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THE CHRONICLE

Volume 45, Number 23

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C.

THURSDAY, February 14, 2019

Black History: Trailblazers

Throughout the month of February people across the country will be celebrating the lives and legacies of great African-Americans who made contributions to society.

Torre Jessup in driver's seat at N.C. DMV

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Throughout Black History Month, The Chronicle will be highlighting history makers from right here in our community who are making a difference and setting an example for others.

This week we shine our light on Torre Jessup, Commissioner of the North Carolina Division of Motor Vehicles.

A native of Winston-Salem and Glenn High School graduate, Jessup took his talents to Morehouse College where he received a Bachelor of Arts degree in sociology with a concentration in criminal justice. After college Jessup served in the office of N.C. Congressman Mel Watt as district director.

It was with Congressman Watt that Jessup said he learned the importance of public service.

"He (Watt) recognized that he was a public servant and he had to be accessible and available to the public. He had to be a

voice to those who may not always have a voice and he ran his office that way," said Jessup. "... Regardless of party affiliation, regardless of socioeconomic status, everybody got the same high level service."

After his tenure with Congressman Watt, where he managed outreach and constituent affairs and set policy objectives, Jessup got the opportunity of a lifetime when he was asked to work with President Barack Obama. In the fall of 2014, President Obama appointed Jessup to serve as the regional administrator for the U.S. General Services Administration's Southeast Sunbelt Region.

"...Public service wasn't new to me at that point but it was new to go into administration and lead the legislative side of government and go to the executive branch to work for the first African-American President of the United States of America. That was humbling," Jessup said.

As regional administrator Jessup was respon-



Torre Jessup is the commississionor of N.C. DMV

sible for 1,000 employees who oversaw the delivery of real estate, technology, and procurement solutions totaling \$10 billion to eight states: Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Mississippi, North Carolina, South

Carolina, and Tennessee.

Continuing on his journey of service, Jessup's next stop was with the U.S. Department of Transportation (USDOT). During his tenure there Jessup served as the director of the

Office of Small Disadvantaged Business Utilization. Jessup said his responsibility there was to oversee two different programs; one geared towards helping small

business owners get government contracts and the other ensuring the USDOT was meeting their M/WBE requirements.

Jessup also served as vice president of public policy and external affairs at Blue Bloodhound, a start-up technology company, before taking his current position with the N.C. DMV.

Since 2017 Jessup has managed the daily operations of the N.C. DMV inducing registration, drivers licenses, vehicle safety and inspections. As you can imagine, an average day for Jessup is pretty busy. He said he meets daily with the leadership in the organization to discuss the strategic direction of the N.C. DMV. Jessup said the leadership of the N.C. DMV works hard to ensure safety for citizens across the state.

"We approve and authorize the privilege for individuals to be able to drive and place vehicles on our highways and that's a very important responsibility to ensure

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Jacinta White uses poetry to deal with grief and aid healing

BY JUDIE HOLCOMB-PACK
THE CHRONICLE

"I went to school for communications and public relations," Jacinta White explained recently. "I didn't know anything about poetry."

White has a B.A. in speech communications

and public relations and a MBA in nonprofit management. She said the idea of being a poet never occurred to her until she wrote her first poem in 1995 while living in Detroit, Michigan, and was thrilled when it was published in Young Detroit in 1996. One month later, her dad died suddenly of a heart attack and she started writing poetry to deal with her grief.

Her father was a minister and while going through his things she discovered numerous scraps of paper where he had written random thoughts. They revealed a different side of her father. This inspired her to collect his



Jacinta White will release her book of poetry inspired by African-American churches this fall.

writings and put them into a book that was published in 1997.

After her father's death, White and her mother moved to Kernersville to be closer to

family. She had continued to write poetry, but she said, "I didn't realize that poetry was healing my grief." That healing process spawned The Word Project, which she

started in 2001. She moved to Atlanta and at that time was working with urban youth. She used poetry to help them deal with the challenges they were facing. In 2005 her job brought her back to the Triad and she brought The Word Project with her.

White wanted to create a broader platform for healing poetry so in 2013 she founded Snapdragon, an online literary magazine. It has continued to grow and now receives submissions from all over the world. White said that people who tell her they don't like poetry "just haven't found the poet that they like. They need to keep looking because you need to hear different voices to find the one that speaks to you."

A chance conversation with her uncle, who is a retired minister, gave her the idea to visit some of the rural churches where her father had preached. At the first church, she was inspired to write a poem. As she explored more churches, she continued to be inspired to write. Walking among the graves in the cemetery, she

thought about the lives of those buried there and the stories that could be told. She knew this was something she had to write about so she applied for and received the Duke Energy Regional Artist grant. The poems and pictures of these rural African-American churches will be published in the fall by Press 53, a local publishing house. "Resurrecting The Bones," White says, "is a journey through African-American churches and cemeteries in the rural South."

White has also been facilitating New Year's Day workshops at The Healing Ground retreat center in Summerfield for over ten years. The workshops offer attendees an opportunity to reflect on the past, meditate, write, and look to the new year in a safe and accepting place. Afterward the group comes together for a potluck meal where they can share their experiences. "It's a great way to pause and reflect at the end of the year so I can have space for what is to come," White explained. "This is where I truly feel the power of poetry."

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