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## No go on union vote at plant

*Smithfield Foods rejects plea by NAACP, workers*

By Erin Gortner  
 THE ASSOCIATED PRESS

RALEIGH—In another push to organize workers at the world's largest hog slaughterhouse, union and NAACP leaders publicly asked Smithfield Foods Inc. on Thursday to sit-down and discuss a "fair and uncoerced" process for holding an organizing election.

It was a request rebuffed almost immediately by the company.

"There's nothing to be accomplished there," said Smithfield spokesman Dennis Pittman, who said such a meeting could occur only when the union agreed to pursue a secret-ballot election. "If they have made up their minds to allow our employees to use the democratic process to hold a union election ... we'll be glad to sit down with them."

That demand drew a similar scoff from labor leaders and the NAACP's North Carolina chapter, who cite Smithfield's illegal meddling in two previous secret-ballot organizing elections. They say nothing can happen until a working dialogue opens between the company and the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union.

"This dispute has clearly reached a point where civil discussion between management and union must occur," the Rev. William Barber, president of the state chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, said during a news conference in Raleigh.

It was the latest exchange in a 12-year dispute between the company and the United Food and Commercial Workers International Union, which has been trying for more than a decade to organize Smithfield's massive plant in Tar Heel, a speck of a town about 80 miles south of Raleigh. More than 5,000 workers process up to

Please see **SMITHFIELD/3A**

## Building leaders at West Charlotte High



PHOTO:CALVIN FERGLUSON

West Charlotte basketball coach Thad Bonaparte leads discussion Wednesday at UNC Charlotte as part of the Emerging Leaders Institute for freshmen.

### Initiative's goal: Nurture culture of achievement in freshmen

By Kristian Coley  
 THE CHARLOTTE POST

Turning around an academically-challenged school takes more than just making students study more. It starts with changing attitudes towards learning.

The Emerging Leaders Institute will prepare West Charlotte High School freshmen to be school leaders. The students were recommended by middle school guidance counselors for their leadership potential.

Two groups of participants attended a week-long session at UNC Charlotte where they develop skills that will enhance that potential. On the last day of each session, a graduation ceremony will be held on West Charlotte's campus. The program teaches the value of making good choices, forming positive relationships with

Please see **IS INITIATIVE/8A**



West Charlotte Principal John Modest congratulates the first class of participants last Friday on campus.

## Congressman turns into a regular Joe

By Cheris F. Hodges  
 cheris.hodges@thecharlottepost.com

U.S. Rep. Mel Watt keeps his finger on the pulse of the people by trading places with them.

The annual switch keeps Watt close to the people who voted him into office.

On Monday morning, he started his day at the Charlotte Metro Credit Union on Central Avenue. His teller line wasn't the fastest but many customers were clamoring to be waited on by the 12th District representative.

Watt said working in the credit union gave him an appreciation for the differences between a bank and credit union.

"The first thing they drove See **TRADING/6A**



PHOTO:PAUL WILLIAMS III

U.S. Rep. Mel Watt of Charlotte (right) tries his hand as a bank teller Monday at Charlotte Metro Credit Union. Amber Brown trained Watt.

### KATRINA RECOVERY SLOW IN MOSTLY-BLACK AREAS



PHOTO:ERICA SINGLETON

New Orleans resident Richard Baptiste stands in front of his former home in the Ninth Ward. Recovery for the poorest sections of the city have been slow.

## New Orleans: Tale of two cities

By Erica Singleton  
 FOR THE CHARLOTTE POST

This month marks two years since Hurricane Katrina ravaged the Gulf Coast. What I knew of the devastation I learned from watching television.

The photos of whole neighborhoods flooded, of people stranded on top of houses, of bodies just floating in the streets. Two years after those images first appeared to me, I truly didn't know what to expect when I was given an opportunity to visit New Orleans and tour its suburbs.

I knew things wouldn't be complete, but I had some expectations, what I saw just blew

me away.

Before Katrina the population of New Orleans' metropolitan area was 1,337,726, with 484,674 residents in Orleans Parish, and 455,466 in Jefferson Parish. Today it is estimated that 1,265,000 people reside in the metropolitan area with only 250,000 residents in Orleans Parish, and 500,000 in the Jefferson Parish, according to the New Orleans Tourism and Marketing Development Corporation.

Based on recent Census data, New Orleans lost half of its population between July 2005 and July 2006. For those that stayed or have come back, nothing will ever be the same.

See **TWO YEARS/2A**

## Risks to living space remain

*Environmental racism still prevalent across the U.S., activists tell senators*

By James Wright  
 AFRO-AMERICAN NEWSPAPERS

Sheila Holt-Orsted sat quietly in the Senate hearing room in the Dirksen Senate Office Building while before her a dream was fulfilled: the first Congressional hearing on environmental justice.

Sen. Hillary Rodham Clinton (D-N.Y.), chairwoman of the Environmental and Public Works Committee's Subcommittee on Superfund and Environmental Health, held the unprecedented hearing late last month.

Holt-Orsted met with Clinton, by chance, a few weeks ago and the two talked.

Clinton told Holt-Orsted that she read an article about her in a nationally-circulated magazine and wanted her to attend the then-upcoming hearing on environmental racism.

Holt-Orsted agreed, and she was satisfied with what she saw.

"This was a very productive hearing," she said. "It is a problem that is confronting this country. The (Environmental Protection Agency) needs to be put on notice that this is not right and has to change."

Please see **ENVIRONMENTAL/3A**



Clinton

### CONVENTION IN CHARLOTTE

## For Shriners, giving is global

By Herbert L. White  
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Prince Hall Shriners do more than march in colorful hats.

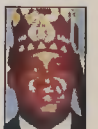
They support education, medical outreach and economic development around the globe.

And 30,000 of them are expected to meet in Charlotte next week.

The fraternal organization will gather August 18-23 for the 114th Imperial Council Session at the Charlotte Convention Center. The 96th Imperial Court Session of the Daughters of Isis will also be held.

The Imperial Council has launched programs that include African outreach and voter registration and education drives in the U.S. Among its initiatives are grants to the Prince Hall Shrine Health and Medical Research Foundation, education grants for

Please see **PUBLIC/2A**



Slaughter



Three women and a cookbook: How cuisine builds relationships/1B

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