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New Orleans

# Data

News Weekly

"The People's Paper"

## Data Zone

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New Orleans!

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## COVER STORY

# The Essence Of New Orleans

*Does New Orleans miss the Essence Festival more than the Essence Festival misses New Orleans?*

Story by Eddie Francis



As the Fourth of July weekend approaches there seems to be among some New Orleanians emptiness about not having the sights and sounds of the Essence Music Festival fill the Louisiana Superdome and Downtown New Orleans. In 2006 the "Essence Fest" will happen in Houston Texas from July 1st through July 3rd. The feelings about attending this year's "Party with a Purpose" among New Orleanians are mixed. Whereas some are excited about taking the road trip to Houston, others just do not have the desire to go.

Conversations among many black New Orleanians after Hurricane Katrina reflected their disappointment in not only the damage that had been done to their fair city but also how they would miss such annual traditions as the Bayou Classic and the Essence Fest. Those conversations continue as locals anticipate how Houston will receive a festival that many in New Orleans felt has been theirs and theirs, alone.

One local figure who has his finger on the pulse of New Orleanians is Q93 radio's "Wild Wayne" Benjamin. Benjamin cites the same pros and cons of the Essence Fest being in Houston. "One bad thing is that Houston is so big. You don't have the same set-up as New Orleans as far as people being able to get around after the shows," he says. He also echoes people's concern that Houston is not the same kind of party-friendly city that New Orleans is. Where festival-goers in New Orleans could leave shows at 2 a.m., walk to the French Quarter or take a very short ride to their favorite after-parties the same will not happen in Houston simply because most establishments in the conservative city close down at 2 a.m.

The same concerns are repeated by David Belton, who lives outside of Houston as a result of Hurricane Katrina. Belton had lived in New

Orleans most of his life. When asked if there is a buzz in Houston about the Essence Fest, "None," he shoots back. Belton says that he has noticed little-to-no advertisements about the festival on the city's airwaves. "There is so much to do here and it's so big that people are barely talking about it," he says. He goes on to say that New Orleanians in Houston are talking about the Essence Fest but Houstonians do not share the same passion for the Essence Fest that locals do. "There's more of a buzz about a Caribbean festival that's happening the same weekend," he says.

That Caribbean festival is the Houston CaribFest, which will be held from June 29th to July 2nd and brings to one's attention a major difference between New Orleans and Houston. For 10 years the Essence Fest has had the luxury of thriving in a city that has a predominately black population. Houston, as Belton points out, is a much more culturally and internationally diverse city. Therefore, the Essence Fest has to compete with other events in the market and that is something it has never had to do. Anyone in New Orleans would recall that no black organization or institution would dare schedule an event on the same weekend of the Essence Festival unless that event was an Essence Fest after-party that promised revelers a convenient distance from the Superdome and had undeniable presence and promotion. In Houston, the Essence Festival does not seem to be getting the same kind of respect from local event planners.

The Essence Fest was only supposed to be a one-time affair but the demand for its success could not be ignored. New Orleanians sang the festival's praises about everything from having visitors from other cities to the performers to the seminars to the homerun New Orleans favorite closing act—Maze

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# COVER STORY



featuring Frankie Beverly. And then there was the ultimate love that Essence Fest showed for New Orleans—economic impact. Michelle Ebanks, president of Essence Communications, Inc. told The Houston Chronicle, “The economic impact of the festival in New Orleans was only second only to the Super Bowl.”

It could very well be that a litmus test for feasibility of the Essence Fest’s surviving its one year outside of New Orleans was the Bayou Classic. Belton recalls that a Southern University alumnus scoffed at the idea of the Bayou Classic returning to Houston in the case of another disaster. Belton says, “He told me that if the Classic had a choice to come back to Houston in case of another disaster, they would rather cancel it.” Belton says the member of the Jaguar Nation and others did not find Houston “as welcoming” as they hoped it would have been.

There are positives for both New Orleans and the Essence Fest in the temporary move to Houston. Benjamin mentioned that having a city as big as Houston host the three-day event should serve as an attraction to a wider range of would-be attendees from around the nation. Also, it provides another opportunity for evacuees in Houston to grab a taste of New Orleans. Finally he points out that it should be taken as a vote of confidence that the Essence Fest will return to New Orleans in 2007, as they only signed a one-year contract to be

in Houston. As a bonus, Susan Taylor, the editorial director of Essence Magazine, serves on the Louisiana Recovery Authority. Taylor told FM 98, WYLD’s “Sunday Journal”, “I think mine is an important voice because I do ask the important questions that are the critical ones . . . making sure that African-Americans who are in business are not forgotten . . . and there’s parity. And that’s what we all have to look out for.”

The festival kept has also maintained local ties with New Orleans through the seminars and performances. Marian Wright Edelman will speak on “The Children of Katrina: Securing Their Future” and former mayor of New Orleans and President and CEO of the National Urban League, Marc Morial, will address seminar attendees on “Picking Up the Pieces After the Storms: Healing and Restoring Lives”. Mayor Ray Nagin will deliver a special address at the day’s seminar. Performing for the festival will be the Rebirth Brass Band, Michael Ward and the Franklin Avenue Baptist Church Choir. Also, local newly published author, Harold Clark will sign copies of his book, “Chummy’s Spirit”. In the super lounges DJ’s Captain Charles and Raj Smoove will entertain the masses.

Despite any challenges, organizers of the festival still expect a healthy turnout. Organizers expect to attract 250,000 festival-goers with 5,000 to 7,000 people attending the seminars, alone.



## Data News Weekly

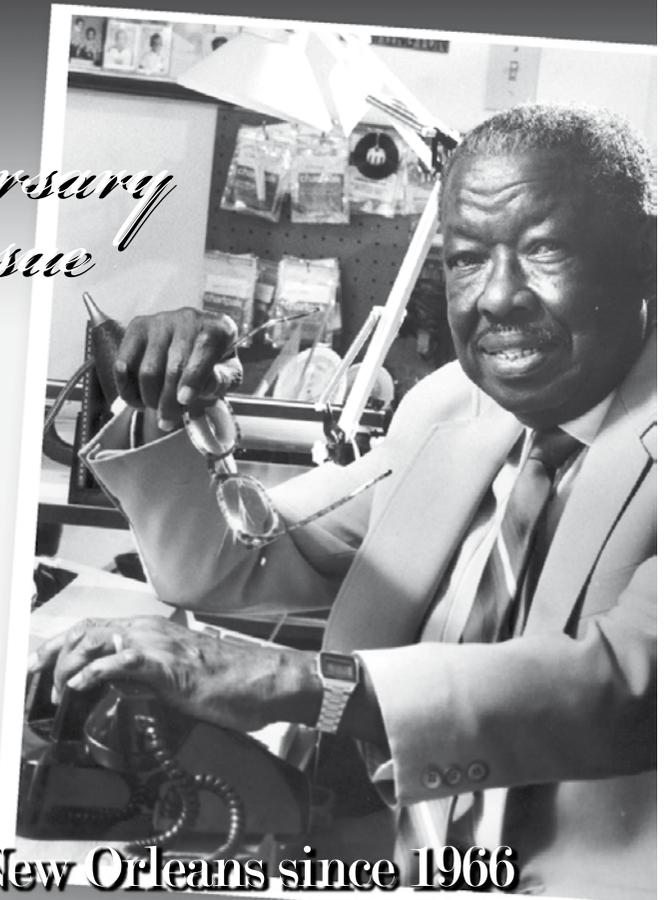
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## NEWSMAKER

# Assessing the Assessor:

## *An Interview with Darren Mire*

By: Edwin Buggage



There has been a recent firestorm of media attention concerning the consolidation of the New Orleans Assessor's Office from seven to one. As these measures have passed amidst controversy through the Louisiana State Legislature, it will soon be up to the people to decide whether they should continue to have the present system that's in place or make drastic reforms. Since much of the mainstream media hasn't made much of an effort to present both sides, we at Data News Weekly want you the citizens to hear both sides. So in a Data News Weekly Exclusive we have an in-depth interview with Assessor Darren Mire of the First Municipal District where he shares his thoughts about this issues and the future of the Assessor's Office.

**EB:** Let's begin by talking about the evolution of this becoming a hot button issue, and also how the mainstream media hasn't really made an effort to present both sides of this issue?

