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Charity wedding gown tour hits town

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Black Like Me

Reporter will tell tales of light-skinned African-Americans in series of stories

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD
THE CHRONICLE

I am black.

But I am frequently mistaken for white. It's not unusual for me to be stopped by strangers and asked, "What are you?" or "Where are you from?" And people will ask you these types of questions in the strangest places - at a drive-through window, in a department store, at a bar.

Recently, I was once again reminded just how low my signal falls on the racial radar.

"Is she the only white girl in the wedding?" asked the (white) wedding coordinator of a Baptist church in Charlotte. She was referring to me - the maid of honor - during a recent wedding rehearsal.

"She is not white!" replied members of the rest of the wedding party - all of whom were black and quickly came to my defense.

The wedding coordinator knew my name, so I do fault her for posing such a presumptuous question out loud. Her point was to tell the flower girl to remember to stand next to the "white girl."

After the wedding coordinator's eyes widened and her mouth fell open - the usual reaction by most upon finding out that I am not white - she responded, "Well she's the closest thing to Caucasian that I see in the room."

To which I responded, "Well you haven't seen the rest of my family, so get ready."

Quickly the other bridesmaids and the hostesses came to my side in attempts to console me; however, I explained to them that this was yet another case of my mistaken identity.

In my family, we run the gamut as far as color is concerned. We come in every shade from yellow, olive, honey, caramel to brown. My mother is biracial: Her father was black and her mother



Photo by Bruce Chapman

Chronicle reporter Courtney Gaillard, second from left, with her family, from left, Ralph and Mary Gaillard, her father and mother, and Nicolle Gaillard, her sister.

File Photo

Right: Courtney Gaillard at work. Here she interviews Rep. Mel Watt earlier this month.

was white. (She prefers the term "biracial" over "mixed" for fear of sounding like an ingredient in a recipe.) My father is black and fair-skinned. Both of his parents were of mixed ancestry as well. So naturally I and my three siblings are light-skinned.

And for our family, the racial potpourri continues. Both of my older brothers have married across racial lines, and my four fair-skinned nieces and nephew are proof that the Gaillard genes are strong. I often wonder how they will be received by the world

See **Black** on A4



Program churns out black leaders

Project Blueprint was started by the United Way in 1987

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD
THE CHRONICLE

United Way of Forsyth County is looking for minority volunteers to make a difference in the community. In October, the United Way Volunteer Center will conduct a two-day volunteer training session, Project Blueprint. Applications are being accepted for



Slade

minorities who are interested in developing and improving their leadership skills in the workplace, nonprofit organizations and the community at large.

Sabrina Slade, volunteer center director, said the project aims to create a more inclusive and culturally diverse nonprofit system in the community.

"The whole goal is to make sure that agencies, on a board level, are representative of the clients that they serve," Slade said.

Project Blueprint was created in 1987 by United Way of America through funding from the W.K. Kellogg Foundation. Its goal was to help United Way and more than 300 other nonprofit agencies recruit minorities to serve on

See **Blueprint** on A9

Legislators urge public to speak out on moratorium

Bill that would halt death penalty is tied up in the state House

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

The chances of North Carolina joining several other states by passing a death penalty moratorium this year are slim to none. That is what state Reps. Earline Parmon and Larry Womble told a small group of constituents Saturday during a forum held at City Hall to discuss the controversial moratorium bill. The bill cleared the Senate earlier this year but was still languishing in a House committee when the session ended a few weeks ago.

Parmon and Womble are staunch supporters of the moratorium, which would halt executions in the state for two years so that capital punishment could be examined to determine if it is doled out fairly. Moratorium sup-

porters say that the death penalty is disproportionately given to black offenders and to poor people. Of the 203 people on death row in North Carolina, 117 are African-American. Supporters also say that the system is so flawed, that there is a possibility that innocent people are being put to death.



Parmon

to ask because if we kill an innocent person, that will be a black eye on the state of North Carolina."

Saturday's event was billed as a forum for residents to give their positions on the moratorium. But only strong supporters of the

See **Moratorium** on A10



Lillie Mae Young holds one of her youngest great-grandchildren Saturday during a party in Young's honor. Young's extended family shut down a street to give the 86-year-old a birthday party for the ages. To read more about the event and Young, see page C1.

New education chief says N.C. students are on the right track

BY COURTNEY GAILLARD
THE CHRONICLE

N.C. public schools are making "great progress" in closing the achievement gap, according to Howard Lee, the new chairman of the N.C. Board of Education. Lee was in town Tuesday. He toured Kennedy Learning Center and R.J. Reynolds High School, and capped off his visit by taking part in a luncheon forum that dealt with the No Child Left Behind program. The forum was sponsored by the Winston-Salem Chamber of Commerce.

No Child Left Behind is federal legislation, signed by President Bush in 2002, that requires public school systems to improve their students' standards of academic achievement. Unlike many states, North Carolina has had a school accountability program, the ABCs of Public Instruction, for years that measures the progress of states schools.



Lee

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