

Forum helps former inmates rebuild lives



ESR Executive Director Twana Wellman welcomes participants Tuesday evening at Quality Education Institute.

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD
THE CHRONICLE

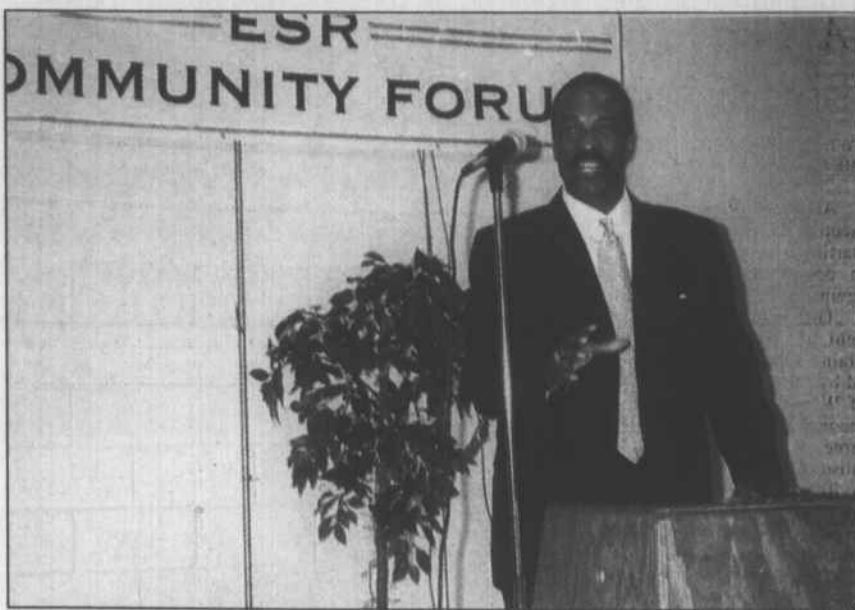
As Bernard Walker walked out of prison six years ago with \$100, a bag of his clothes and a bus ticket, he was sure that the prison guards were betting on his return as he passed through the front gate to freedom. Whether it was six days, six weeks or six months, the guards were convinced Walker would be back in jail.

"The (prison) guards right now are losing money because they're betting that I will come back to prison, but guess what? I'm here," said Rev. Walker of Carver Road Christian Church, who was the guest speaker at Experiment in Self-Reliance's Inmate Re-entry Forum on Tuesday evening.

"The only way that you can beat the system is to stay out of the system," Walker said.

Walker shared his success story, filled with trials and tribulations, of how he acclimated himself back into society after having been incarcerated. After graduating from an ESR program, Walker went on to graduate from Winston-Salem Bible College.

"People did not want to hire me because I had a felony, not only a felony but a federal record for armed bank



The Rev. Bernard Walker says he is proof that not all former inmates are doomed to end up in jails and prisons once they are released. Walker was released six years ago.

robbery. Can you imagine going into an employer's office and sitting down in front of him and telling him you want to work at his corporation and he looks at your record and sees that you were in prison for armed bank robbery?" asked Walker. "He did not see the goals I set for my life...All he saw was a man sitting before him with a record that was detrimental to his life."

Walker candidly spoke of the banks he and several other men robbed in Winston-Salem and Greensboro as well as the teller he shot in the leg during one of the robberies. After fleeing the state and running from the law for a period of time, Walker was arrested and charged with two counts of armed robbery. He was sentenced to 38 years in a maximum-security federal penitentiary. After serving eight years, Walker was released on parole.

"I am not anti-prison. I believe that the prison system is needed. I believe that the court system is needed. I believe that the judicial system is needed. It is imperative

to have those things in place. But I do thank God, that it was in prison that I realized that I had a better life to live," Walker said.

After Walker's remarks, workshops were held with brief instruction on job interviewing, legal issues and establishing credit for individuals with criminal histories. Several agencies also attended as part of the Inmate Re-entry Marketplace, where brochures and information were available in booths for attendees. The Inmate Re-entry Forum was made possible thanks to an ECHO Grant from The Winston-Salem Foundation.

ESR is a United Way agency that strives to eliminate poverty and homelessness through education, advocacy and building economic and social capital. ESR also manages four transitional housing shelters throughout Winston-Salem.

Twana Wellman, executive director of ESR, said that the idea for the Inmate Re-entry Forum developed as a result of community need and desire to address the issue. Out of the 700 clients that ESR served

last year, one-third had criminal records, including felonies and misdemeanors of various degrees, which prohibited many of them from purchasing homes, obtaining jobs and rebuilding credit. Wellman said.

"Our purpose in bringing (Rev. Walker) to the table is for people to know that you can overcome. Just because you skinned your knee, just because you bumped your head and just because you got arrested - you can recover and you can regroup, but it depends on your mind-set," Wellman said.

The Inmate Re-entry Forum was the fifth installment of ESR community forums that in the past focused on affordable housing, vocational education, employment and health care for the medically uninsured.