**DM:** I think certain people have an agenda in my opinion. And I believe this became an issue a couple years ago by one of our major newspapers in the city when they started writing a series of negative articles about the current tax assessment system and in my opinion began trying to build a consensus that we should go down from our current system of seven assessors to one. And it is true that all other parishes in the state have one assessor, and the proponents are saying it's an equality issue and why should we be different than any of the other parishes. And to

me what's interesting is that for us we have seven, but it's historical in its origin because there were seven townships in New Orleans, and when the city became one municipality it took on the seven assessors set up.

**EB:** Now that we know its origins what are the benefits of having seven assessors in today's New Orleans?

**DM:** I think the mistake people are making is that they're thinking the job of the assessor is population based, but it is in fact parcel based. So we value the number of parcels, not the number of people. The people other side are saying in post-Katrina New Orleans we need one, but because fewer people are in the city does not mean that those properties where people are not residing does not need to be assessed, this assertion is false. There is also a problem with how the argument is being crafted, but the truth of the matter is that the parcels that number over 160,000 in this city still need to be assessed yearly.

**EB:** Let's say that hypothetically there was one assessor; is it possible in your opinion for one assessor to actually do the job that was previously done by seven people?

**DM:** It is possible for one assessor to do the job of seven, but not with the amount of money they have right now. In 2003 the legislative auditor did a report that basically stated that all seven of the assessors offices in New Orleans were underfunded based on the amount of parcels they have to assesses. Now if you go down to one you would have the exact same budget and it would still be underfunded. I believe yes it can be done like in other parishes, but it would have to be funded better.

**EB:** Would it make more sense to adequately fund one office rather than continue to inadequately fund seven?

**DM:** In this scenario the taxpayer would lose that personal contact with their assessors, and it would become more bureaucratic. Yes you would still be serviced, but not in the friendly

fashion people are being serviced presently. I believe people have the right to see their assessors, which they can do right now because they are seven, but when you have only one you may never have the opportunity to speak with your assessor directly if there is a problem with your property tax assessment.

**EB:** In your honest opinion why has this become such an important issue right now?

**DM:** Like I stated previously there was several studies published by a local newspaper that said the offices were not uniformed in how they assessed property value. And as they make the push for consolidating other offices as well like with the judges for instance, I believe there are racial undertones that no one is talking about. When there were seven White Assessors there wasn't a strong push for consolidation. Now we have three Black Assessors, and two majority black districts that have White Assessors and that may soon change. So it is definitely a power move by certain individuals, it's not much different than what happened with the levee board, where the people who were in favor of consolidating it did not flood. I'm not saying that's all together a bad thing, but in the case of those who are pushing this agenda of one assessor, are not the ones who come into our offices seeking relief, because their property was damaged, it is those who weren't affected and are now paying more taxes.

**EB:** You just mentioned something very interesting in the fact that you feel there are racial undertones in this planned consolidation. But the authors of the bill Ann Duplessis and Austin Badon, as well as State Representative Cedric Richmond have also proposed a bill that would have one assessor statewide are all African-Americans. Do you feel they are just the front people while others are behind the scenes giving them their directives?

**DM:** I've had several conversations with both Austin Badon and Ann Duplessis, who were authors of the bill, and they basically felt like it was the right thing to do. I truly think they thought it was the right thing to do because they feel New Orleans is no

different than any other parish and we need to cut bureaucracy. Now at the same time these are two representatives where the majority of the people in their district are displaced, and mind you the assessor's office is based on parcels and we still have to assess those properties, but what's interesting is they're representative of districts where most of their constituents are absent and those communities future are uncertain, but you don't see the same move to eliminate their own jobs.

**EB:** In reference to the issue of consolidation, the Mayor Ray Nagin, Governor Blanco, the Business Council of New Orleans and the River Region and others have supported this measure, what do you feel is the common thread that have brought them together to attempt to reform your offices?

**DM:** The common thread they feel is money. They thought that there would be uniformity if there were one assessor. Now my argument is a little different, I believe you may not get uniformity if you have one assessor. I think the bigger problem is how do you fix the property tax system, I believe the bill would have been probably better crafted if there had other reforms in it that would give whoever the one assessor is if this would pass the tools to do their job more effectively. I think the only good thing about the bill is that the people have the right to vote on it and that will happen in November.

**EB:** Janet Howard, the President of the Bureau of Governmental Research stated that forty-one percent of all the properties in New Orleans are underassessed, how true is that?

**DM:** I think there is some truth to that, but keep in mind that is pre-Katrina. Now I think this is the time since so many properties were damaged that it is a unique opportunity for all seven assessors to start over and do the job correctly that they inherited. Underassessing of property taxes is an age old problem. There have been calls for reforms, but this problem is larger than New Orleans, in fact it is the whole state of Louisiana.

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## NATIONAL NEWS

# Voting Rights Extension 'Highjacked' in Congress



Photo: Monica Morgan

National Urban League President and CEO Marc Morial

By Hazel Trice Edney  
NNPA Washington  
Correspondent

DETROIT (NNPA) - Civil Rights leaders are enraged over efforts to 'highjack' proposals to extend the Voting Rights Act this year and are urging voters to express their dissatisfaction.

"The Voting Rights Act got derailed, highjacked, expropriated by a hand full of - you fill in the blank - southern members of Congress, who literally, in the last hour, raised loud and vociferous objections to going forward," said Marc H. Morial, president and CEO of the National Urban League. "The argument advanced by these members of the House have absolutely no merit whatsoever. They are 40-year-old arguments that have been stirred in a 21st century pot, put in a microwave and zapped."

Bruce Gordon, president and CEO of the NAACP, says the organization is encouraging its members to call their elected representatives.

"We are doing a lot of work," he says. "In the civil rights movement, we learned that some things happen in the back room where the deals are made."

Gordon said while most of the public attention is focused on the House, the Senate has been slow to renew the voting measure. Gordon has met with Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), chairman of the Judiciary Committee, to register his concerns.

"The Senate is slowing their roll," Gordon says. "They're not moving this with the sense of urgency that they should."

The two civil rights leaders made their comments in a joint appearance before the annual convention of the National Newspaper Publishers Association, a federation of more than 200 Black newspapers.

Key provisions of the 1965 Voting Rights Act expire next August. Activists are eager to get the measure extended this year to avert possible last-minute legislative glitches. In a rare show of bipartisanship, Republicans and Democrats, along with President Bush, voiced support for H.R. 9, called the Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments of 2006.

The sponsors include Senate Majority Leader Bill Frist (R-Tenn.), Minority Leader Harry Reid (D-Nev.) and Sens. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), Patrick Leahy (D-Vt.) and Edward Kennedy (D-Mass.). The House sponsors include Reps. James Sensenbrenner (R-Wis.), John Conyers (D-Mich.) and Melvin Watt (D-N.C.).

"In the 1960s, many active citizens struggled hard to convince Congress to pass civil rights legislation that ensured the rights of all - including the right to vote. That victory was a milestone in the history of civil rights. Congress must act to renew the Voting Rights Act of 1965," President Bush said in a Black History month speech at the White House.

Given the broad political support, civil rights leaders and members of the Congressional Black Caucus were stunned last week when a handful of southern Republicans held up the legislation, complaining that the South - the region most covered

by the legislation - had been unfairly targeted. However, Black political disenfranchisement was common in the Deep South during the early 1960s, when the legislation was first passed.

Opponents of the voting extension argue that it should be nationalized so that one region will not be unfairly burdened. However, civil rights activists say that would only lead to nullifying the measure because, under recent Supreme Court rulings, past discrimination must be

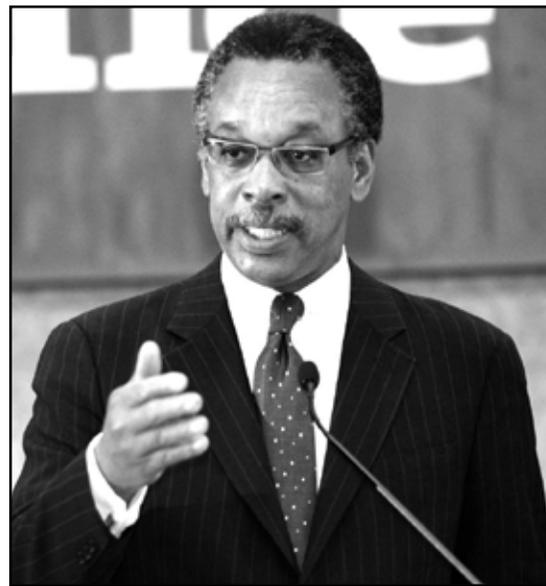


Photo: Monica Morgan

NAACP President and CEO Bruce Gordon

established in order for a measure to be held constitutional.

