

BUSINESS FOCUS

Briefs

King-size furniture

Uh-huh. That's right. Bedroom furniture inspired by the life and career of "The King of Rock 'n' Roll" is debuting this weekend at Rominger-Southern Furniture.

Following its successful introduction at the Spring International Home Furnishings Market in North Carolina, the "Elvis Presley Collection" by Vaughan-Bassett has appeared in more than 500 newspapers across the country, on the covers of major furniture-industry magazines and on ABC's "Good Morning America."

"I think this collection will draw a lot of people to the story," said Larry Dunn, store manager. "We're confident both serious and casual Elvis fans will love the furniture collection inspired by such an American icon."

The "Elvis Presley Collection" includes two master bedroom suites. "Elvis Presley's Hollywood" is a retro group that evokes the Golden Age of Hollywood of the late '50s and '60s when Elvis made his 31 films. The group's biggest "hits" are the Elvis Presley leather platform bed, the "Platinum Record" mirror and the Elvis Presley armoire. "Elvis Presley's Graceland" is more traditional, with a refined look. Signature pieces include the "Love Me Tender" bed, and a "Burning Love" heart-shaped mirror.

"Vaughan-Bassett designers made a number of visits to Graceland and thoroughly reviewed our archives, which house an extensive collection of memorabilia, including several original pieces of Elvis' furniture," said Jack Soden, president and CEO of Elvis Presley Enterprises. "We believe the 'Elvis Presley Collection' successfully reflects a style inspired by the life and storied career of Elvis."

"I've been thrilled with all the positive attention the collection has already received," Soden said. "We expect the enthusiasm to continue as people remember Elvis on Aug. 16, the 25th anniversary of his death."

Rominger-Southern Furniture is at 1201 N. Liberty Street and has been selling home furnishings for more than 100 years.

Microsoft gives \$25 million to historically black universities

NEW ORLEANS (AP) — Microsoft Corp. announced a gift of \$25 million July 19 to the 39 colleges and universities of the United Negro College Fund to expand the use of computer technology on the campuses.

The grant will go toward a campaign started by the United Negro College Fund in 2000 to help close the so-called digital divide.

"We are extremely appreciative of Microsoft's continued support and commitment to closing the digital divide and expanding educational opportunities for the deserving young men and women that attend UNCF institutions," fund president William H. Gray III said.



Gray

AmeriCorps grant to boost employment preparation services

RALEIGH — The N.C. Commission on Volunteerism and Community Service — a federally-funded agency in Gov. Mike Easley's office — has awarded an AmeriCorps grant of \$241,999 to the N.C. Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services to help individuals in 30 counties find and retain employment.

The program, called Consumers Achieving Real Employment Enrichment Retention Services (CAREERS), began in September 2000 and will serve nearly 500 North Carolinians in 2002-2003.

The AmeriCorps members will provide employment preparation services at Vocational Rehabilitation offices that serve Burke, Cherokee, Clay, Columbus, Davidson, Davie, Duplin, Forsyth, Graham, Greene, Guilford, Harnett, Haywood, Jackson, Johnston, Jones, Lenoir, Macon, Mecklenburg, New Hanover, Randolph, Sampson, Stokes, Surry, Swain, Vance, Wake, Wayne, Wilson and Yadkin counties.

The Division of Vocational Rehabilitation Services is recruiting 20 full-time AmeriCorps members to serve with CAREERS in 2002-2003. Members will teach consumers how to write a résumé, search for a job, and interview with prospective employers. Several of the AmeriCorps members will work specifically with hearing-impaired and Spanish-speaking persons. Members will also assist consumers with transportation needs, arrange classes of such topics as nutrition and money management, and help coordinate substance-abuse and domestic-violence services. For more information about CAREERS or to inquire about joining, contact Georgene Scott, program director, at (919) 855-3556.

