

Butts to keynote Greensboro Four anniversary events

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

N.C. Agricultural and Technical State University will sponsor its annual Sit-In Breakfast to pay tribute to the four A&T freshmen who initiated the chain of events that changed the destiny of minorities in this country.

The 46th Sit-In Anniversary Celebration will kick off with a breakfast Wednesday, Feb. 1, at 6:30 a.m. in Williams Cafeteria. The theme is "Reconnecting the Past... Establishing the Present... Shaping the Future."

On Feb. 1, 1960, Ezell Blair (now Jibreel Khazan), Franklin McCain, Joseph McNeil and the late David Richmond requested service at the segregated lunch counter of the F.W. Woolworth store in downtown Greensboro. Their courageous act against the existing laws and social mores sparked the Civil Rights Movement and resulted in provisions that enhanced the quality of life for minorities in this country.

The A&T Four (Greensboro Four) will make remarks at the event.

The keynote speaker for the celebration will be the Rev. Dr. Calvin O. Butts III. Butts is pastor of the nationally renowned Abyssinian Baptist Church in New York and president of SUNY College at Old Westbury. He was one of the

founders of Abyssinian Development Corp., a comprehensive community-based organization, responsible for more than \$500 million in housing and commercial development in Harlem, and continues to help guide and support the daily operation of the not-for-profit organization.



Butts

He was also instrumental in the establishment of the Thurgood Marshall Academy for Learning and Social Change — a public lower, intermediate and high school, under the direction of the corporation.

Butts has spearheaded boycotts against several New York institutions for their racist policies and employment discrimination. He led a nationally acclaimed and most effective campaign in eliminating negative billboard advertising in Central Harlem and many communities around New York City.

Immediately after the breakfast, a memorial wreath will be placed at the February One Monument.

At 3 p.m. a Sit-In roundtable discussion with the A&T Four will take place in the Memorial Student Union — Stallings Ballroom.

The activities for the 46th Anniversary Sit-In Celebration are free and open to the public. For more information, call (336) 334-7791.

EWPS

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due process. For example, at a hearing in early 2004, where EWPS appealed the revocation of its charter to the State Board of Education, the school was not allowed to present all of its witnesses and not properly given access to the state's evidence and witness list, the decision says.

"We are happy with the decision and look forward to opening the school again," said Min. Mikal Muhammad, the chairman of the school's board. Muhammad said a new seven-member board for the school is already in place and sites are being considered for EWPS. The school's old building on 14th Street had been sold after the revocation.

At its height, East Winston Primary had about 200 students, most of them African-American, and a capable staff of teachers and school leaders. Muhammad said he and others will work hard to get all of that back.

Jimmie Bonham, the school's former director, said he will leave it up to the school's board to determine if he will return to the school. Many of the state's issues with EWPS revolved around Bonham. The state alleged that he asked a school employee to inflate the school's student numbers in order to get more state funding. Bonham was also accused of making questionable charges on the school's American Express card.

But the judge concluded that the allegations against Bonham were all smoke and no fire. The judge said that many of those who made allegations against Bonham were not credible.

"A suggestion of alleged mismanagement is not proof of mismanagement.... Concerns do not equate to wrongdoing," the decision states.

Bonham, whom supporters credited with making EWPS a success, says he does feel some vindication from the decision but that he is more concerned about the future of

EWPS

Justice has been served partially, but we have not been made whole," he said. Bonham said wholeness will come when the school reopens.

Bonham claims that EWPS was doing well before the state stepped in. He said all of the school's audits had been clean and students were happy and productive.

Muhammad has claimed from the beginning that the Office of Charter Schools had a personal vendetta against the school. He says the judge's decision confirms that the office was not acting on procedure in many instances.

Otho Tucker, who served as director of the Office of Charter Schools during EWPS' revocation process, is no longer with the office. Many of those who worked under Tucker have also left the agency.

State Reps. Larry Womble and Earline Parmon say they want whoever is in the Office of Charter Schools to do a better job in the future.

"I am concerned with some of these findings," said Parmon, who chairs the House's K-12 Education Committee. The legislators have put in calls regarding the court decision to Howard Lee, the chairman of the State Board of Education, and State Superintendent June Atkinson.

"We would expect that the State Board of Education and superintendent would read these findings of the Administrative Court and really digest it and see how we can better serve our students," said Parmon.

Parmon says she had concerns about the state education system long before she was elected to the General Assembly. Her own charter school, LIFT Academy, had its

charter revoked six years ago. She also fought the decision in court. Parmon said her own personal experiences with LIFT have never clouded her duties as a legislator, but her concerns persist. She says she has received complaints from schools across the state that have had their charters yanked by the state.

Womble says that it appears that African-American charter schools are getting their charters revoked more frequently than other schools. He wants the state, when possible, to do a better job of working with schools on issues that could lead to revocation.

"I don't think that revocation should be the first line of defense," he said.

A spokesperson for the N.C. Department of Justice, which argued the case for the state, said the department could not comment on the decision.

A representative from the State Board of Education could not be reached before press time.

ANNOUNCEMENT

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Watson

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NBJC

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After his speech, Sharpton told reporters that it is every church's obligation to help end the "poisoned atmosphere" surrounding acceptance of homosexuals.

"The church should have a front seat in the car leading toward dialogue, leading toward tolerance," Sharpton said.

In 2004, a predominantly black Atlanta-area church where Martin Luther King Jr.'s daughter Bernice serves as an elder held a march calling for a national ban on gay marriage. The march's organizer, Bishop Eddie Long, said his followers "did not come in a march of hatred." Regardless, the event — which started with Bernice King lighting a torch at her father's tomb — didn't sit well with gay rights groups.

King's widow, Coretta Scott King, has called gay

marriage a civil rights issue and denounced proposed amendments to ban it.

"History has shown that every time a church has gone on the side of exclusion, they have been wrong," said Pat Hussein, a local activist and summit participant. "Hopefully there can be things made right."

The Rev. Kenneth Samuel, pastor of Victory Baptist Church in the Atlanta suburb of Stone Mountain, said he hopes for mutual respect through the discussions about homosexuality. He received a standing ovation at the summit when he called for equality for all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, and an end to hate crimes targeting homosexuals.

"These are heart-wrenching issues," Samuel said. "Anytime we talk to people about identity or sense of values, we have to address them with passion and intellect along with their spirituality."



Bishop Long



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