"We have worked extremely hard over a number of months to reach bipartisan and bicameral agreement on this legislation and had reason to believe it would be considered expeditiously," CBC Chairman Mel Watt said in statement. "The Voting Rights Act has always had strong support from Democrats and Republicans alike. We fear that pulling the bill could send the wrong message about whether the bill enjoys broad bipartisan support and that delaying consideration until after the July 4 recess could give those with partisan intensions space and time to politicize the issue."

Even some Republicans are baffled by the holdup.

House Judiciary Committee Chairman F. James Sensenbrenner Jr. (R-Wis.) says the bi-partisan bill was crafted after months of studying more than 12,000 pages of testimony that indicated there is much work to be done in assuring non-discrimination before the

vote of the Voting Rights Act is complete.

"Some members, whom I believe are misinformed, have expressed concerns about voting on this legislation now," says Sensenbrenner in a statement. "I stand by this bi-partisan legislation. H.R. 9 is a good bill."

Congress first amended and strengthened the Voting Rights Act in 1982, when it was first set to expire, and then extended it for 25 years - until 2007. Key sections are set to expire next year. One is

the pre-clearance clause of Section 5, requiring all or parts of 16 states with a history of discrimination to submit any changes in voting procedures to the Department of Justice for approval before they can take effect.

Those states are: Alabama, Alaska, Arizona, California, Florida, Georgia, Louisiana, Michigan,

Mississippi, New Hampshire, New York, North Carolina, South Carolina, South Dakota, Texas and Virginia. The state, county or local governments must prove to federal authorities that voting changes do not have racially discriminatory purposes and that they will not make racial minority voters worse off than they were prior to the change. The attorney general can then prevent a change by issuing an objection, which can be challenged in the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit. Section 5 also requires federal poll watchers to be onsite during voting.

Section 203, which requires voting precincts to eliminate any language barriers, is also up for renewal.

Some civil rights leaders had predicted trouble. Jesse Jackson Sr. said during the 40th anniversary of the act last year: "The forces that we defeated in 1965 never stopped trying to take it back... They never stop."

## Mayor Bowser of East Orange, N. J. Elected President of the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc.



NCBM President, Mayor Robert Bowser of East Orange, N.J.

NNPA Newswire - Mayor Robert Bowser of East Orange, N.J. was elected President of the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc. (NCBM) in Memphis, Tenn. at the organizations 32nd annual convention held April 26-30, 2006. Mayor Bowser who is the organizations 17th President will lead the organization over the next year. Mayor Bowser stated "I am excited about my selection as President and the opportunity to lead this organization and our mayors around the country into a higher level of service to this country".

Mayor Bowser, City of East Orange 12th Mayor and the first African American in the history of the City to have been elected to serve a third term. Initially elected in 1998 and re-elected in 2002 and 2006.

As President, Mayor Bowser will set the National Conference of Black Mayors, Inc. agenda, appoint committee and task force chairs, and serve as the national spokesperson for the organization.

During his inaugural address outlining his vision for the next year, Bowser stressed that NCBM must help with the development of our nations youth, strengthen public/private partnerships and continue to enhance the executive management capacity of its member mayors. "Our member mayors collectively represent over 30 million people across the country and helping to empower them to empower their citizens will intern help to change the world" he said.

The mayors also elected Mayor George Grace, St. Gabriel, LA 1st Vice President, Mayor James Perkins, Selma, AL 2nd Vice President, and Mayor Heather Hudson, Greenville, MS 3rd Vice President.

STATE & LOCAL NEWS

# Calling in the Calvary?

*Does the presence of the National Guard indicate a city out of control?*

By Cheryl Mainor

In the Nine months since Hurricane Katrina and the flood which followed, the City of New Orleans has passed through various periods low and

high crime phases. But the return of the National Guard troops to the streets of the city, has brought to the forefront the question of whether or not New Orleans can handle its own problems, and is it ready for the influx of repatriates expected this summer.

The media spotlight shone hard on the Crescent City following the brutal killings of 5 young black men in a violent episode, the likes of which have not been seen in many years. These murders, an apparent retaliation action, seemed to be the catalyst for Mayor Ray Nagin to call in

reinforcements. But according to NOPD Superintendent Warren J. Riley, this process has been in the works since March.

According to Superintendent Riley, the request to have troops sent in this summer was made by his office in March, in advance of the mass return of residents, when FEMA assistance is scheduled to cease on June 30. With the large numbers of those possibly returning, and more areas becoming repopulated, NOPD anticipated the need for extra reinforcements. But other fear that the violence could discourage people from moving back to New Orleans.

Mayor Nagin, prompted by the highly publicized murders, made the decision to make the request to the Governor to enlist the assistance of the National Guard, making this the first time it has been used for law enforcement in the United States since the immediate aftermath of Hurricane Katrina. Nagin's request to Gov. Blanco was for as many as 300 National Guardsmen and 60 state police officers. Acting on the Mayor's request, Gov. Kathleen Blanco agreed to send National Guard troops and state police to patrol the streets of New Orleans. In her press statement, Gov Blanco said, "The situation is urgent". "Things like this should never happen, and I am going to do all I can to stop it."

In a public statement regarding his decision, Mayor Nagin stated, "Today is a day when New Orleanians are stepping up. We've had enough," Nagin said. "This is our line in the sand. We're saying we're not going any further."

Nagin said he would not allow criminals to take over when the city is still trying to recover from the hurricane. The mayor said in the immediate future, 100 troops will be posted in heavily flooded neighborhoods to free police to concentrate on hot spots elsewhere. The troops, dressed in full camouflage fatigues, arrived in a convoy of 75 vehicles many of them that arrived Tuesday were sent to New Orleans during Katrina, but they had not seen the city since that time. Up to 200 more Guardsmen will be sent in later, bringing the total in the city to 300. In addition, 60 state police officers were sent to help keep the peace. "We're just trying to give a hand to the city of New Orleans," said Lt. Melvin Edwards, 32, a member of 239th Military Police Company. Capt. Alfred Travis, the company commander, said the Guard's mission was "still part of Katrina." "We're in the disaster phase, and I think we may be in the disaster phase for a while, until the neighborhoods are built up again," Travis said.

Reaction to the mayor's request was mixed. "As we tell people to come home, we have to keep these areas safe," said LaToya Cantrell, president of the Broadmoor Improvement Association, a heavily

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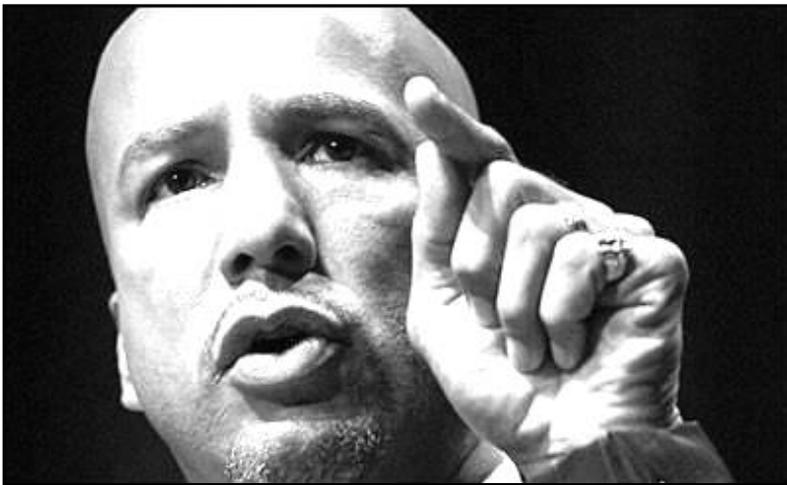
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Continued on next page.

## STATE & LOCAL NEWS



New Orleans Mayor Ray Nagin asked the governor to send up to 300 National Guard troops and 60 state police officers to patrol the city.

