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A Data News Weekly Exclusive

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Essence Fest Celebrates 20 Years

The Party with a Purpose and its Impact on New Orleans and African Americans Nationwide

Data News Weekly Speaks with Essence Magazine Editor-in-Chief Vanessa Bush



As this year marks the 20th Anniversary Editor-in-Chief Vanessa Bush, shown above, says excitedly that the connection between the City and the festival has been a perfect fit. "It is our great honor for the Essence Music Festival to be held in New Orleans, we consider it the home of the festival."

By Edwin Buggage

A Perfect Fit: Essence Fest and its Impact on New Orleans

On the weekend of the 4th of July of this year would be two decades that a sea of ebony faces converges

on the Crescent City for the Essence Music Festival. What started as a 25th Anniversary of a magazine dedicated to African-American women has evolved into the preeminent festival for African-Americans in the country. As this year marks the 20th Anniversary Editor-in-Chief Vanessa Bush says excitedly that the connection between the City and the festival has been

a perfect fit. "It is our great honor for the Essence Music Festival to be held in New Orleans, we consider it the home of the festival." Continuing she remarks that one of the things that continues to make the festival such a destination is that New Orleans is a City with a unique and distinct cultural heritage. "We consider New Orleans one of the greatest cities in the world,

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New Orleans Mayor Mitch Landrieu, Essence Magazine Editor-in-Chief Vanessa Bush, Rev. Al Sharpton, President of Essence Communications Michelle Ebanks. Photo Credit: JR Thomason

it is culturally rich and very unique and we could not think of a better City to partner with for the festival."

Known as the Essence Music Festival in the formal sense, but it has become colloquially known as the "Party with a Purpose." While the music concerts that over the years have brought some of the greatest names in music to the stage during the evening shows, the daytime events are a must see as well, as it also brings together some of the best minds in the African-American community for free empowerment seminars dealing with the issues that affect our community. In addition, the festival annually leaves a 200 million dollar impact on the City of New Orleans. A point not lost on Ms. Bush who says that last year was the biggest year for the Essence Fest and is optimistic about this year, "Over the years the Essence Music Festival has had an amazing economic impact on the City of New Orleans. In 2013 it brought in 231 million dollars contributing the City and state economy. This is largely due to the 543,000 people who came into the City to experience the festival and we hope to top that number this year."

While the festival is only a four day event it takes much planning and coordination that is a yearlong process, in addition many of the conversations that were started

during the fest in regard to community uplift are manifested into tangible initiatives in the City of New Orleans and throughout the nation. Bush says, "We wouldn't be able to do a festival without the help of the City and the state, so it is an effort where a lot of pieces come together to continue to make this festival happen every year. We partner with NOLA 4 Life and other organizations in New Orleans and others throughout the country making sure that the conversations that began during the festival we continue throughout the year. Some of the issues we address that are going on in our communities are things such as gun violence, education, the economy and employment and a host of other issues that affect our community. In this effort we are fortunate that we have some of the largest global brands as corporate sponsors including Ford, McDonalds and Wal-Mart that help us keep the daytime programming at zero cost to attendees."

Carrying on a Tradition: Essence Continues to be Relevant in the 21st Century Empowering African- American Women and the Entire African-American Community

Essence Magazine is the number one magazine geared towards African-American Women, since hitting

newsstands in 1970 it has become a brand that continues to evolve and remain relevant to the needs of its millions of readers. Editor-in-Chief Vanessa Bush continues in the long line of great editors that have included Marcia Ann Gillespie, Susan Taylor and Monique Greenwood. Speaking of her ascendance to the top editorial post at the magazine and the mission of the publication moving forward she says, "I have been with Essence Magazine for 13 years, I have worked with Susan Taylor, Monique Greenwood and others who have come through and just to work with them to see their passion for their brand has had an influence on me and it is continuing. The thing that throughout the magazine's history that continues to be part of the DNA is the empowerment of Black women and this community. We tell stories like no one else can and that continues to be our mission. And once it was just in the pages of the magazine, but now it is more than that, it is about the digital realm as well to be where our readers are. Our core message is the same to when the magazine was started 44 years ago and that is a place where Black women can be honored to celebrate who we are and to inspire us, and that is as important today as it was when the publication started in 1970."