ESR will hold a special Individual Development Account (IDA) graduation on Monday at 6 p.m. The event will be held at the YWCA on Glade Street. The guest speaker will be state Rep. Larry Womble.

Sales Tax Holiday coming this weekend

BY PAUL COLLINS
THE CHRONICLE

At a time when many people are shopping for school supplies and back-to-school clothes, North Carolina will have a Sales Tax Holiday this weekend.

According to the N.C. Department of Revenue Web site, G.S. 105-164.13C provides an exemption for certain items of tangible personal property sold between 12:01 a.m. on the first Friday in August and 11:59 p.m. the following Sunday. For 2002, the dates are Friday, Aug. 2, through Sunday, Aug. 4. Clothing, footwear, and school supplies of \$100 or less per item; sports and recreation equipment of \$50 or less per item; and computers, printers, printer supplies, and educational software of \$3,500 or less per item will be exempt.

Clothing accessories, jewelry, cosmetics, protective equipment, wallets, furniture, layaway transactions, items used in a trade or business, and rentals are not covered by the exemption and will be subject to the applicable tax.

Computers, printers, printer supplies, and educational software sold during the holiday period with a sales price of \$1,000 or more per item must



The state is letting residents hold onto more of their money this weekend when a Sales Tax Holiday goes into effect.

be documented by means of Form E-599H, North Carolina Sales Tax Holiday Exemption Certificate, or other evidence to establish the exemption. The vendor must maintain the documentation.

According to a spokesman for the local Department of

Revenue office, the Sales Tax Holiday applies to both the 4 1/2 cent state sales tax and the county 2 cent sales tax.

For more information, go to the N.C. Department of Revenue's Web site at www.dor.state.nc.us and click on "hot topics."

School

from page A1

Members of the Black Leadership Roundtable and the Ministers Conference of Winston-Salem were on hand to hear the board's decision. The Roundtable, excited about the promise of a new school in the African-American community, had actively campaigned for the bonds. The group had also been critical once news of the alternative site came to light.

Norma Corley, the interim chairperson of the Roundtable's Education Committee, said she is happy that the school system is acquiring land at both sites. Although Corley wants the school built on Old Greensboro Road, she has never denied that the southeastern site was a good place to put a school.

"I had wondered why it had to be either or," she said, referring to the school system's desire to choose one site over the other.

Corley said she was pleasantly surprised by the vote, but she added that she and others will continue to monitor the project.

"This, to me, is like phase one," she said. "We have to make sure it is executed. We can't let up because this vote has taken place."

School Board member Geneva Brown said several weeks ago that she was fearful that the board would not keep its word to build a school in East Winston. She said it took a lot of explaining and educating to get the rest



The school system wants at least 50 acres off Old Greensboro Road before beginning to build the school.

of the board to agree to build the school at the original site. Brown said the School Board, which has had an endless list of conflicts with the black community over the last 30 years, made a giant leap forward by keeping its word.

"They talk a lot about trust. They talk a lot about promises. Tonight, I think they really came through with it," Brown said.

Board member Victor Johnson said he doesn't believe the school system will have a difficult time getting the extra acreage at the Greensboro Road site. Officials will immediately start the push to get the needed land, Johnson said, so that construction can begin by the end of the year. The school is scheduled to open in 2004.

Johnson said the school system will also continue to push

the city for land adjacent to the site that has been tied up in an option for several years. The land in dispute is being touted as a site for a seniors facility.

Johnson says a seniors facility would not be the best neighbor for the high school because of the noise and traffic.

"I don't understand why they would hold up land that is needed for this school," Johnson said of city officials.

For many East Winston blacks the fight is not over yet. Next month, the School Board will consider names for the new East Winston high school. Many alumni of Atkins High School want the school named for their alma mater. Atkins High School was shut down in the 1970s to accommodate integration changes. The school was later reopened as a middle school.

Black Business Street Festival

Sharing the Wealth
WINSTON-SALEM BLACK CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
Sharing the Wealth!

Historical Winston-Salem Trivia Contest

1. What church appears to be the oldest surviving Black church in Winston Salem?
Answer: _____
2. What B. F. Goodrich franchise in 1970 became the first African American major tire dealer in the country?
Answer: _____
3. What Black-owned-and-operated transportation company was purchased in the early 1970s by the City of Winston-Salem?
Answer: _____
4. What were the three African American owned theatres in Winston-Salem?
Answer: _____
5. What Black dry cleaners operated in Winston-Salem during the 1940s from a partnership between Cornelius R. Williams and Charles T. Martin?
Answer: _____

Enter to win weekly.

Winners will be recognized September 21st

Read THE CHRONICLE for more information.
Answer all five "Historical Winston-Salem Black Business" Trivia Questions.
It's easy . . . find the answers in this issue . . . just look for advertisements with the Winston-Salem Black Chamber of Commerce logo.
Deadline to receive entries is Tuesday of each week. Winners are selected randomly from total entries received weekly.

Send complete entry to:
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