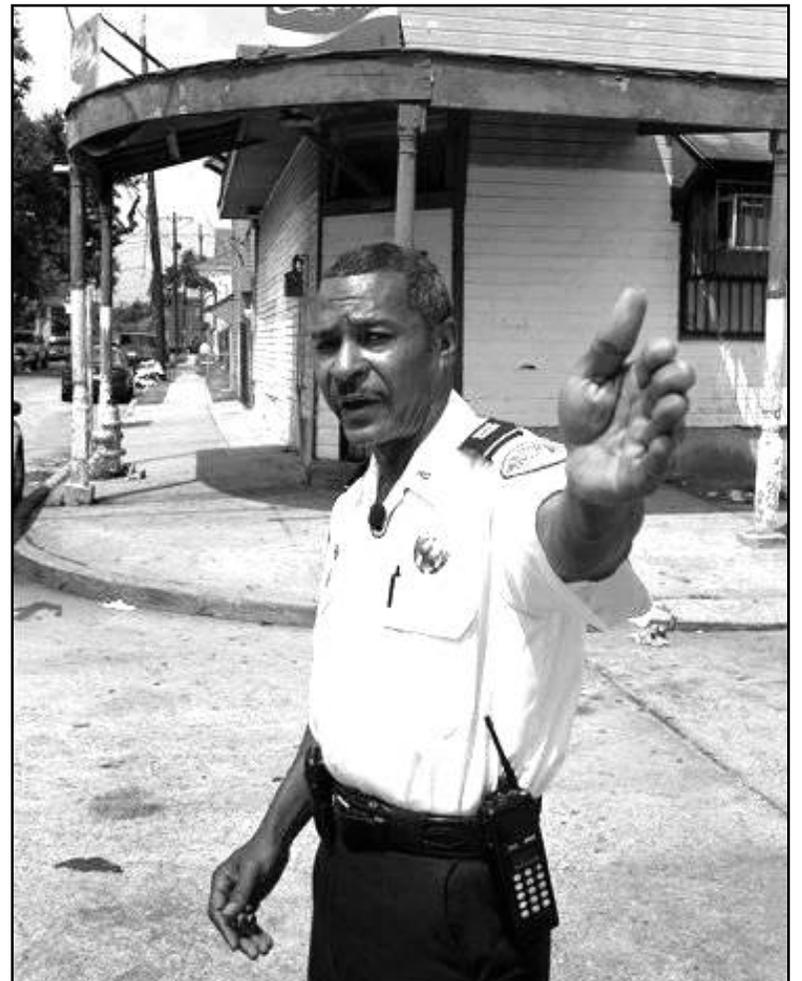
flooded neighborhood. "It's long overdue. Neighborhoods should not have been left alone to begin with. Pulling out was a mistake." But Sherman Copelin, president of the New Orleans East Business Association, cautioned that handing over some neighborhoods to troops unfamiliar with those areas could be a mistake, saying officials should not "let someone come in and be a housekeeper."

The presence of the Guard, has called into question from some in the media, the efficacy of the NOPD and City Hall and

killings however, prompted St. Tammany Parish Sheriff Jack Strain to publicly speculate that the Slidell killings were somehow a "spill over" from crime in New Orleans. "If you send 500 armed men into a zoo, the animals are going to crawl out of the cage," Strain said. Other Slidell officials also fear that crime is spilling over from heavily patrolled New Orleans. "After the teens were killed, National Guardsmen and state police were sent to beef up New Orleans patrols. The state should have taken a more regional

The mayor wants to use the military for operations like drug surveillance. But Melton, has not been besieged with support from Jackson City Council members, and has not had a formal sit down meeting or made a formal request to Gov. Haley Barbour for the troops he is soliciting. Melton admits that he does not have the authority to order the Mississippi National Guard, that authority is granted to the Governor, but he , but he can make the request, it is up to the Guard to respond. Melton has since slightly pulled back on his position, and is waiting to see what happens next before issuing the curfew. He credits his strong rhetoric for being a catalyst for an immediate slow down in crime over the past week.

For the time being, residents of New Orleans, are getting used to seeing the Guard troops, and as their numbers increase in the coming weeks, and the numbers of those citizens returning home to rebuild increases, it will remain to be seen if this is the solution to the rising problems of crime, and whether or not it will be a viable answer for other communities who are facing the same problems during this reconstruction phase.



New Orleans Police Chief Warren Riley says the request for National Guard troops had nothing to do with this weekend's violence, but rather an expected influx of people into the city.

*More State and Local News Page 15.*



Jackson, MS Mayor Frank Melton, has also felt the strain of growing crime, and is considering requesting MS National Guard assistance like New Orleans

their readiness plans for the "homecoming," but are these negative connotations fair to the administration. The New Orleans murders were highly publicized, to the extent that they made international newswires, yet New Orleans is not the only city which is in the post-Katrina rebuilding stage which is dealing with a building crime wave.

### Slidell Calls for More Help Too

Earlier this week, 4 members of a family in Slidell were murdered in their mobile home, in a similarly brutal fashion. Although the killings like the New Orleans killings, at this time are thought to be motivated by illegal drug activity, the suspects are still being sought. The

approach, Strain said, noting that beefed-up patrols in New Orleans are probably pushing criminals outward. Louisiana officials should consider assigning more state police to his area, he said. Sheriff Strain offered no concrete statistics to validate his position.

### Jackson MS Mayor Considers State of Emergency

Nagin's request is similar to the one made by Jackson Mayor Frank Melton last week. Melton said he was in New Orleans over the weekend and believes Nagin is doing the right thing. The mayor came out boldly last week saying he would lock the city down, impose a stiffer curfew for juveniles and use National Guard helicopters for surveillance.

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# DATA ZONE

## Blige, Brown, West, Foxx lead BET winners

By Gail Mitchell

LOS ANGELES (Billboard) - Mary J. Blige, Chris Brown and "Gold Digger" duo Kanye West and Jamie Foxx shared double wins at the 2006 BET Awards Tuesday night (June 27).

Picking up respective statuettes as best female R&B artist and best

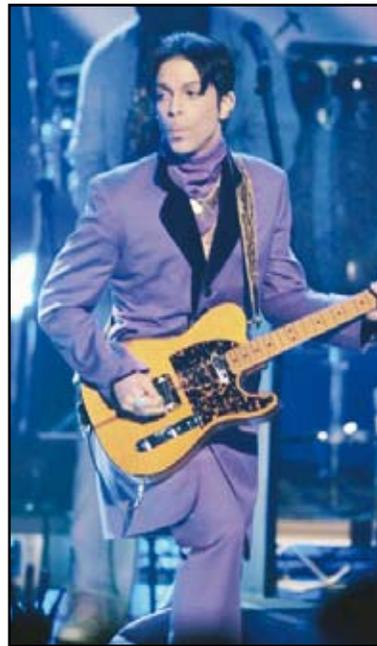
duet/collaboration, Blige and the West/Foxx collaboration also tied for video of the year honors.

R&B newcomer Brown walked away with a best new artist trophy as well as the viewers' choice award.

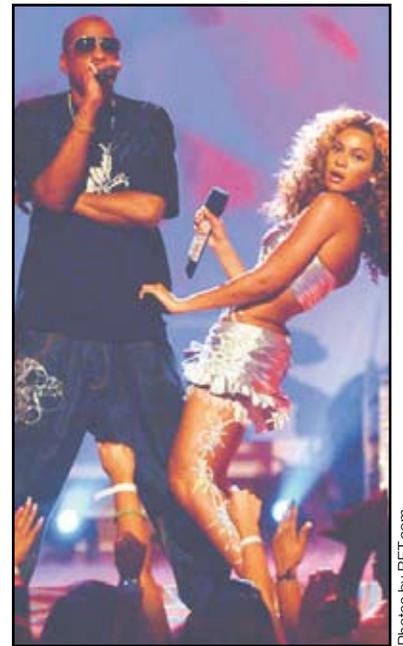
Airing live from the Shrine Auditorium in Los Angeles, the sixth annual ceremony saluted

several first-time winners. Prince was named best male R&B artist, rapper T.I. claimed the award for best male hip-hop artist, and Kirk Franklin was christened best gospel artist.

Anthony Hamilton was the inaugural winner of the first BET J Cool Like That Award, *Continued on page 15.*



Prince displays his many talents during the BET Awards. Prince was awarded Best Male R&B Performer of the Year.



Hip Hop's Royal Couple Jay Z and Beyonce shaking it up onstage brought the crowd to their feet.

Photos by BET.com

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**IN THEATRES JULY 7**

## DATA ZONE

# Hitmaker Dallas Austin Imprisoned In Dubai On Drug Charges

*Producer, in prison since May 19, is likely to receive one- to two-year sentence, police say.*



Photo Caption Hit Producer Dallas Austin has been in a Dubai prison for more than a month on drug charges, local authorities have confirmed

by Jennifer Vineyard

Hitmaker Dallas Austin has been in a Dubai prison for more than a month on drug charges, local authorities have confirmed.