Lexington State Bank ranked in U.S. Banker's top 100

LEXINGTON — LSB Bancshares Inc., parent company of Lexington State Bank, has been recognized in the July edition of the respected U.S. Banker magazine as one of the best performers among the nation's smaller bank holding companies.

Robert F. Lowe — chairman, president and chief executive officer — said, "We're very pleased that LSB Bancshares Inc. was ranked 43rd in this annual ranking of the nation's top 100 Performing Community Banks." Importantly, Lowe added, "the ranking is based on average return on equity over a three-year period, 1999-2001."

U.S. Banker looked at all publicly traded community banks that had total assets of less than a billion dollars as of year-end 2001.



Postal worker Derrick Richmond has not had problems because of his dreadlocks.

Shemika Swann/NNPA News Intern

'Hair' Today

Some black workers still facing battles over hairstyles

BY AMECIA TAYLOR
NNPA NEWS INTERN

WASHINGTON — Deciding on a hairstyle for men and women is no longer a personal choice. Getting dreads or braids today could result in being unemployed tomorrow. Natural hairstyles may be accepted socially, but the work force has not completely embraced the trends.

Fighting a blaze should be the only concern of firefighters, but six local firefighters have been forced into another fight. They have been fired for refusing to cut their hair or trim their beards.

The firefighters—a Rastafarian and four Muslims—filed a federal lawsuit alleging that the grooming policy enacted by Washington's fire chief violated their First Amendment right of expression and the Religious Freedom Restoration Act of 1993, which protects free exer-

cise of religion.

Some Muslims say they are directed by the Prophet Muhammad to "grow the beard and trim the mustache," while Rastafarians say they cannot cut their hair based on Leviticus 21:5, which reads, "They shall not make baldness upon their head, neither shall they shave off the corner of their beard...."

Daniel Aronowitz, the firefighters' attorney, expects the case could be resolved this summer. A June 2001 preliminary injunction returned all six firefighters to active duty, pending final resolution of the case.

"We want to establish a ruling that the six firefighters can wear their hair and beards in conformity and still be (Washington) D.C. firefighters," Aronowitz said. "The ruling should open the door for other firefighters to work and practice their religious beliefs. It will allow other Muslims to serve their city and state in firefighter capacity," he said.

This is not an isolated case. "There have been a few other cases around the country involving police, firefighters or government officials," said

Arthur Spitzer, ACLU legal director for the national capital area.

Police officers in Dallas are among them. Six officers last year were fired or placed on suspension because of their natural hairstyles.

Dallas police Sgt. Felicia Thornton said two officers were fired but the other four came into compliance by changing their hair. The department's hair policy remains unchanged. "There have been no more incidents since then to my knowledge," said Thornton, spokesperson for the department.

Some advocates say the issue is clear.

"No policy should infringe upon the right of an individual," said Theodore Holmes, interim president of the International Association of Black Professional Firefighters. "There is an Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) bulletin that talks about safety, and as far as dreads go, as long as it doesn't compromise safety issues, no one should establish a (hair) standard."

Jennifer Kaplan, public

See Hair on A9

MBC Network's 'Sports Lifestyles' scores winning home run with NABJ award

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

ATLANTA — "Sports Lifestyles," hosted by former Detroit Tiger and New York Yankee All-Star Cecil Fielder, has won first place in the sports category for broadcast news in the 2002 National Association of Black Journalist (NABJ) Awards Contest.

The award-winning "Sports Lifestyle" segment features an interview with the legendary Bo Jackson, the first, two-sport (baseball and football), All-Star athlete. In a rare behind-the-scenes interview, the 1985 Heisman Trophy winner talks candidly about topics ranging from parenting to sports. Jackson reveals how growing up without a father has shaped his views on parenting and marriage. He also discusses with Fielder his glory days as the 1991 Baseball All-Star MVP and the injury that ended his football career.

