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WEEK OF AUGUST 2-8, 2007

Pork fight turns to airwaves

Activists counter Smithfield Foods with TV ads

By Herbert L. White
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The public relations battle between Smithfield Foods and its workers has taken to North Carolina's televisions.

Smithfield, long a target of worker abuse allegations at its pork processing plant in Tar Heel, has launched an advertising campaign to boost its image and lure new employees. A coalition of activists led by the N.C. NAACP plans to counter with ads featuring Smithfield workers demanding a meeting with company officials and a vote on unionization.

"If Smithfield is serious, we all need to sit down and work out a fair process this time," Smithfield plant employee Keith Ludlum says in a commercial to be unveiled today in Raleigh.

The Tar Heel plant, located in Bladen County about 140 miles east of Charlotte, is the world's largest pork-processing facility. Nearly all its 5,000 employees are African American or Latino.

Smithfield's ads, which are running primarily east of Raleigh, include workers praising the company's health care plan and benefits package. The ads close with: "Quality Food. Good Jobs."

The counter ads claim Smithfield fired and intimidated workers as well as federal citations for poor working conditions.

"I was fired illegally for my union activity," Ludlum said in the activist commercial.

Union officials have indicated a willingness to meet with Smithfield leaders and the NAACP. Smithfield President Joseph Luter said the company is willing to allow a union vote in a July 31 letter to state NAACP president William Barber. Luter also criticized the civil rights group for denying workers an opportunity to vote on representation.

"The union has refused, and presumably on behalf of the North Carolina NAACP, you have loudly supported them," he wrote.

Going to X-tremes



PHOTO: CALVIN FERGUSON

Ray Goff of Charlotte catches some air during the competition at the Charlotte Skateboarding & Music Festival at Grayson SkatePark.

Wheel deal at festival

Skateboarders went to the extreme at the second annual Charlotte Skateboarding & Music Festival.

The best boarders in the Charlotte area were at Grayson SkatePark Saturday for a day of big air, acrobatics and music on the 13,000 square foot concrete course. Skateboarders showed off their skills in divisions ranging from beginners to advanced competitors. The best skated in tricks and speed contests and advanced boarders went wheel-to-wheel for cash prizes.

Top skaters also shared tips and pointers on the sport to increase physical fitness and skateboard safety.

Herbert L. White



Raheem Walls of Charlotte tries to keep his balance boarding across the course.

N.C. gang bills fall short at deadline

State will fund prevention programs, commission panel to study their impact

By Herbert L. White
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Tougher laws to deal with gangs in North Carolina will have to wait until 2008.

Lawmakers failed to find consensus on penalties for gang-related activities by the close of the legislative session. The General Assembly isn't likely to convene until May.

Lawmakers, however, approved a \$4.8 million grant program for gang violence prevention and intervention in the state budget signed into law by Gov. Mike Easley Tuesday. Legislators also approved the formation of a committee that will convene meetings on gang activity across the state and report its findings next year.

"The gangs are real," said state Sen. Malcolm Graham of Charlotte, sponsor of the Street Gang Prevention Act. "Not only in Charlotte, but across North Carolina."

Charlotte has 2,000 police-documented gang members and 150 sets, or individual units.

"The gang problem is a growing and complex issue that affects all facets of our community," he said. Please see **GANG/3A**



Graham

APPRECIATION

Vanessa Baxter blazed trail in local TV news

By Ken Koontz
SPECIAL TO THE CHARLOTTE POST

Former Charlotte TV reporter C. Vanessa Baxter died at her home Monday after an 18-month fight against pancreatic cancer. She was 53.

Ms. Baxter was among a wave of African-American women reporters at WBTV News in the mid-1970s. She joined the top-rated news organization in 1976 upon graduation from Howard University, where she had been a mass communications major.

She joined Debbie Mann (Gibbs) and Beatrice Thompson to form the unprecedented makeup of three black women news staffers and later a fourth with the addition of Charlene Price (Patterson). Ms. Baxter covered numerous beats, especially education, during her four-year tenure at WBTV News.

Please see **C. VANESSA BAXTER/2A**



Baxter



PHOTO: CALVIN FERGUSON

GOOD WORKS: Neighborhood activist Aaron McKeithan (third from left) and developer Bobby Drakeford (second from right) show off their community activist and business leadership awards at the Northwest Corridor CDC Philanthropy Awards luncheon at Johnson C. Smith University. Kareem Boykin of McCrory YMCA is on the left, Brenda McMoore of NWCCDC is second from the left. NWCCDC Director Gwen Isley is on the right.

Fight crime with a night out

By Herbert L. White
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Get to know your neighbors and fight crime on August 7.

National Night Out brings neighbors together to fight crime and drug abuse annually. Community groups typically sponsor activities for families ranging from rallies to picnics to boost awareness. Mecklenburg County Park and Recreation will host activities across Mecklenburg County.

National Night Out is sponsored by the National Association of Town Watch. An estimated 34 million people from more than 10,000 communities across the U.S. and

Canada participated last year.

National Night Out started 24 years ago with homeowners leaving their front lights on and neighbors getting acclimated with each other to battle crime. Over time, activities including block parties, cookouts, and parades have been added.

Among the activities in Charlotte:

Block Party in the 1500 block of Clanton Road, 6-9 p.m., sponsored by the Arbor Glen Outreach, Amay James, and Southview Recreation Centers. Residents of 17 neighborhoods on or near West Blvd are expected to participate. Recreation center staff will provide.

See **KNOW NEIGHBORS/2A**



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in order to enjoy the
summer heat/1B

INSIDE

Life 1B
Religion 4B

Sports 1C
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