Austin, 33 — who's worked with TLC, Gwen Stefani, Madonna, Pink, Michael Jackson, Janet Jackson and many others over his 17-year career — was traveling to Dubai to attend Naomi Campbell's three-day birthday party at the Burj Al Arab hotel when he was detained at Dubai International Airport on May 19. He is currently being held at Al Rashidiya prison, where he is being allowed visitors.

While Dubai police did confirm that Austin is being held on drug charges, they stopped short of accusing him of trafficking, which can result in a death-penalty sentence in the United Arab Emirates, the Persian Gulf nation in which Dubai is located. Instead, officers characterized the amount of drugs Austin is alleged to have had in his possession as small, indicating it would likely have been for personal use.

A clerk at the Dubai Court of First Instance referred to the charges as "possessing and taking drugs," which could mean that Austin was allegedly seen taking drugs, or that traces of drugs were allegedly in his system. Under U.A.E. law, the presence of restricted drugs and medication in the body can count as possession — even if an individual used a substance before arriving in the

country. A British woman named Tracy Lewis was held for eight weeks in a Dubai jail in 2005 after testing positive for prescription drugs codeine and temazepam — even though codeine is available over-the-counter in England and one of the drugs found in her system was prescribed to her at the Dubai airport clinic.

Even a small quantity of a controlled substance (which can include some over-the-counter U.S. drugs and even poppy seeds) can result in a four- to 15-year sentence in the U.A.E. However, police estimated that Austin would likely receive a sentence of one to two years, depending on the results of their ongoing investigation. Dubai police did not specify whether Austin possessed cocaine, as some news outlets reported Friday, but did say that he allegedly possessed marijuana.

Sources close to Austin suggest that the producer aroused suspicion when, after first going through airport security upon arrival, he went back to retrieve something he had forgotten on the plane. The sources said any cocaine in Austin's possession must have been a trace residue in a borrowed traveling bag.

The sources also said that Austin may have possessed the sleeping aid Ambien (also called Sonata or Zaleplon), which is not considered a narcotic but is on the U.A.E.'s list of restricted medications.

The State Department and the U.S. Consulate are attempting to assist Austin, but declined to provide further information about this specific case. A State Department official said in these types of cases the office typically supplies a list of local lawyers, contacts family members and seeks funds on the prisoner's behalf, provides a loan if needed, visits the jail to make sure the prisoner is being treated fairly and provides basic toiletries.

Austin is scheduled to enter a plea at the Dubai Court of First Instance on July 2.

This report is provided by MTV News

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## DATA ZONE

# Do Not Hide Your Light

*We cannot hide our light!*



The Love Dr.  
Data Columnist

I thought I had heard it all, but a visitor to my weblog (<http://lloydennis-betweenthelines.blogspot.com/>) commented that the idea was circulating in some parts of our community that "marriage is for white people". My spirits really took a dip, as I realized that cyclical ignorance is a chronic disease that plagues so many black people.

I might have disputed the idea that people were dumb enough to buy into the idea that the very thing that lifts entire generations out of poverty was not "for" the people who needed it most. I should have guessed that marriage would be dismissed in such a way by folk who desperately need to learn to make it work in their lives. After all, when I taught at Rabouin High School, I was told that "math was for white people", "standard English was for white people", and "science was for white people", by children who desperately needed to embrace all three as ways to achieve some of the legitimate prosperity that is available (albeit sometimes not equally) in America.

As a self employed photographer, it was my understanding of math and science that gave me an edge when learning how to manipulate, camera, lens and film, to do with them what other people cannot. It was my marriage that caused me to purchase the first home which became the collateral for my first business loan. The marriage also gave me a helpmate who shared in making our business successful, so hearing that black children are now telling one another that "marriage is for white people" hurts so bad that despair could be right around the corner were it not for the belief that I was born to teach them better.

Those of you who read this column regularly, may be familiar with the research

of Dr. Sheila Webb from which I regularly site two statistics which prove the falseness of any assertion that marriage is a white thing. Dr. Webb shows that in 1898 (after slavery and before welfare) that 78% or four out of five adults in the black communities of America were married. Remember these were folk no more than one generation past slavery. They were for the most part, poor and uneducated, but they had enough common sense to live with and raise families.

Fast forward to 1998, after welfare was created and only two out of five black adults (40%) were married. Prior to welfare, as a rule, young unmarried black women didn't have and attempt to raise children, but now young ignorant, confused and unskilled young mothers create more of the same with each pregnancy.

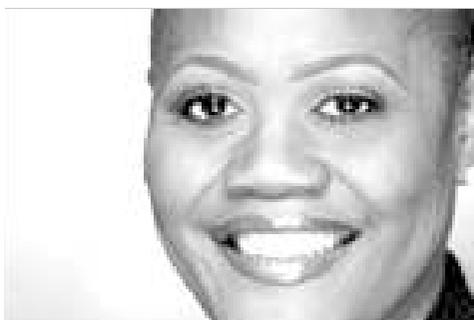
The point of all this verbiage is to make the case for all we married folk to stop hiding the good stuff. I know that there are more happy couples than Boo and me, but we have allowed ourselves to be bamboozled into accepting the media promoted idea that the single life is really fun. Most of the single folk I know aren't that excited about their lifestyles.

The children are suffering because we are hiding this wonderful light under a basket of a humility we cannot afford, particularly we married and prospering men. If we aren't fooling ourselves we will recognize how being a family man feeds our souls and our prosperity, giving us focus and purpose for most of what we do.

Whenever I am in the midst of younger men, I talk trash about my family. Hell, we have to teach every chance we get. Trust me, when you say it and mean it, it shows. Actually, there is usually a part of every young man that feels fatherhood and family, but in today's media hyped reality and the reality left by welfare, they fear the unknown, so we have to let them see and hear us glow, in the barber shop, at the mechanic shop, playing ball, at work, on the team or in the class. They may even ridicule and poke fun at us for doing so, but they will not be able to deny us and the yearning that lives inside them. It's the way He put us together, what we are designed to do, be men who care for our women and children, like we did before welfare replaced us.

For more from the "Love Doctor" of New Orleans, visit [LLOYDDENNIS.COM](http://LLOYDDENNIS.COM)

# Let Freedom Ring



Melanie Campbell  
NNPA Columnist

took the passage of the Constitution's 14th & 15th Amendments to codify freedom for all Americans, we are today witnessing a retreat from a battle that thousands of our citizens fought for and even gave their lives. At a time when our country's leaders ask daily for unity, what are African Americans and other potentially disenfranchised minority citizens to believe when maintaining strong voting rights enforcement provisions appear to be the stumbling blocks to passage?

As a nation, we recently and mournfully witnessed the passing of Mrs. Coretta Scott King and Mrs. Rosa Parks – two of America's fierce warriors for social change and justice. How then, can a bill carrying the names of these brave and courageous women, coupled with the fire of freedom fighter Fannie Lou Hamer, not be the beacon for hope, and spirit that each of these women wished for all Americans, equally.

As Executive Director and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation I urge every American to contact their Congressional representatives and tell them to "Let Freedom Ring" by passing the **Voting Rights Act Reauthorization of 2006** -- without amendment – before Independence Day.

Melanie Campbell is Executive Director and CEO of the National Coalition on Black Civic Participation in Washington DC.

Americans across this country should be outraged by the tactics employed by a small, yet extremist band of Congressional members to delay passage of H.R. 9, the **Fannie Lou Hamer, Rosa Parks and Coretta Scott King Voting Rights Act Reauthorization and Amendments Act of 2006**. I challenge our legislative leaders not to succumb to pressure brought to bear by a few of their colleagues representing states where voting rights violations remain commonplace occurrences for African Americans and other ethnic minorities. The irony does not escape civil rights activists and thoughtful Americans that these actions are taking place on the eve of our nation's 230th birthday. A date celebrated and commemorated as the day of independence and freedom. And while it



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## COMMENTARY

# Diary of a Survivor: The Essence of New Orleans



Edwin Buggage.  
Data Editor

As we enter the weekend that celebrates the party with a purpose, we also celebrate the anniversary of this country declaring its independence. But this year the usual joie de vivre that characterizes many New Orleanians is non-existent for there is not much to celebrate. Since August 29, 2005 lives have changed forever, people went from dancing at the second line to sitting all day in FEMA lines. The recent past has been one of displacement, disappointment and despair. Families have been disrupted, and communities have been decimated. The people have witnessed an irresponsible government wreak havoc on citizens of the Crescent City. On the days following the storm lawlessness and anarchy became the norm as people struggled to survive what in essence was a holocaust, as death and destruction overtook the city, with the violent water's wrath leaving New Orleans a hollow shell of its former self.