This year marks the 20th Anniversary of the fest and the night

time shows are chockfull of great entertainers including Jill Scott, Mary J. Blige, Prince, Charlie Wilson, Erykah Badu and many more. Also for the big 2-0 the daytime programming has also been expanded according to Bush, "This year because it is our 20th year we have tried to up the ante, we are bringing in some new things. One of which is called Empower You. It is smaller workshops that deal with some of the issues we deal with on the larger stages. It could be centered on career and employment, health and wellness, relationships etc. It is a whole track of programming to extend those conversations." Continuing she says, "And it will be some of the same people from the larger workshops that will be participating such as Iyanla Vanzant, Steve Harvey and others. We are having something that is like the TV show Shark Tank, that we are calling Power Move, where entrepreneurs get a chance to pitch their businesses to leading business entities and the winners will get prizes and help with their business." Essence is a "party with a purpose" the whole family can enjoy. On Thursday it is Youth Day at the fest and there will be workshops on developing technology; where they can learn about coding and other types of information about career opportunities centering on new technology.

The Essence of Love

For many Essence Fest is the place that has a special significance for different reasons. It may be the place where a man may have met his future wife, or a place where people gather each year for a family reunion, or college friends get together for a fun-filled weekend. Over the past 20 years the fest has meant these things and more to so many people. Speaking on this Bush says, "There are so many love stories and memorable moments between couples happen at the fest. Last year producer Will Packer proposed onstage to his girlfriend, I got engaged the day before the festival started last year. There are lots of love stories and bringing people together. We have been asking people to share some of their greatest moments from the fest and I am sure we will see a lot of more of those memories as the festival get closer. It has been more than just love stories but also family reunions, girlfriend getaways and just a great place to be around so many positive people."

Has Essence Fest Found a Permanent Home in New Orleans?

Some years ago when the future of New Orleans hung in the bal-

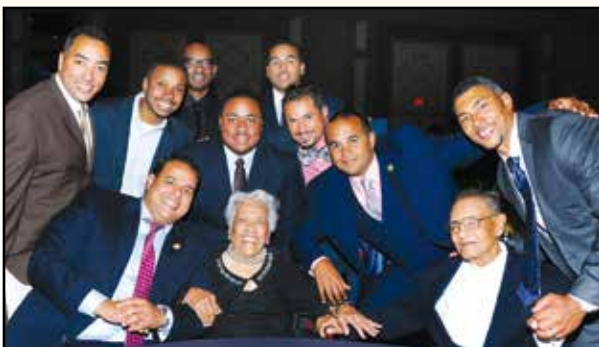
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Shoot Ya Best Shot!

Chase Family Foundation Annual Gala Fundraiser Highlights

Photos by Bernie Saul

The "Who's Who" of New Orleans came out to the the Edgar "Dooky" Jr. and Leah Chase Family Foundation Gala Fundraiser which took place last Saturday night. The event raised money for to fund scholarships and featured fabulous food, music and lots of fun. Of course, Data was there.



Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events

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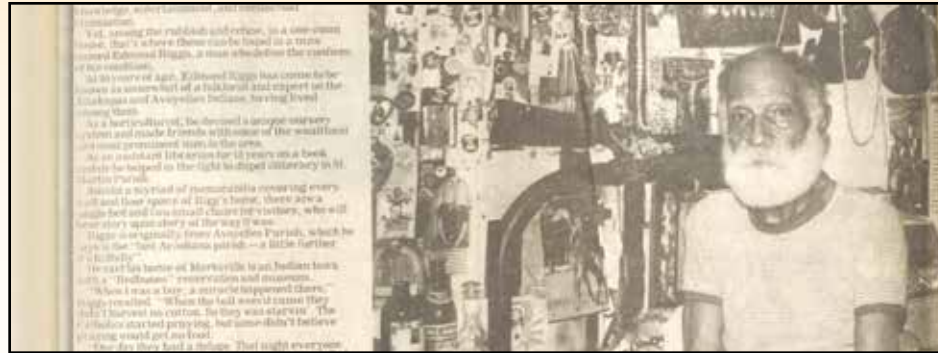
Edmond Riggs

