

# Afro Center moves ahead with vision

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ter's Board of Directors, continue to serve effectively — as interim director?

He, along with others in the Charlotte community, say absolutely.

"Well, certainly, it's not something we want to do long-term," Taylor said. "The good news is the (AACC) staff has really done a great job, so I think the amount of time that I have to spend on staff operations is (limited). I mean, the staff really does it. People like (community cultural programs director) Vickii Graham, people like Gloria Duncan make a difference. These people have really done great work. So it really does kind of mediate the

hands-on, day-to-day tasks for me."

"Right now, I can be more of a visionary role, in terms of helping execute on key things that the center can continue to grow from."

To outsiders, it would appear that an abundance of growth is needed at the Afro Center. Of late, the center's most pressing issues have been highly publicized:

- Nearly six months after the board of directors voted to replace Beverly Cureton as executive director, a replacement hasn't been chosen.

- There are concerns about whether the center can attract the corporate and community funds necessary to maintain and expand pro-

gramming.

- And it's still uncertain whether the center has the backing — financial and otherwise — to land a new \$17.9 million building, which would be vital in drawing more annual visitors.

## Moving forward

Because of the support system in place with the center's staff and his peers on the board, Taylor said things have been going well for the AACC.

A recent victory for the center was a Dec. 15 fund raiser hosted at the home of Charlotte attorney Johnny Taylor, which generated a much-needed \$32,000.

"We set a goal for \$25,000,"

David Taylor said proudly, "and we raised \$32,000 — and growing. We've still got checks coming in. Those people wrote \$500 checks 10 days before Christmas, which is unheard of."

That, he said, is something that should help quell any notions about the AACC's lack of ability to generate funds from corporate and community entities.

"I think the community and the individual and corporate have historically been very supportive of the center, and continue to be supportive," Taylor said. "I think our challenge at the center has been that we go out and inform them of our needs and make requests. But I have yet to find that either of those entities have demonstrated that they have no interests. I've seen quite the contrary — that there's a great passion for the center, a great willingness for the center to succeed. And they've demonstrated that."

"What was really encouraging (about the December fund raiser) was that it was a whole different set of people (involved). It wasn't the regular people that always come to the center's rescue, the people you can always count on for a check. This was new money, by and large. Board member DeAlva Glenn took this vision and pulled this together, working with Johnny. That's the kind of leadership that we're getting from the board that people don't know about necessarily. And we've already got a couple other ones scheduled that we hope will be similarly successful."

## Necessary asset

John Minter, who has been

involved with the Afro Center as a patron over the years, said he isn't worried about whether it ultimately can thrive. The center, Minter said, is too much of a community pillar to fail.

"It's obviously a process that would work a lot better if it had (a permanent) executive director to organize and focus

a portion of it,

but the Cultural Center itself has always had a special relationship with the community," Minter said.

"So even without an executive director, there's enough passion in the community to give it the kind of support it needs to be successful, to help get the new building. People will come through and make donations because of what the Cultural Center means to the black community."

Hence, Taylor said, the center's visions are very ambitious. And realistic.

For starters, Taylor and the center have set a fund-raising goal of \$250,000 by the end of the fiscal year. As a matter of fact, he said, the center is "hitting and exceeding" its budget, which means the new executive director won't come in with the AACC in financial straits.

Taylor said the Board of Directors has "two to three candidates, quite frankly, that we like, and we're having several conversations with them." But he would not give an indication of how soon a successor would be named.

It doesn't matter, though, he said, because the center's overall vision will not change.

"The ultimate vision is that the Afro-American Cultural Center become the premiere arts center in the region," Taylor said. "One, because of the variety of things we do. When you really think about, we not only can have local impact; we really should have regional and state impact as well."

"When you even think about the great city of Atlanta — Atlanta won't have what Charlotte has in the Afro-American Cultural Center. This place would really tell our story in different aspects. We want to change people's lives — how they think, how they view African-Americans. And we're excited about that."

Such vision is what makes Taylor the ideal person to run the AACC at such a critical moment, Minter said.

"I think he is the kind of person with the respect and integrity in the community who will attract the support the Cultural Center needs," Minter said. "You need a (permanent) director, but, more importantly, you need the right direction."