As the day marking the first year anniversary of the destruction of an American city grows near. It will truly be a sad day as our citizens many of whom are still reliving the horror of losing their livelihoods, their way of life and in some cases loved ones are struggling trying to make sense of their lives will have to relive the horror of those tumultuous days. Today I look around at the city and I think will it ever be the same city I loved my whole life, riding passed familiar sites I reminisce about a city where people once danced to the sounds of brass bands or the colorful Mardi Gras Indians chanting to percussive sounds that had my heart racing and feet moving to their syncopated rhythms, or the aromas of some best cuisine in the world, and the familiarity of communities where families lived that spanned generations. I now sit and think about how so many residents of the city have to face an uncertain reality as the place their birth tries to recapture some of it glimmer, as it sits among shards, in this tarred, tarnished façade, a cultural, historical, mystical,

romantic city no longer.

Communities that were once filled with the hustle and bustle and the unique unmistakable sounds of New Orleans speech that were once music to my ears, now resemble silent desolate ghost towns. Trash and debris from nearly a year of neglect has multiplied and houses sit unoccupied as this city I've called home stands as an unrecognizable, unfamiliar and lonely place. As I sit and wonder pondering what is to become of my city, one that despite media reports to the contrary, not much has happened in the way of significant progress. As I walk down the street daily I see the same trash lining the streets, I see abandoned cars, in essence the city looks as if the levee breached last week not nearly one year ago.

I watch the news, and see politicians pontificate about the city's recovery, but the reality does not match their rhetoric. Most of New Orleans is still uninhabitable as many most of them African-Americans regardless of their

social class are still considering whether or not they want to return, and the answer many are concluding is no. I think for many people of New Orleans they've had to think long and hard about their future over these past few months. Asking themselves do I want to come back to a city where graft, theft, and corruption was the rule rather than the exception? Where you pay taxes that go to a public school system where many parents with the means including elected officials feel is not adequate enough to educate their own children, and where a restaurant waiter can earn more than a teacher. A city that is so unsafe that the National Guard has to be called in. A city where garbage pickup is sporadic if at all, these are the things that people have to grapple with as they think of returning to New Orleans. Will it be better or will it be more of the same or worse remains to be seen.

And although I consider myself a skeptic as well as a cynic, I believe in my mind that

New Orleans will be a greater city in the future, but the sad reality of today is that it now lies in a ruinous state. It a shameful symbol of America, it resembles something from a science fiction movie or some war torn region in a Third World country. On this day as we celebrate, the Declaration of Independence, let us not forget what happened to the people during Hurricane Katrina, let's not forget these people, my people, American people by no fault of their own who are struggling trying to put there lives back together. And in the spirit of togetherness and unity, which is one of the founding principles of this country, please keep the plight of the survivors of Hurricane Katrina and the city of New Orleans in your hearts and in your prayers as we continue to rebuild one of America's historical treasures.

Edwin Buggage is Editor-In-Chief of New Orleans Data News Weekly. For comments he can be contacted at [ebmediagroup@yahoo.com](mailto:ebmediagroup@yahoo.com).

## Talk Back

Is the August 29  
Deadline to declare  
your intentions to  
Return to New Orleans  
Enough Time? If not,  
how much time do you  
think is enough?

See page 14.

## Data News Weekly

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## HEALTH NEWS

# Get the Most from Your Medicines



Larry Lucas  
Data Columnist

By Larry Lucas

We are fortunate to live in an age when prescription medicines are readily available to cure or treat everything from hypertension and ulcers to cancer and Alzheimer's. Every day, millions of Americans rely on these medicines to live longer, healthier, more productive lives. But studies show that up to 50 percent of prescriptions are not taken properly, which means many people aren't getting the full therapeutic benefits.

One of the easiest ways to ensure the safety and effectiveness of any medicine is to follow the instructions given to you by your doctor or pharmacist.

But that's not always easy. The medicines may cause side effects. Or you may feel better and want to stop before finishing your medicines. Many people think they are allergic to a medicine when they are really experiencing a side effect. However, some side effects may be too severe to tolerate. Tell your doctor immediately if you are having symptoms that you think may be caused by your medicine.

Be sure to ask questions so that you understand how to take your medicine before leaving the doctor's office or pharmacy. Ask your doctor if your prescription needs to be refilled. If you are taking medicine for high blood pressure or to lower your cholesterol, you may need to take your medicine for a long time.

Having lived with high blood pressure for more than 20 years, I know firsthand the importance of taking medicine as prescribed. Serious side effects can result from taking too much or too little of a medicine, or taking it too often or not often enough.

As we get older, we're more apt to have multiple medical problems, see more doctors, and take more medicines. Keep a list of your medicines, including non-prescription medicines, and give the list

to each doctor you consult. Give a copy to a family member as well, and update it every time you visit your doctor or get a new prescription. Let your doctor know about any illnesses or conditions for which another doctor or health care professional is treating you.

Dr. Woosley asks his patients to join him in a "therapeutic contract" to share in the responsibility for the safe and compliant use of their medicines. "People need to realize that taking prescription and non-prescription medicines properly are an important part of getting well," says Dr. Woosley.

### Taking Your Medicine

Before you go to the Doctor, know the facts about treating these common ailments. First, colds, flu, and most sore throats and bronchitis are caused by viruses. Antibiotics do not help fight viruses, and they may do more harm than good because taking antibiotics when they are not needed, and cannot treat the illness and increases the risk of contracting a resistant infection later.

### Top Five Tips for Using Your Medicines Correctly

1. Fill all medicine prescriptions promptly and renew them before they run out.
2. Never stop taking a prescribed medicine for any length of time without asking your physician.
3. Take all of your medicine doses on time. If you miss a dose, ask your doctor or pharmacist what to do.
4. Don't take a larger or smaller dose of medicine than prescribed.
5. Don't share your medicines or take medicines prescribed for others, no matter how similar your symptoms.

If your doctor says you do need an antibiotic, he or she will tell you to be sure to take the entire prescription, even if you start to feel better sooner. Stopping the antibiotic early can allow the bacteria that have not yet been killed to restart the infection and, possibly, become resistant.

The number one thing you can do to keep healthy is take steps to prevent needing medicines in the first place. Doctors say you can prevent cardiovascular diseases like hypertension by quitting smoking, decreasing your salt intake, getting physically active, limiting alcohol intake and eating well. And protect yourself from the cold and flu by washing your hands often, in addition to getting regular exercise, enough rest and eating healthy, balanced meals.

# The Importance of Water



Glen Ellis  
Data Columnist

I recently answered my door to find a priest standing there. No, he wasn't there to deliver last rites to me. Otherwise, you wouldn't be reading this column. He is a friend and neighbor, stopping by to get a little "health advice." During the course of our session, it became clear that at the heart of his concerns was insufficient water consumption. The man was chronically dehydrated. After about an hour of this "command performance" lecture by me, it was clear that there is no such thing as writing too much about the importance of water.

What kinds of symptoms result from drinking too little water?

Most commonly, constipation, dry and itchy skin, acne, nose bleeds, repeated urinary tract infections, dry and unproductive coughs, constant sneezing, sinus pressure, and headaches. When water becomes scarce, the body tries to limit the amount it loses through breathing, mucous production, urination, perspiration, and bowel movements. The human body is 75 percent water. The brain is 85 percent water. The cells of our body rest in, and are surrounded by water. Maintaining the fluidity of the body is required for optimal health.

One of the aspects of physiological aging is reduced fluid in tissues. Instead of being juicy we become drier. The tendons of the muscles and the ligaments of the joints and the bones become less fluid, less resilient. To keep the physiological body as young as possible, we must maintain circulation. Drink plenty of water to replenish what is used and to keep the body fluid. Move the body often to assist in circulation of fluids. Breathe deep and fully. Think of the body as a park filled with many beautiful fountains and ponds. Keep the water from becoming stagnant or depleted by continuously replenishing with fresh, living water.

Obviously, we all lose some water through urination, a natural requirement for the removal of various toxins from the body. When fluid volume is diminished, however, the ability of the body to remove toxins through urination is also diminished. It is a mistake to think that

the more water we drink, the harder it is on the kidneys. In fact, except for people with some uncommon kidney problems, the opposite is true. Water soluble toxins cannot be easily removed through the bowels, especially when a lack of water also causes constipation. These toxins then must be eliminated in other ways such as through the skin. The increase in body toxin levels can cause headaches and fatigue. The attempt by the body to remove excess levels of unwanted chemicals through the skin can cause acne and will aggravate eczema.

