

Heart-healthy solutions sought in Charlotte

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the African American community obtain the knowledge and skills necessary to live longer, healthier lives," said Wayne B. Kong, the association's chief executive officer. "This is an important effort in our community. If we are effective, thousands of residents in Charlotte's African American community will become more productive, have a better quality of life and strengthen their ties with family members. There is nothing more important than that."

Stroke and cardiovascular disease are the leading cause of death of blacks. On average,

more than 10 black Charlotteans die daily from heart disease.

The Charlotte initiative is part of an eight-city tour in which community leaders are coached on the risks of heart disease as well as providing screenings and healthy living tips. On July 29, the Charlotte campaign continues with the Super Community Health Fair at Eastland Mall, 5471 Central Ave. It will include screenings for blood pressure, cholesterol, glucose, weight and body mass index.

For information on the initiative, call Melanie Clark at (704) 965-5440.

Bennett president to retire

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

GREENSBORO — Johnnetta Cole, who took over as president of troubled



Cole

Bennett College in 2002, plans to end her five-year term with a bang, announcing Tuesday that Oprah Winfrey and Maya Angelou will headline a benefit gala for the school this fall.

In remarks at a state-of-the-school briefing, Cole said she will stick to her original plan and retire from the school's presidency in June.

She said she first wants to see the historically black school finish off a \$50 million fundraising campaign to secure its future.

That effort is being co-

chaired by Angelou and former U.S. Sen. Bob Dole, R-Kan., and has passed the halfway mark, Cole said.

Now, Cole said, she hopes Winfrey — who she called an "extraordinary force in American and international affairs" — can help give a big boost to the effort.

During four years as president, Cole, the former president of Atlanta's Spelman College, has helped stabilize Bennett. When she took over in 2002, the school was running a \$2 million budget deficit and was on academic probation.

She scored an early coup when she recruited Dole to lead the big fundraising campaign; Dole's wife, U.S. Sen. Elizabeth Dole, R-N.C., had become concerned about Bennett after visiting the school during her 2002

Senate campaign

Frustrated by internal dissent at the college, Cole said in April 2005 that she would resign as president. But an outpouring of support changed her mind and she decided to stay.

Last fall, Bob Dole and former President Bill Clinton — on whose transition team Cole served in the early 1990s — hosted a fundraising event for the campaign at the college.

In her remarks Tuesday, Cole said the U.S. Department of Education recently gave the school's financial aid program an excellent rating and that the school has seen significant growth in alumnae giving and has renovated three historic campus buildings.

"How privileged I am to be the president of this ever so special institution that has such an important mission, and that has come this far by faith, by hard work and by the support of so many friends," she said.

Bennett was co-educational when it was founded in 1873, but became a private school for black women in 1926. The school has a current enrollment of 570.

TUSKEGEE AIRMEN

World War II fliers blazed trail for today's astronauts

By Judy Carlock

TUCSON (ARIZONA) CITIZEN

TUCSON, Ariz. — Thirty minutes before the July 1 launch of the space shuttle Discovery and retired Lt. Col. Luke Weathers watches intently.

Beside him lies a pristine copy of a 2003 Time magazine memorializing the crew of the space shuttle Columbia. One of the smiling faces is that of Ronald McNair, the second African American in space.

A CNN announcer says that aboard the shuttle Discovery — whose takeoff would end up getting postponed to July 4 — is the second African American woman in space.

The labels sound dated. Of course there are black astronauts. Why wouldn't there be?

Weathers, 86, is part of the reason that fact might be taken for granted.

The framed prints on the walls of his immaculate Oro Valley home help tell the story. In 1942, black leaders pressured the U.S. military to train a corps of black pilots at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama. They weren't just fighting Nazis. They were fighting bigotry and segregation at home.

The Tuskegee Airmen had something to prove: that black Americans wanted and could handle the most challenging military jobs.

For their achievements, they will receive the Congressional Gold Medal in a White House ceremony later this year.

Weathers was motivated by more than patriotism when he joined the Army Air Corps. "They were getting ready to draft me," he said. "I didn't want to be cannon fodder."

The Memphis native, who had completed coursework for a degree in science and biology, used what influence he could to receive a spot as a cadet. He became one of 450 pilots sent overseas, and one of almost 1,000 who graduated.

"This was called the Tuskegee Experiment. We're going to prove to you that you can't do it so you'll stop hollering," Weathers later told a newspaper. "The thing was that whites didn't think blacks could fly. It's just that simple."

Over two years in Europe and northern Africa, they damaged or destroyed more than 400 enemy aircraft. The fighter pilots never lost a bomber that they were escorting.

Some got their first experience with integration in German POW camps.

Bigotry didn't bother Weathers.

"I felt sorry for the racists," he said. "I knew who I was."

He does not tell war stories, but clearly relishes the memory of a triumphant return to Memphis and prominent coverage of a parade in his honor — the first time, he said, the local paper had ever featured a black person.

One print on the wall shows pilots preparing to take off from their base in Italy. Weathers points out the plane he piloted. It is called "Lucifer" in the painting, but Weathers said he had no name painted on his plane.

"I was a marked target from the standpoint of German intelligence," he said. The black community in Memphis had mounted a major war bond effort, and he feared he specifically would be targeted "to take some of the wind out of their sails."

In a painting hanging at the Pentagon, Weathers, in a P-51 Mustang, escorts a damaged B-24 bomber to safety in England.

On Nov. 16, 1944, Weathers and two other pilots escorting the bomber were attacked by eight German planes. Weathers reportedly flew into the Germans head-on, taking down one plane with machine-gun fire. Then he dived, pulled out of the dive and found one German pilot still behind him.

"I chopped my throttle and dropped my flaps to cut my speed

See AIRMEN/7A



Hope is more powerful than a hurricane.

Help victims of Hurricane Wilma and thousands of other disaster victims the country-wide year by donating to the American Red Cross. Funds will be used to buy food, shelter, counseling and other assistance to those in need.

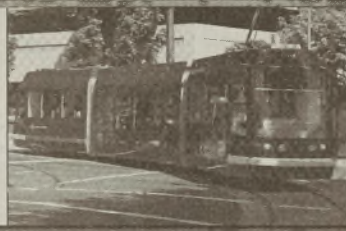
American Red Cross
1.800.HELP.NOW
redcross.org

CENTER CITY STREETCAR CORRIDOR PUBLIC MEETING

The Charlotte Area Transit System (CATS) will hold a public meeting to discuss updated information on the streetcar project. Project information on the capital costs, environmental effects, and the top two sites for the proposed maintenance facility will be shared with the public for feedback. Boards will be present displaying renderings of the proposed maintenance facility sites. We hope to see you there!

Tuesday, July 18, 2006

Charlotte-Mecklenburg
Government Center
600 East 4th Street Charlotte
Room 267 • 6:30 p.m.



The Center City Streetcar is proposed to run along Trade Street, Beathes Ford Road, Elizabeth Avenue, and Central Avenue.



Please consult the CATS Trip Planner at www.ridetransit.org for bus routes nearest the meeting location. For more information, call (704) 336-RIDE or visit www.ridetransit.org

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