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County revisits Walton honor

Commissioners yield to pressure to review naming building after former colleague

By Winfred B. Cross
THE CHARLOTTE POST

The Mecklenburg County Commissioners are expected to reconsider naming a building after late commissioner Bob Walton Tuesday.

District 1 Commissioner Linda McCall has placed the

item on the agenda for reconsideration.

The board unanimously voted, without discussion, in November to name the Stonewall Plaza Building the Robert L. Walton Building. Walton died in July 1994 of a heart attack.

McCall said her vote for the

measure was "a mistake."

"For some reason, this came up as a public issue within the last two weeks," McCall said. "Phone calls started coming in. I explained to each why I sup-



Walton

ported the decision. Then, as I listened, I realized these people were giving me a different viewpoint, from the victim's standpoint."

Walton was convicted in 1987 of assaulting an 18-year-old male in a homosexual encounter. He was sentenced to 30 days in jail. McCall said it would not be fair to the man he assaulted or his family to have the building named after

Walton.

"Within the last three or four years we've become very concerned with victims' rights," she said. "We are trying to convey a different message. Victims have rights too. I feel very strongly about that."

District 3 Commissioner Darrel Williams thinks McCall's concerns are politically based.

"It's an election year, anything



PHOTO/HERBERT L. WHITE

The Robert L. Walton Building may lose its name Tuesday.

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THE SKY'S THE LIMIT



PHOTO/HERBERT L. WHITE

Adrienne Owens overcame the death of her mother to win a scholarship at the U.S. Air Force Academy in Colorado Springs, Colo. Owens is a 1995 graduate of Providence High School.

Personal tragedy inspires Charlotte student to strive for Air Force Academy

By Herbert L. White
THE CHARLOTTE POST

MATTHEWS - One chin-up kept Adrienne Owens out of the U.S. Air Force Academy.

But Owens is no quitter.

On two separate occasions, she tried to push her way past the bar in physical tests for the military school in Colorado Springs, Colo., only to come up short both times. She wasn't about to let a chin-up keep her out. Owens, 18, had come too far.

"I was disappointed," she said. "But I couldn't quit."

That's been Owens' trademark. Five years ago, her mother, Ada, died of cancer,

pushing Owens and her family into a deep depression and driving her grades downward. It took some coaxing, but she recovered and has an Air Force Academy scholarship worth \$500,000 to show for it. Rep. Sue Myrick recommended Owens for acceptance.

"I'm very excited," the Providence High School graduate said. "To be chosen out of thousands of kids is an honor."

Maj. Nick Berdeguez, a community liaison for the academy in Monroe, said he knew Owens was the kind of student who could make it in Colorado Springs.

"She's a bright, intelligent woman," he said. "She's got everything the Air Force wants. She's one of the sharpest candidates I've come across in my 10 years as liaison officer."

Owens wasn't thinking about the future when Ada Owens died. An accountant, Ada kept the family together while her husband George served in the Army. Her death cast a pall over everyone, especially Adrienne, who went

from an A student to a D.

"I was very angry," she said. "After my mother died, it just seemed like a part of me was taken away. My grades suffered, and I wasn't doing very well in school."

But help was on the way. Brenda Gibson, who grew up with George Owens and his family in Clinton, N.C., had a premonition: she'd marry George and help raise their combined families. The first step was getting George and his three children past the mourning.

"When I first went to their house, the shades were shut. It was completely dark," she said. "I said 'we've got to get some light in here.'"

The combined family moved to Matthews - Brenda from Chevy Chase, Md., George from Lorton, Va. - three years ago. Adrienne wanted to be an accountant like her mother, but Brenda challenged her to take on a more demanding discipline.

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Alexander's suspension goes beyond checks

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

A letter from the NAACP national office reveals a sharp difference between why Kelly Alexander Jr. was suspended as N.C. NAACP president and the reasons stated by Alexander.

Alexander has said in written and oral statements the suspension came because he used checks pre-signed by the previous treasurer, James Florence of Fayetteville.

The NAACP letter said the suspension was due to more serious offenses, including failure to turn over financial records and monies to the new state treasurer and creation of an account using NAACP funds separate from the N.C. chapter's accounts.

The letter, obtained this week, was sent on May 20 to Alexander, the 20 people who signed a complaint against him in April, and other NAACP officials, including Nelson Rivers and all North Carolina local chapters. It was signed by William Penn, the NAACP's director of branches and field services.

Alexander did not return calls made to him seeking comment.

In his letter, Penn said the national board "determined that you failed to turn over the account books and all monies of the Conference to the Treasurer,



Alexander

See LETTER on page 6A

Dole, Clinton among NAACP speakers

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Under the theme "A New Day Begun" the nation's oldest civil rights organization meets for its annual convention in Charlotte July 6-11.

President Bill Clinton is tentatively set to address the gathering on July 10. Clinton will be greeted by Lenny Springs, an NAACP national board member and head of its fund raising arm. Kweisi Mfume, the new NAACP president and chief executive officer, will introduce the president. Clinton's challenger, Bob Dole, will also speak.

The convention theme could easily be based on the organization's new leadership, the highly-respected Mfume, the former Maryland congressman who stepped down as head of the Congressional Black Caucus to

take the reins of the troubled organization in December.

M f u m e replaced the Rev. Ben Chavis, whose handling of organization funds led to his ouster, and subsequent audits found other

financial irregularities, leading to a leadership shake-up which brought Myrlie Evers-Williams to the head of the Board of Directors.

The convention is expected to be a showcase of new leadership, renewed commitment to civil rights and a reach for younger membership. The convention, the NAACP's 87th, will

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Poet Maya Angelou named honorary chair of slave ship exhibit

By John Minter
THE CHARLOTTE POST

Poet and author Maya Angelou is honorary chair of the drive to raise \$125,000 for this fall's exhibit at Spirit Square of the slave ship Henrietta Marie.

The exhibit will come to Charlotte's Spirit Square in Nov. 8-Jan. 25, 1997, due primarily to the efforts of Dawn Womack, the arts center's vice president for arts and education.

In a mailing sent last week to potential contributors, Womack outlined an extensive program of lectures, educa-

tional programs and performances which will accompany the showing of artifacts from the ship, which sank near Key West, Fla., around 1700.

"The exhibit will offer an incredible opportunity for everyone in our community to explore an evocative period in America's history, to move beyond that period to the celebration of a people and their contributions to our country's present and future," Womack said. "In that context, Spirit Square has created a much broader program, entitled 'From Enslavement to Empowerment,' incorporating the arts, literature and history as a way to inspire a com-

munity-wide examination, understanding, appreciation and celebration of African and African American achievements over the last 300 years."

Planned are a gospel celebration and opening reception and a lecture series on such topics as "Women and the Slave Experience," "Religion & Politics," and "The Role of the Abolitionists."

Appearing during the three-month program will be Angelou, writer Cornel West, and others. Classes and workshops are also planned for adults and children on African American arts forms - clay pots, weaving, basketry, steel

drums. Also planned are workshops on marine archaeology and the methods of historical research.

One major event will be the performance of Peter Grego's play "Hating to See the Sun Rise," by O'Samba, an African-Brazilian Dance Troupe. The play is based on the actual transcripts of conversations with former slaves. The Afro-American Children's Theatre



Angelou

is planning performances and residencies during the exhibit. The fund raising packet asks supporters to "be a part of this historical experience."

"The project's mission is to provide you and others in our community a positive experience, despite slavery's painful reality, that moves us into healthy discussion and action about our common future," Womack said. "Lectures and panel discussions will center around social, political and economic development, challenging young minds to think critically about leadership and other important roles in our

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