In addition, too little water will result in the kidneys not having enough fluid to do their job. When this happens, the liver must lend the kidneys a hand and then the liver won't be able to carry out its 500 chemical functions. This can trigger other problems in the body.

### Let me give you some facts.

### Water Is Fundamental:

1. Seventy-five percent of people are chronically dehydrated.
2. In 37 percent of people, the thirst mechanism is so weak that it is mistaken for hunger.
3. Even MILD dehydration will slow down one's metabolism as much as 3 percent.
4. One glass of water will shut down midnight hunger pangs for almost 100 percent of dieters.
5. Lack of water is the #1 trigger of daytime fatigue.
6. Preliminary research indicates that 8-10 glasses of water a day could significantly ease back and joint pain for up to 80 percent of sufferers.
7. A mere 2 percent drop in body water can trigger fuzzy, short-term memory, trouble with basic math, and difficulty focusing on the computer screen or on a printed page.
8. Drinking five glasses of water daily decreases the risk of colon cancer by 45 percent, plus it can slash the risk of breast cancer by 79 percent, and one is 50 percent less likely to develop bladder cancer.

### Are you drinking the amount of water you should drink every day?

Water must be continuously replaced since on average, a quart and a half is lost on a daily basis through breathing. You can live without food for several weeks,

*Continued on page 15.*

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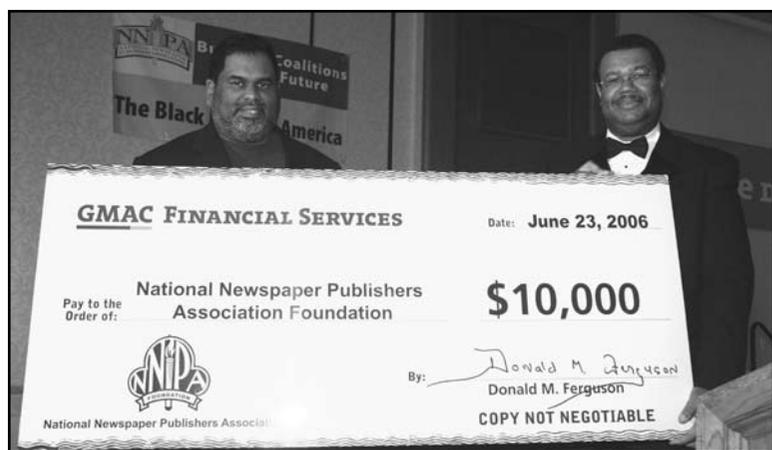
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## NEWS

## GMAC Announces Student Award Program

*GMAC and the National Newspaper Publishers Association Select Recipients for SmartEdge Book Allowance Program*



Brian Townsend, chairman of the NNPA Foundation, receives the GMAC SmartEdge Book Allowance Donation from Don Ferguson, GMAC director of Minority Dealer Development, Relationship Marketing and Diversity, at the NNPA Convention in Detroit.

DETROIT - GMAC Financial Services, in conjunction with the National Newspaper Publishers Association (NNPA), today announced a \$10,000 GMAC SmartEdge Book Allowance Program that will help 20 students seeking higher education to offset the costs of textbooks with a \$500 stipend.

SmartEdge by GMAC is a financial literacy program designed to help individuals understand, establish and maintain good credit and make sound financial decisions by educating about proper budgeting and personal finance.

Students who take the SmartEdge by GMAC course get the advantage of understanding important finance issues at a young age. With the book award program, students get financial aid for books, as well as an opportunity to put their financial planning knowledge to work as they budget for other education expenses.

"GMAC is about building stronger communities, and there's no doubt that education is a key factor in doing that," said Bill Muir, president, GMAC Financial Services. "We created this program as an adjunct to our successful SmartEdge by GMAC financial literacy program. By incentivizing students to take a greater interest in their personal finance, we also are encouraging a commitment to higher education."

GMAC's SmartEdge Book Allowance Program, launched earlier this year, is a national effort in collaboration with nonprofit organizations to encourage post-secondary education by providing recipients with an allowance to help offset the costs of textbooks. GMAC will give a total of \$400,000 in book allowances in 2006, helping nearly 800 students.

"SmartEdge is a valuable program that can give students the advantage of understanding finance at an early age, plus the opportunity for our students to receive help beyond tuition gives them an even higher chance of being able to continue their education," said Brian Townsend, foundation chairman, National Newspaper Publishers Association.

Students can apply for a Book Allowance online at [www.nnpa.org](http://www.nnpa.org) <http://www.nnpa.org/> by clicking on the GMAC SmartEdge Book Allowance link on the scholarships page and completing the online form. All applications must be completed no later than Aug. 1, 2006, and recipients will be notified by Aug. 15, 2006. The NNPA has established the selection criteria and also will distribute funds to selected individuals.

SmartEdge by GMAC is offered free and with no obligation to GMAC or GM through seminars and events throughout the country. In 2006, GMAC plans to host more than 1,000 SmartEdge programs in cities including: Atlanta; Chicago; Cleveland; Dallas; Houston; Miami; Sacramento; San Antonio; San Diego; St. Louis; Charlotte, N.C.; Memphis, Tenn.; and Tampa, Fla.

A self-directed Web-based version of SmartEdge by GMAC also is available online at [www.SmartEdgebyGMAC.com](http://www.SmartEdgebyGMAC.com) <http://www.smartedgebygmac.com/>. The site hosts video seminars, online tutorials and program workbooks are available for download.

*Data Zone,*

*Continued from page 8.*

which commemorates this year's relaunching of the former BET Jazz channel. Rounding out the list of music-category winners was best group honoree the Black Eyed Peas.

Receiving special tributes were actor/activist Harry Belafonte (the BET Humanitarian Award) and R&B pioneer Chaka Khan (BET Lifetime Achievement Award). Khan's segment provided one of the evening's most compelling moments as Prince, Stevie Wonder, Yolanda Adams and India.Arie performed songs from the singer's illustrious career.

*Water,*

*Continued from page 13.*

but you can go less than a week without water. The best way to get this water is by drinking plain water. But other beverages, such as fruit juices, and non-caffeinated drinks are also good sources of water. Fruits and vegetables can also be good sources of water.

Caffeinated and alcoholic beverages, while they do supply water to the body initially, contain diuretics that cause the body to lose water. In the dry, hot air of winter and very hot days of summer, drink at least 10 glasses of water daily for optimal health.

Glenn Ellis, author of *Which Doctor?*, is a syndicated health columnist and radio commentator who lectures around the world on health issues particularly relevant to the African-American community. He can be reached at [glenn@glennellis.com](mailto:glenn@glennellis.com)



## Talk Back!

Data News Weekly wants to know what you think!

Each week, Data News Weekly brings you the information we think you want to know. In an effort to better reflect the thoughts of the community, we are offering you Talk Back. Take this opportunity to let your community, government officials and our editor know what your opinions are on the subject. Selected submissions will be published in the Data News Weekly Talk Back section and a compilation version will be sent to the candidates for Mayor for the City of New Orleans.

**This week's question:**

Is the August 29  
Deadline to declare  
your intentions  
to Return to New  
Orleans Enough  
Time? If not, how  
much time do you  
think is enough?

**Send your comments to:**

Talk Back, Data News Weekly,  
PO Box 5033, Atlanta, GA 30302

Or send us an email at

[dnweditor@bellsouth.net](mailto:dnweditor@bellsouth.net)

Or visit our website [www.ladatanews.com](http://www.ladatanews.com)

**Talk Back! It's your chance!**

## NEWS

### NOLAC to Provide Legal Assistance

New Orleans Legal Assistance (NOLAC) announces a new collaborative project to help low-income Katrina victims open successions so that they can rebuild their homes.

One of America's largest law firms, Womble Carlyle, will send 50 attorneys to New Orleans to work as volunteer attorneys with NOLAC on this Successions Project. Also, New Orleans law firms, Stone Pigman, Sessions Fishman Nathan and the Pro Bon Project will help.

Many homeowners need to file a succession with the courts to clear title to inherited homes and to get ownership for insurance payments, Road Home recovery grants and loans necessary to rebuild their homes.

Mark Moreau, Director of Program services for New Orleans Legal Assistance (NOLAC), said "In Katrina's aftermath, legal aid for successions is a huge unmet need for many Greater New Orleans low-income homeowners and residents." Moreau said that "The pro bono help from Womble Carlyle represents an extraordinary commitment of legal work by a national law firm to the rebuilding of Greater New Orleans communities. Our clients are truly blessed to have their help and that of local pro bono attorneys with this vital project."

