

Town Council OKs new name for road

BY ADAM W. RHEW
STAFF WRITER

Dec. 7 — The emotion that characterized an 11-month saga about renaming Airport Road in honor of a civil rights leader spilled into the topic's final chapter.

The Chapel Hill Town Council received a standing ovation from members of the community when it voted unanimously in favor of changing the name of Airport Road to Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard.

"Dr. King fought just for this," said Brenda Brown, an at-large member of the Special Committee to Consider Renaming Airport Road.

The committee's recommendation of the name change by a 15-3 vote helped drive the council to approve the renaming.

Brown wept with joy after the council approved the committee's proposal, which calls for the road to be renamed by July 4, 2005.

That recommendation also calls for the placement of separate street signs with the designation "Historic Airport Road" along the road.

But some people were not as pleased as Brown.

Catherine Holland, who served on the committee and owns a business on Airport Road, expressed frustration with the committee's final recommendation, which evolved during three November meetings. "To (committee members in favor of the renaming), Airport Road seems like the only solution," she said.

Before voting on the proposal, council members heard a presentation from two of the facilitators hired by the town to ensure that the committee's meetings stayed focused.

The presentation highlighted the committee's final report, which discusses the group's 10 total rec-

ommendations and its decision-making process.

Council members then heard comments from community members on both sides of the issue.

"It would be nice if we could just wave a magic wand and everybody would be happy about this," said Billy Madden, who lives near Airport Road and was opposed to the change.

After the vote, facilitator Calvin Allen said he knew some people would not be happy with the decision. "It's hard that there are still some questions out there," he said.

One of those questions relates to a concern that the committee was "hand-picked" by the council in order to achieve a certain outcome.

"I can't help but think that the committee was stacked," said Bruce Johnson, an Airport Road business owner and one of the three committee members who voted against recommending the name change.

Holland expressed similar displeasure. "I am very disappointed and discouraged by the actions of the members of this council," she said.

In a pre-meeting press conference, Mayor Kevin Foy said the council picked people who wanted to engage in discussion.

"We didn't need to stack the committee," he said. "We didn't have to have the committee at all."

At Monday night's meeting, Foy requested that Town Manager Cal Horton review the committee's nine other recommendations, including the promotion of further discussions on race relations.

Council members will likely hear those proposals in January.

Contact the City Editor at citydesk@unc.edu.

Stone Center opens its doors

BY ARMAN TOLENTINO
STAFF WRITER

Aug. 23 — Overcast skies and light rain didn't stop the grand opening ceremony Saturday morning for the freestanding Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History — an event that marked the culmination of more than a decade of controversy, advocacy, planning and fund raising.

Chancellor James Moeser, with Chapel Hill Mayor Kevin Foy, UNC-system President Molly Broad and other top officials on hand, officially dedicated the building in front of more than 500 guests who gathered under a tent outside the facility.

The morning ceremony was the second part of a four-day grand opening celebration. On Friday night, members of the University community participated in a candlelight vigil and procession from the Old Chapel Hill Cemetery to the new building.

"Very few building dedications carry as much meaning and emotion as this one," Moeser said. "It's extraordinary because so many of you knew Dr. Sonja Haynes Stone."

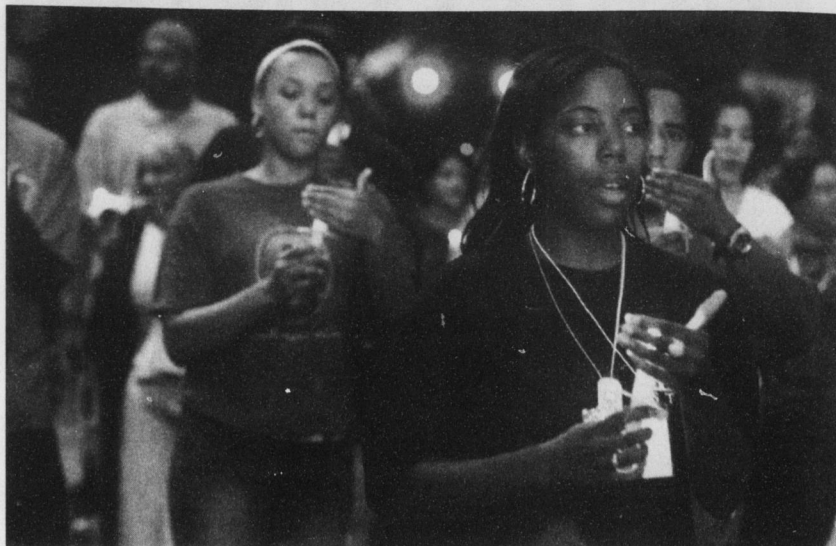
Stone was an associate professor of African-American studies and was known for her efforts to give minorities a stronger voice in University affairs.

