

Mecklenburg drug use doesn't fit public perceptions

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The majority of drug users in Mecklenburg County run counter to stereotypes, according to a recent survey.

A study released last week by the Chemical Dependency Center of Charlotte-Mecklenburg showed that although 7 percent of respondents have used cocaine or crack, more than half of them were white and nearly a quarter are between the ages of 25-45. Respondents in the 25-34 age group were most likely to use cocaine or crack, with 14.5 percent affirmation. The 35-44 age group was next at 9.8 per-

cent.

The survey of 850 county residents conducted by the Urban Institute of UNC Charlotte revealed that drug use is more likely to occur among people with a college education than those with high school or less. More than a tenth said they've never touched alcohol, with 14.5 percent saying that they've never taken a drink.

The study showed:

- Twice as many whites (7.9 percent) than African Americans (3.6 percent) use cocaine or its crack derivative. More whites than blacks admit to have driven while

impaired (50.7 percent to 22.4 percent), but more African Americans had been cited for DWI (5.6 percent to 5.1).

- About a third of Mecklenburg's population, or 370,000 people, are affected by a family member's alcohol or drug problems, according to the survey, and nearly 40 percent of respondents said they had at least one family member who has experienced a drug- or alcohol-related problem.

- Public safety is also more at risk than many believe. Local data confirm national statistics that 1 in 10 people who drink alcohol with devel-

op more serious problems later.

- People with at least some college education are more likely to try drugs than those without. Among respondents, 8.7 percent with some college tried cocaine or crack; 7.2 percent were college graduates. Only 4.7 percent of people with high school education or less tried drugs.

- Significant numbers of respondents admitted they drove while impaired, even when they knew it was dangerous to do so. Few of those caught driving impaired ever sought treatment for their problems.

Curry said she thinks last week's foundation visit went well, largely due to the efforts of Fighting Back director Hattie Anthony. "It is because of her that the midyear assessment went as well as it did," Curry said.

It has been a troubling year for Anthony, who has weathered several adverse news reports about the program, including concerns about a \$15,000 weekend retreat by 90 community leaders to Myrtle Beach. The \$15,000 was part of training funds provided by the foundation and the retreat was approved by the foundation, though some city officials questioned whether the city would have to match those funds.

Education Center, the Urban League and the Charlotte Area Fund.

"Those programs were already in place, doing a good job city wide, but now they fall under the umbrella of Fighting Back just to work out of resource centers. Fighting Back is supposed to be a vehicle whereby services already available

in the city are brought closer to people...and reduce the demand for alcohol and drugs, in cooperation with existing agencies."

After hearing the community report last week, Robert Wood Johnson Foundation officials said they will let the community know soon, whether it will recommend a second \$3 million grant for Fighting Back. The foundation's annual meeting, when awards are usually announced is this summer.

Mecklenburg's program is one of 14 Fighting Back programs in the country.

Fighting Back waiting

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cation and HIV/AIDS education in the location at 2730 Rozelle's Ferry Road, when it began leasing 2,000 square feet of space to Fighting Back.

"We rent space to them so they may have a resource center in that building. We are also a partner with the project. We commit to share and to encourage people to come to the resource center for pro-

gramming and we sit on the (Fighting Back) commission. We help publicize what Fighting Back does out of the resource center.

"They provide services to the community through city and county agencies that are already in existence," Curry said.

Some agencies with offices in the resource center include the Mecklenburg County Health Department, the Drug

The unsung heroes



PHOTO/PAUL WILLIAMS III

Focus on Leadership honored Charlotte's unsung heroes last week during its annual banquet at the Airport Sheraton Hotel. Among those honored for their work in the community were: Kevin Ligon (community service); Afro-American Children's Theatre (arts); Ron Goodwin (business/entrepreneur); Vilma Leake (education); Angela Bynum (human service); Paula Williams (media); Shaun Miller (youth); Rev. Sheldon Shipman (religion) and Samuel Reid (politics).

News Briefs

Makaziwe Mandela will help Johnson C. Smith University celebrate its 129th anniversary.

Mandela, daughter of South African President Nelson Mandela, will be the keynote speaker at JCSU's



Mandela

Founders' Day celebration Sunday. The event will be held at Jane M. Smith Memorial Church on campus. An affirmative action/equal opportunity adviser at the University of Witwatersand in Johannesburg, Mandela holds master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. As a Fulbright 50th Anniversary Distinguished Fellow, Mandela is visiting colleges, universities and community organizations throughout the U.S. Her

tour is hosted by the United Negro College Fund and sponsored by the U.S. Information Agency, which funds the Fulbright Program.

The Founders' Day program is free and open to the public. A community reception will follow.

- The Charlotte-Mecklenburg NAACP wants to turn non-voters into political participants.

The organization's Operation Renaissance will register voters through Monday at the Charlotte Transit Center. Volunteers are signing up voters from 10 a.m.-5 p.m. daily, and 80 people registered in the first three hours.

By bringing more voters into the election process, people can have a real voice in government, said local NAACP president Alfred Alexander. As a civil rights organization, the NAACP has been on the cutting edge of voter empowerment.

"The CMC NAACP has long seen the importance of voter education and voter registra-

tion," he said. "The founders of the NAACP understood the powerful relationship of the vote and the conditions of the African American community. This is the same message we carry today."

This year's elections take on added importance in Charlotte because of the NAACP's national convention here, which typically attracts major candidates for president. Operation Renaissance's goal is to produce record numbers of voters.

"The NAACP is serious about getting voters out in record numbers in such an important election year," said Terry Belk, chairman of the Political Action Committee. "Charlotte will be the nter of a lot of attention as we approach the national NAACP convention that will be held here in July. It is a golden opportunity for the citizens of Charlotte to have a front row seat to the issues and process that is the heartbeat of America."

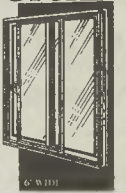
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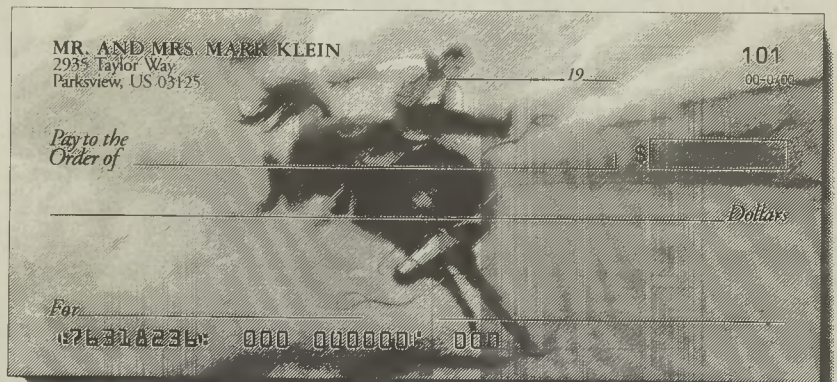
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