



Tadzia Treadwell speaks directly to the Class of 2001.

Photo by Kevin Walker

**Construction**

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munity Development Block Grants and The Department of Housing and Urban Development after the federal government became concerned that cities that receive federal money for housing programs put too much emphasis on brick and mortar and not enough on people.

Richie Brooks, director of Housing and Neighborhood Services, the agency that oversees the program, says his department has never been a brick and mortar operation.

"We want to provide opportunities to persons that really want to change their lives," said Brooks. "We have the belief that if we can touch one person, we have been successful."

In recent years, the program has increased its focus on job placement after the graduates complete the program. The placement rate for graduates is near 100 percent.

Some have found jobs with city agencies; others have found work with private companies. The program is trying to form more partnerships with local construction companies, for employment and educational purposes. The graduates have benefited by visiting and working at actual construction sites.

Quivette Powell, a 2001 graduate, has already landed a job with the city. Powell admitted that at one point she never thought she would hold the certificate that she caressed

last week like a newborn.

"I really didn't think I was going to finish this class. It was hard so many times for me even to come to class," she said.

Powell's motherly responsibilities (she has three young boys) often clashed with her classwork. She said she kept her eyes on the prize because she wants a better life for her little ones. It's a goal that she believes is obtainable now that she has cleared the first major hurdle.

Graduate Demetrius Wilson said he entered and stuck with the class because he did not like what he was seeing around him. Friends and neighbors were on the wrong side of the law, partaking in seedy activities. He said he knew that if he didn't look for change, he would head down the same road.

"If I didn't join this class, I know that I would be locked or dead," he said, looking down at his framed certificate in wonderment.

Kelly Sparks was given the task of putting the hopes, dreams and experiences of him and his classmates into a compact speech at the graduation ceremony. He told of their many days of frustration and insecurity. He also said that on many days members of the class wanted to give up. Sparks thanked the teachers, counselors, friends and families on behalf of his class. He also expressed the hope that officials say is evident in many of the construction graduates.

"It has been a long time coming, but a change did finally come," Sparks said.

could be NCAA postseason baseball tournaments.

Casinos paid \$360 million in state taxes and fees last year. Mississippi Gaming Association, the casino's lobbying group, endorsed a new flag.

"We thought it was the right thing to do," director Andy Bourland said, citing the racial diversity of the casinos' employees and patrons.

Bourland said he doesn't know what impact a boycott would have on state casinos, some of which belong to companies that operate in Las Vegas and other places.

John Saleeby of Natchez Pilgrimage Tours, umbrella for the state's largest and oldest pilgrimage to antebellum homes, said he doubts a boycott would keep tourists away from Old South attractions.

"I might have my head stuck in the sand or something but I'm not overly concerned about something like that," Saleeby said.

**Church builds bridge during event in Easton community**

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

A bridge is a place or means of connection or transition. We normally think bridges create pathways between great distances. However, some of the most important bridges span only a few miles and are constructed out of the fabric of humanity, not steel. On Saturday, April 28, families from St. Peter's World Outreach Center and the Easton community connected for a fun-filled afternoon and began building what

promises to be a productive relationship that will benefit local residents.

The event took place in the field of Easton Elementary School. The afternoon's activities included a mini-concert featuring lively Latin and reggae music selections, face painting, games and refreshments.

Representatives from St. Peter's Family Life Enrichment Center and St. Peter's Family Support Services were on hand to provide informa-

See Bridge on A8



A family enjoys the activities at the "bridge" event.

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**Flag**

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new flag, saying the Confederate X had branded Mississippi with negative stereotypes.

Mfume praised Gov. Ronnie Musgrove and business leaders for working with the NAACP and other groups for a new banner.

Officials at the University of Mississippi's Institute for Racial Reconciliation had endorsed a new flag. On Wednesday, the institute issued a letter announcing plans for a meeting in June for people who want to work on race relations.

"It is clear that racial divisions still plague our state. We call upon all Mississippians to work to end those divisions once and for all time," the letter said.

The National Collegiate Athletic Association will discuss April 27 whether to cancel future sporting events in states that embrace the Confederate battle flag. At stake



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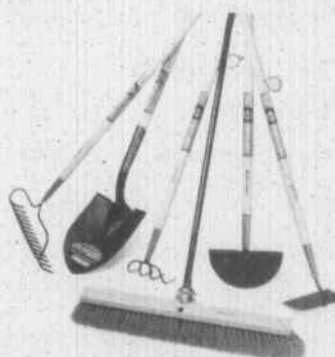
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