The report comes one week after a protest against CompUSA prompted a promise from the giant computer retailer to hire a black-owned advertising firm.

The CompUSA matter stemmed from a dispute a year ago involving the Katz Media Group, which sells advertising time for hundreds of radio stations nationwide. Katz issued a memo advising clients to limit advertising on stations targeting black or Latino audiences because "advertisers want prospects, not suspects."

"The Tom Joyner Morning Show," a nationally syndicated radio program owned by ABC Radio Networks, launched the protest 10 weeks ago. To demonstrate buying might, scores of listeners sent CompUSA cash register receipts from their purchases at the urging of host Joyner and Black Entertainment Television commentator Tavis Smiley.

In return, CompUSA is offering a 10 percent store discount to all those who mailed receipts.

## Newsbriefs

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The teachers claim that they did not receive the benefit package they were promised by the Beninois officials who sent them to Nigeria. They also said they did not get the health coverage, which was paid for by French and Belgian aid organizations.

The only money the teachers said they received during the 1998-1999 academic year was a salary advance from the Nigerian government. According to them, Benin did not pay its share of their contracted salary.

Living and working conditions were so harsh that when the teachers returned to Benin for vacation, they spoke out publicly about their experiences. — Ali Idrissou-Toure

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