Paul Tuttle, NOLAC Pro Bono Counsel, said that "our successions project with Womble Carlyle will help us serve an additional 200 families this summer." Tuttle further said that "the project has the potential to help these families qualify for more than \$10 million in insurance and Katrina recovery funds.

The project will begin seeing new clients on July 10. Low-income people who need legal aid for successions, may call New Orleans Legal Assistance at 504-529-1000. Applicants should call now for an appointment.

### DSCEJ to hold Katrina Survivors Forum at Clark Atlanta University

*A Safe Way Back Home Katrina Survivors Forum*

The Deep South Center for Environmental Justice, Inc.(DSCEJ) will be hosting a "Katrina Survivors Forum" centered around environmental issues as a result of Hurricane Katrina. This session will be held in Atlanta, Georgia to meet the needs of evacuees living in the Atlanta area.

The A SAFE WAY BACK HOME Katrina Survivors Forum will be located on the campus of Clark Atlanta University, Science & Research Center - 1st Floor Auditorium on Wednesday, July 19, 2006, from 6:00 p.m. - 8:00 p.m.

Topics will include; Environmental Concerns, New Orleans City Services, and an update on "The Road Home" housing plan and more. A number of Louisiana elected and governmental officials have been invited to participate, including representatives from the New Orleans City Council, the Louisiana Recovery Authority, the Environmental Protection Agency and others.



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There are right now seven other parishes near New Orleans that have also been deemed underassessed. They all have one assessor, so as I stated earlier having one assessor does not solve your property tax problem.

**EB:** If you had the autonomy and the ability to reform the Assessor's Office, and make it fair and equitable what would you do?

**DM:** If I had the power I would make sure that all assessors statewide got forty dollars to fifty dollars per parcel to assess property, currently, we get about twenty-five dollars. That would make us on par with other jurisdictions around the country that do the same job. I would also require that the tax recipient bodies pass a law that make sure tax mileages are rolled back when assessments are up and that's way it's supposed to work. When assessments are up the mileages are supposed to roll back, and when assessments are down the mileages are supposed to roll up. And that makes the makes all tax recipient bodies revenue neutral where people are not getting gouged on their property tax, and if their homes go up in value they actually pay the same property tax as the year before. That's a protection other parishes have, but in Orleans we don't practice it, I would change that. I also would look into the non-profit tax exemption law of the state where so many non-profits have income producing properties and are not paying property taxes. And that burden is passed on to home owners and business owners; those are some of the things I would do to reform the Assessor's Office and whether it's seven or one they should have the tools to do a more efficient job.

**EB:** It is believed by many that the poorest people are the ones who don't want to pay when it comes to taxes, but when it comes to property tax it is the opposite, in your opinion how true is that?

**DM:** It's very true that it is the most well-off people whose properties are underassessed, it's funny because so many people are yelling about reform, but the same people are not running into our offices saying raise my assessment I want to pay more taxes. The truth is there are very little underassessment in poor neighborhoods.

**EB:** If you had to say something to the citizens concerning this measure, what would you tell them?

**DM:** That they need to educate themselves on this, and that they've heard only one side of the issue. I think no matter what side you vote on whether you want one or seven assessors you need to make sure the system is well funded and that the system works for the people. Ultimately, the people vote for the assessor, so they need to be educated about what is a millage and how do assessments go up and down. How do seven versus one assessor benefit them if at all? What is uniformity? Those types of things are very important when you go in to vote on any constitutional amendment. And I find many voters go into the polls unaware of what they're voting on and make bad decisions and wind up paying for it later, so I would say study the issues and be sure to get both sides so that you can make an informed choice.

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### Urban League of Greater New Orleans Announces 27th Annual Golden Gala

Cresting on a long history of success, the Urban League Golden Gala will be held Saturday, July 15, 2006, 8p.m., at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside. The Gala theme "Welcome Home New Orleans-Staying Connected," is a tribute to displaced New Orleanians who are returning home after Hurricane Katrina. The Golden Gala is regarded by many as the unifying event of the city, and brings together a diverse assemblage of caring friends and supporters from New Orleans' community and business sectors.

Since 1938, The Urban Leagues role and advocacy, civil rights and public policy have been a beacon for hope for poor and disadvantaged citizens. The Gold Gala generates critical resources for the Urban League to continue this work.

Individual ticket prices for the Golden Gala are \$125 for patrons. For more information on the Golden Gala, or to make a reservation, please contact Cathy Washington at 504-620-2332. Visit the Urban League on line at [www.urbanleagueneuorleans.org](http://www.urbanleagueneuorleans.org).

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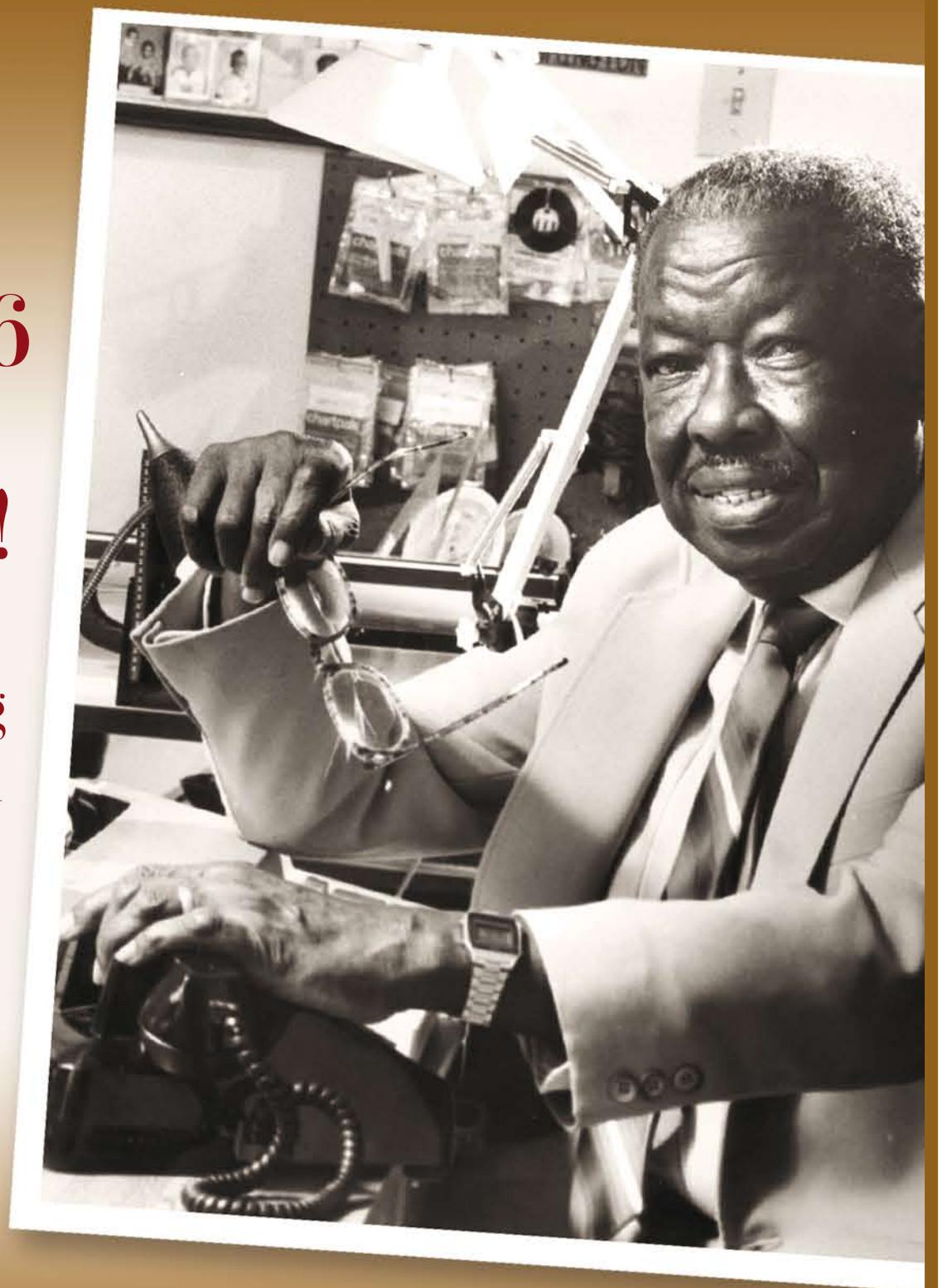
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