Iris Propagator

Edited by LMG Calla Victoria

Although irises put on their big show during the month of March in our gardens, I am compelled to share some important iris information with you even now. While working the Greater New Orleans Iris Society's show back in March of this year, Patrick O'Connor (one of our members) shared some information with me about an African-American named Edmond Riggs; who was one of the earlier iris propagators. Patrick told me that I could probably find more information in the Louisiana Iris archives. After an exhaustive search I landed on the University of Louisiana archives website, but could not locate any information. After contacting two archivists there, Jane Vidrine, Archival Assistant, was able to locate the article. The information is located in the Society for Louisiana Irises (SLI) Records in Marie Caillet scrapbooks of the history of Louisiana irises, collected over six to seven decades. Jane scanned the article and emailed it to me. I also found additional information in an article entitled "Edmond Riggs: The Real Man" by Richard Sloan. Both pieces were used to compile this rendering.

In 1907 in Avoyelles Parish, Edmond Riggs was born Black in south Louisiana.



Edmond learned the ways of the swamps, fished with his dad for spoonbill catfish, whose eggs were sold in the north for caviar. Edmond began to grow plants to sell out on islands in the swamps, where they wouldn't be stolen. And using handwritten handouts, he advertised his irises, azaleas and other plants.

As a Horticulturist Edmond Riggs devised unique nursery systems and became friends with some of the wealthiest men in the area. He planted thousands and thousands of live oak trees, which was another one of his specialties. Along with irises, Edmond Riggs planted azaleas and camellias in the woods and swamps because they grew best in their natural habitat. He would dig them up when he wanted to sell them.

Edmond became a Library Assistant and

traveled with the bookmobile for 18 years. Riggs got to know many prominents in the White community through his plant sales. One such person was Minnie Colquitt. She and Edmond had corresponded about growing irises in the swamps of Louisiana. Minnie arranged a collecting trip and it wasn't until the Shreveport ladies arrived for the adventure that they realized Edmond Riggs was a Black. That didn't stop the trip, and some of those very collected irises are probably in the family trees of modern award winners.

In 1944, Edmond Riggs registered 23 varieties of Louisiana irises. Riggs' irises probably mostly *I. nelsonii* are likely extinct or have lost their identities. They were collected plants or seedlings chosen from bee crosses among those grown in the garden.

Cultivars with such wonderful names as 'Evangeline,' 'Lafayette,' 'La Louisiane' and 'Sunrise Lights' are probably forever lost.

Because of segregation that existed during most of his life, Edmond Riggs could not become a member of SLI (Society of Louisiana Irises), attend society meetings, or enter iris shows. But his presence as a major player in the iris community was apparent as articles on him and his irises appeared in Gardening Magazine, The Sunday Advertiser, and The Flower Grower magazine to name a few. Edmond Riggs presented the irises as significant additions to gardens.

Upon Edmond Riggs' passing in 1993, a wealth of iris knowledge and experience went mute and was lost. However Richard Sloan, who was treasurer for SLI. 2003, thankfully felt the need to remember and appreciate Mr. Edmond Riggs; a significant participant in, and contributor to, the lore and history of the flowers we so enjoy. Sloan's Louisiana iris introduction "Edmond Riggs" honors the man and his contributions. Iris "Edmond Riggs" should be a must in all Louisiana gardens.

**Check out my
"Gardening Tip of the Week"
at www.thegardeningdiva.com.**

Remember, never get too busy to stop and admire the beautiful flowers!

Data News Weekly is Hiring

Data News Weekly Newspaper, The People's Paper, is hiring for two positions in our New Orleans Office.

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Did the UNCF Make a Deal with the Devil?



Julianne Malveaux
NNPA Columnist

When the Koch Foundation gave the United Negro College Fund \$25 million, it set off a maelstrom of comments in cyberspace and real time. How dare the UNCF take money from the Koch brothers, some asked. They ought to send it back, said others. One woman told me she would never give to UNCF again because of the Koch donation. Another says the Koch donation changes her perception of UNCF.

The donation will provide \$18.5 million in scholarships, money that is badly needed to get some of our young people out of school, especially with the cuts so many experienced because of reduced access to the Parent Plus loan. Another \$4 million will go to the 37 UNCF schools for general support, again to make up some of the losses that

came from reduced enrollment due to Parent Plus. The remainder goes to UNCF for their general support.

What's wrong with this picture?