Moeser said the building is fittingly named for Stone, whom he described as an inspirational teacher.

"We want all of our students to be moved by the experience of a teacher," he said. "This center is the physical legacy of a great teacher."

Broad also acknowledged Stone's legacy and said her ideals and dreams will live on in the center.

"It breathes life into Dr. Stone's unwavering commitment to social justice," Broad said.



DTH FILE PHOTO/LAURA MORTON

Senior Michelle Greene, a four-year Communitary member who worked for the old Black Cultural Center, helps lead a procession to the Sonja Haynes Stone Center for Black Culture and History on Aug. 20.

A debate begins

When Stone died of a stroke in 1991 at the age of 52, officials renamed UNC's Black Cultural Center — at the time located in a suite in the Student Union — in honor of Stone.

Shortly after, students associated with the center and the Black Student Movement pushed for a freestanding black cultural center.

Debate about a freestanding center intensified when former Chancellor Paul Hardin, who supported an expanded cultural center in the Union rather than a freestanding one, remarked in March 1992 that a cultural center should be "a forum and not a fortress."

Hardin later explained his reasons for opposing a freestanding center, including the lack of available funding, his own self-described conservative attitude toward new buildings and his desire for all minorities to feel comfortable.

But his comment attracted national media attention and resulted in student-led protests, marches, sit-ins and subsequent arrests.

Joseph Jordan, director of the Stone Center, acknowledged the students who began the fight for

a freestanding center during his opening remarks.

"Today, this is much their day as it is anyone else's," he said.

Stone's son, Robert B. Stone-El, Jr., also paid tribute to those students and others at UNC who made the freestanding center possible.

"I call this University great, not because of its size or because of the beautiful campus, but because of the people who are here and make it great," he said.

The search for funds

Hardin eventually threw his support behind a freestanding center, but fund-raising efforts struggled to meet the \$9 million needed to build the facility.

To raise money, students sponsored benefit concerts and led community walks.

In 1997-98, students made a pledge to raise \$20,000, while members of the UNC Board of Trustees promised a five-to-one match from their own pockets if students met that goal. They succeeded, and the trustees made their match.

Then in 1999, the University received a \$29 million gift from an alumnus. Former Chancellor

Michael Hooker decided to use part of the gift to complete the fund-raising campaign.

Moeser acknowledged Hooker in his address, as well as the efforts of students, faculty, staff and members of the University community who helped make the center a reality.

"The struggle to build this building was a crucible of commitment," he said.

Broad echoed Moeser's comments on the hard work and dedication that went in to establishing a freestanding center on campus.

"The hope and dreams of so many are embodied in this place," she said. "It is a culmination of years of dogged persistence in a belief and vision."

BSM President Erin Davis also talked about the struggle for a standalone center. She said that the movement was led mostly by students who took pride in their heritage and who demanded that the University do the same, generating loud applause from the crowd.

Making an impact

Richard "Stick" Williams, chairman of BOT, spoke about the impact the center will have on the University and the surrounding community.

"This place is open to everyone — all races and creeds, all schools and departments," he said. "If done right, this center can be quite a gathering place for folks across campus and the community."

Foy also commented on his desire for the center to be accessible to all people, regardless of their background or where they live.

"It's my hope that the center will not be confined to this University, but that it will look outward to this town, to this state and to this nation," he said.

Student Body President Matt Calabria also addressed the crowd, commenting that the candlelight vigil made him realize how special the center is to the University.

"It wasn't until last night that I got it," he said. "It's hard for students right now to truly understand just how the Stone Center was developed and the struggle for it to come about. But last night I really felt what it means to be here."

'It's finally here'

After the ceremony, visitors took a tour of the 44,500-square-foot facility that features a 360-seat cylinder-shaped theater in the form of an African drum.

The facility also includes a 10,000-volume library, art gallery, dance studio and a multipurpose room in addition to classrooms, seminar rooms and a computer lab.

Offices will house the center staff, visiting scholars, the Institute of African American Research and Upward Bound.

Moeser invited the crowd to explore the building, in the same way he envisions people from the community and the state doing in the coming years.

"I see North Carolina children visiting this building, just like they do at Morehead Planetarium," he said.

During the year, the center will offer a variety of programs, including lectures, concerts, workshops and discussion groups.

Senior Michelle Greene, who worked with the Stone Center when it was located in the Union, said she is glad the center finally has a true home. "You just get the feeling that it's finally here," she said.

With the beige walls of the Stone Center behind her, Broad looked into the crowd and spoke about the significance of the day's events.

"We mark an important milestone in what has been a very long journey," she said.

"Today is also a fresh start for a future that is full of great potential."

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