

**UNDER THE 'HAT'**

Natalie Wilson takes on role of Mary McLeod Bethune/5B



Shauntae Barrette and Harold Jordan win Essence magazine contest/3B



I DO, I WILL



Fate and series of similarities brought Dwain and Lucrisha Hudson together/1B

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PHOTO/CALVIN FERGUSON

Johnson C. Smith University cheerleader Alisha Lide, a senior from Charlotte (right) leads the Golden Bulls mens' basketball team onto the floor before a Feb. 15 game against CIAA rival Livingstone College. Next week's CIAA basketball tournament is expected to pump more than \$15 million into the Charlotte economy.

## More N.C. teens are kicking ashes

Study: Smoking cessation programs gaining ground

By Herbert L. White

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Fewer young North Carolinians are lighting up.

Cigarette use by high school and middle school students has significantly declined since the state began funding tobacco use prevention and cessation initiatives for teens, according to a survey by UNC-Chapel Hill researchers.

Cigarette use dropped 25 percent among high school students and 38 percent by middle school students from 2003-05, according to the report. The decline appears related to the statewide tobacco use prevention and cessation initiatives, researchers said.

The evaluation was authorized by the Teen Tobacco Use Prevention and Cessation Initiative of the North Carolina Health and Wellness Trust Fund. The fund was established with North Carolina's share of tobacco lawsuit settlement money. The report also details how the initiative affects youth of different ages, ethnicity and socioeconomic status, activities led to those effects and ways to improve outcomes in the next few years.

"Our data shows that the Health and Wellness Teen Initiative, as the first state-funded effort and one that is highly successful over the last three years, has allowed political leaders, policy-makers, parents and youth themselves to recognize and more successfully deal with the health effects of tobacco,"

Please see ANTI-SMOKING/6A

## Ready for fun and games

Charlotte organizers and businesses look to improve on CIAA tournament

Tournament more than hoops to fans

By Cheri F. Hodges  
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The Central Intercollegiate Athletic Association has a life-long fan in Edward Cook of Durham. But this year's tournament is going to be bitter-sweet for the North Carolina Central University graduate.

"This is the last year for my alma mater in the CIAA," he said.

While Cook is happy for the Please see FANS/2A

By Herbert L. White  
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The welcome mat's out for the most ambitious CIAA basketball tournament ever.

Next week's tournament at Charlotte Bobcats Arena will bring more fan-friendly events, star-studded parties and education-oriented activities than last year, which drew a record 155,000 visitors Uptown. Going into the 2006 tournament, skeptics wondered whether Charlotte could match previous host Raleigh's success. "This year, the ques-

tion is can Charlotte top itself.

"I think our stiffest competition is ourselves," said Bill McMillan, director of marketing and business development at the Charlotte Sports Commission and co-chair of the CIAA local organizing committee. "We want to do better than we did. As a community, we want to top ourselves."



McMillan

By fans' reaction, Charlotte's first CIAA tournament was a winner. Charlotte Bobcats Arena and the Convention Center scored high marks for accessibility and programming in a questionnaire completed by visitors. In particular, traffic, and parking in particular, were a concern to some. Everything was open to review.

"We had our first planning meeting after last year's tournament," McMillan said. "We've enhanced some things Please see EXPERIENCE/2A

“ We want to do better than we did. As a community, we want to top ourselves. ”

Charlotte Sports Commission marketing director Bill McMillan

## Obama responds to critics in South Carolina

U.S. senator says he can win in 2008

By Jim Davenport

THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

ORANGEBURG, S.C. - White House hopeful Barack Obama, taking a fellow black lawmaker to task, said Saturday voters are ready to elect a black president.

"At every turn in our history, there's been somebody who said we can't," the Democratic senator from Illinois told a nearly all-black audience of about 2,000 at Clafin University.

"Some people said we can't do this, we can't do that, so we shouldn't even try. If I have your support, if I have your energy and involvement and

commitment and ideas, then I'm here to tell you, 'Yes we can.'"

The comments drew the loudest ovation during a question-and-answer session in his first campaign swing through

South Carolina, an early voting state.

The first-in-the-South contest here is seen as a test of candidates' abilities to reach black voters. Half of the state's Democratic primary voters are black.

Obama responded to comments this past week by Democratic state Sen. Robert

Please see OBAMA/3A



PHOTO/SCOTT LEWIS

U.S. Sen. and presidential candidate Barack Obama (D-Ill.) makes a point during a campaign visit at Clafin College in Orangeburg, S.C., Saturday.

## Top this: Charlotte best U.S. city for black families

By Herbert L. White

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Charlotte's the place for black families to settle, according to a national survey.

BET.com ranked Charlotte the best city in America for African American families, outdistancing Columbus Ohio and Washington, D.C. The worst?

Cleveland, Ohio.

Charlotte's economic strength, coupled with the academic growth of local colleges, booming business community and social scene impressed researchers.

Charlotte's improved efforts to recruit young professionals and 50 percent home ownership

among blacks were also noted.

"Along with learning which areas of the country are more conducive to black families, the Best Cities study helps explore family issues in a cultural and political context," said Retha Hill, BET Interactive's vice president of content. "We hope the results will spark ideas and

inspire positive conversations within the black community."

Researchers examined 22 cities across the U.S., including Atlanta, Boston, Los Angeles and Philadelphia. Criteria included economics, education and crime.

On the Net:  
www.bet.com

### thebox

NEWS, NOTES & TRENDS

## Magic leads HIV town hall meeting

By Herbert L. White

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Know your HIV status?

Basketball hall of famer Magic Johnson will host a town hall meeting on HIV and AIDS Feb. 28 at 6 p.m. Little Rock AME Zion Church, 401 N. McDowell St. The meeting is free as part of Johnson's "I Stand With Magic: Campaign to End Black AIDS."

The campaign's goal is to slash the rate of new HIV infections among African Americans in half over the next five years. Johnson will lead the discussion himself during the town hall meeting. He'll also talk to students at Johnson C. Smith University at 7:30 p.m.

Free AIDS testing will be conducted at Regional HIV/AIDS Consortium, 7510 East Independence Blvd., Suite 105 March 1 from 11 a.m.-3 p.m. and March 2 at Metrolina AIDS Project, 127 Scaleybark Road from 4-8 p.m.



Johnson



To win the CIAA basketball title, contenders need role players to step up/1C

INSIDE

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