"The community has always wanted more from the center than it could give. But I think Mr. Taylor is the kind of person who has the integrity to actually fulfill everything the community needs. I know it's very difficult for him to do both jobs right now. It's not going to be easy. But he's been very successful in business, and I know he can be successful leading the Cultural Center for however long is necessary."

## Egypt apologizes for Sudan deaths

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encounter repeatedly playing on television news channels around the world, a spokesman for President Hosni Mubarak expressed the country's "sorrow and pain for all the victims."

But Suleiman Awad also rejected criticism from the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, saying police had evicted the protesters at the agency's request.

The migrants had occupied the park since Sept. 29 to demand that officials in the nearby UNHCR offices declare them eligible for resettlement in a third country. Egypt's Interior Ministry said the agency asked for protection because it had received threats.

On Friday, High Commissioner Antonio Guterres condemned the bloodshed from his Geneva office, saying "there is no justification for such violence and loss of life."

Awad said authorities ended the protest "in response to three written requests from the UNHCR office in Cairo."

"The UNHCR is fully aware of how much help Egypt has given in this situation and how much patience it has shown," he said.

The UNHCR stopped hearing the cases of Sudanese seeking refugee status after a January peace deal ended a civil war in the south of their homeland.

Criticism mounted in Egypt and abroad as a small group of protesters gathered at the park, chanting "down with Mubarak" and "humanity was killed here."

## Kenyan inmates skip New Year's lunch to support drought victims

By Rodrique Ngowi

*THE ASSOCIATED PRESS*

NAIROBI, Kenya — Thousands of prisoners skipped their annual New Year's lunch Sunday and instead sent the food to hundreds of thousands of Kenyans affected by food shortages, a senior prison official said.

Most of Kenya's estimated 50,000 prisoners gave up their ration of beans and stiff porridge made from corn on the day that President Mwai Kibaki declared the food shortages a national disaster in a bid to speed up relief efforts.

"In the next six months, up to 2.5 million of our people will be in need of famine relief. This represents close to 10 percent of the country's population," Kibaki said during new year celebrations. "To ensure that we have adequate

interventions on the ground, I am declaring the famine a national disaster."

Prisoners wanted to help after watching images of starving Kenyans on TV, reading about food shortages in newspapers and discussing the situation with visiting relatives and among themselves, said John Isaac Odongo, the commandant of Kenya's prison staff training college.

People detained in Kenya's 93 prisons "move about when they are taken to court and this is how the idea of skipping a meal was spread," Odongo told The Associated Press.

Convicts at the Naivasha Maximum Security Prison said the food shortages also affect their relatives.

"Those suffering out there are our brothers and sisters and we need them once we get out of this place," said One James Kamutu, who was sentenced to death.

Drought has also triggered food shortages in neighboring Ethiopia and Somalia, a country that has had no effective government since warlords overthrew dictator Mohamed Siad Barre in 1994.

More than 1 million Ethiopian cattle herders face extreme food shortages after the failure of rains that normally replenish water sources and sustain livestock through the dry season.

In anarchic Somalia, where about 2 million people need humanitarian aid, drought has affected its southern region, leading to increases in admissions of severely malnourished children to therapeutic feeding centers there.

Associated Press reporter Anthony Gitonga in Naivasha, Kenya, contributed to this report.

## French moving to end forced marriages

By Julio Godoy

*INTERNATIONAL PRESS SERVICE*

PARIS — Fatia was in love, but months earlier she had been forced into marriage with another man.

"When my mother realized I did not want to marry the man she had chosen for me, she warned me, 'Either you marry him, or you are not my daughter any more,'" Fatia, 23, said. "I went to the town hall to my marriage as if I was going to my own execution, but nobody cared there about my feelings. I just got married to a man I had hardly met — and whom I did not love."

In time she came to love someone else.

"I thought I was going mad," she said. "I was falling in love with this wonderful guy, and at home I had to go to bed with another man, whom I feared, and with whom I did not have anything to do, least of all any intimate life. It was terrible."

This conflict continued for several months, until Fatia's mother agreed to do her bit now to help end the marriage. She spoke to Fatia's husband and after a long dispute he accepted dissolution of the marriage.

Today, Fatia shares her life with the man she loves. Not a perfect partnership, but at least this is what she wanted. "It is my life, whatever mistakes I commit, I have to come to terms with them," she said.

Fatia is not alone.

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