During Jackson's reign as one of the best athletes of the 20th century, sports fans realized that "Bo knows baseball and football"; however, Fielder uncovers in his interview that "Bo knows fishing and hunting as well."

For Fielder, whose show over the years has received numerous programming honors, each nomination holds a special meaning. "I am proud that the NABJ has bestowed this honor on 'Sports Lifestyles,'

When you receive recognition by the professionals within your industry for your hard work and effort, it makes the win even sweeter. I am blessed to have an out-



Fielder

standing producer, Larry Lawson, who is truly talented and well deserving of this award. With the continuation of Larry's hard work and dedication to "Sports Lifestyles" we will continue producing shows that entertain and inform both the sports enthusiast and the general viewing audience."

The award-winning episode was shown again on July 26 at 8 p.m. (Eastern time) on MBC.

Major Broadcasting Cable Network is America's first minority owned and operated, 24-hour cable network committed to providing wholesome entertainment for the entire family. The vision of MBC Network is to provide intelligent, family-oriented

programming that embraces values in the business, entertainment, sports, nonprofit and governmental sectors.

MBC Network demonstrates its commitment to the community that it serves by providing and reinforcing positive messages in program content and through direct engagement in the community.

Blacks far from parity with whites, report says

BY DEBORAH KONG
THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

In areas ranging from jobs to home ownership to politics, blacks continue to make gains, but equality with whites remains a far-off goal, the National Urban League says in its annual report on the state of black America.

"When you look at the data, yes, we have made substantial headway, but there are still — without a shadow of a doubt — substantial gaps in every category, every vital sign," said Hugh Price, president of the New York-based black empowerment group. "We're making steady progress but we're not in the end zone yet."

The report, a collection of eight essays written by experts in fields such as labor, home ownership and civil rights, is intended to capture an annual snapshot of blacks in America. The first one was published in 1976.

The authors highlight several areas where blacks have made gains yet disparity persists. Among them:

- During the 1990s, black unemployment fell to its lowest level in 30 years.

- The rate of poverty among black families fell to 26 percent, the lowest ever recorded.

- Yet black workers have been hit harder by the recession than others.

- In June, the unemployment rate for whites was 5.2 percent; for blacks it was more than twice that, 10.7 percent.

- In the workplace, blacks are about twice as likely to hold lower-paying, less-prestigious service jobs. About 20 percent of blacks hold professional or managerial jobs, while more than 30 percent of whites do. Less than 1 percent of certified public accountants, for example, are black.

- Compared with whites and the rest of the nation, blacks are still stuck in the pre-civil rights era when it comes to owning their homes. For whites, the home-ownership rate is 74 percent. For blacks, it is 48 percent — the national rate in the 1940s.

- There were more than 9,000 black elected officials in the year 2000 — more than at any other time in the nation's history, the report says, drawing on data from the Joint Center for Political and Economic Studies.

- Blacks also represent 38 percent of all AIDS cases reported in the United States, Maya Rockeymoore, of the Urban League's Institute for Opportunity and Equality, says in an essay citing Centers for Disease Control and Prevention figures.

The gay community, led mainly by white males, responded to the early threat of AIDS by using political muscle to marshal federal, state and local resources. But blacks were slower to organize, Rockeymoore says in her essay, "African Americans Confront a Pandemic: Assessing Community Impact, Organization and Advocacy in the Second Decade of AIDS."

That lack of a coordinated, early mobilization, combined with "poverty, substance abuse problems and exclusion from social insurance programs," has placed black and Hispanic communities "at a distinct disadvantage in their efforts to ward off the spread of AIDS," Rockeymoore writes.



Wagner International Photo via FPS

Cingular Wireless CEO Stephen Carter, actor Kevin Bacon and Art Start welcomed the wireless carrier to the city of New York last month. Cingular donated \$500,000 to Art Start, a New York City-based, nonprofit organization that helps underserved children express themselves through the arts. The donation will help fund a 24-hour safe haven in lower Manhattan.