Koch scholarships will be awarded to students with good grades, financial needs, and an interest in studying how "entrepreneurship, economics and innovation contribute to well-being for individuals, communities, and society." Sounds like conservative free markets to me. More than that, it sounds like granting scholarships to further the Koch government-reducing, free market focus. Koch protects its interest by having two seats on the five member scholarship committee, with the other three from the UNCF. While non-Koch interests are the majority, it will be interesting to see if a donor can sway a committee.

What else? The Koch brothers are making the most of this gift in the media. Rarely have I seen so many headlines generated by a gift of that size. \$100 million, maybe. \$250 million, surely. But while \$25 million will mean a lot to the UNCF, schools such as Harvard would likely consider it nothing more than a modest behest. The Koch brothers must think they'll get some positive publicity from their gift, and

they obviously have the PR team to pitch it.

Furthermore, these are the very Koch brothers who have supported voter suppression efforts. They would reduce the size of government, which means the Pell grants that so many students depend on would shrink in size. What one hand gives, in other words, the other takes away. If the Koch brothers would fight to maintain or increase the size of the Pell grant, fewer would look askance at their gift. Instead, many see this as the cynical manipulation of a deep-pockets donor who gets much publicity from their gift.

It kind of reminds me of the Donald Sterling gift to the Los Angeles branch of the NAACP. After Sterling's racist rant, his donation was returned. Still, the NAACP was in the process of giving him a second lifetime achievement award prior to his verbal rampage. Indeed the 2014 outrage against Sterling had elements of class bias. The multi-million dollar players weren't angry when he discriminated against African Americans and Latinos in the slum housing he owned – which cost him a couple of million dollars to settle with the Justice Department – but they were dismayed

when he made negative comments about them. Their earlier silence equaled acquiescence to Sterling's racism; their protest suggested that they would get angry only when rancid racism was directed at them.

Do basketball players really think that Sterling is the only NBA owner who harbors racist views? Those owners have enough sense not to articulate them publicly. If they know that other owners share Sterling's views then they condone closed door racism, not the open door kind. If they are aware, and don't care or share, they are making deals with the devil.

If the Koch brothers are the devil, then most of our organizations are making deals with the devil. Look at the list of sponsors for any African American organization or event. Sit through a board meeting, and listen to folks review possible sponsors, many corporate. There are "good" corporations whose diversity portfolio is robust, and then there are those who need a little help. The need for funds notwithstanding, are we for sale for the price of a table or a few salmon (used to be chicken) dinners?

On the other hand, when the New York Times criticized the Congressional Black Caucus Founda-

tion for its corporate support, Elsie Scott, the then-director said that if we spent money on certain products it was only right that we get their support. Does this apply to the Koch donation?

Unfortunately, too many African American organizations buy what we want and beg for what we need. Many in the African American community have \$25 million to give to the United Negro College Fund. Many could spend the dollars to support our students. The fact that we do not leaves us vulnerable to contributions like Koch, contributions that come with strings and, perhaps, a conservative agenda.

Should UNCF President Michael Lomax send the money back? Only if someone steps up to replace it. The \$18.5 million for scholarships represents 3,700 scholarships for students. If the \$4 million is divided equally among 37 schools, it means \$108,000 per school, enough to hire back one of the people laid off and to support some programs. Should Michael Lomax lay down with the devil? Where is the angel?

Julianne Malveaux is a Washington, D.C.-based economist and writer. She is President Emerita of Bennett College for Women in Greensboro, N.C.

Cover Story/ Continued from page 3.

ance as Katrina washed so much of the City away, the Essence Music Festival was held in Houston, Texas. There was even talk of the festival leaving the City permanently, but today as the City is rebuilding it seems that Essence Fest is here to stay. "The relationships we have had with New Orleans over these 20 years have been incredible, so we see no reason for this to end. Last year was our biggest year and we are hoping to top that this year. We just can't imagine having the festival anywhere else. There's something special about being in a place that takes care and honors its traditions and its history and I think Essence, the brand is in alignment with that in that we are always looking forward but we can never forget the past. We are anchored in that strength and New Orleans is the same so it is a perfect fit and we together have created a new tradition in this City and for the entire African-American community and as we celebrate our 20th year and many more to come."

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More Relief for Those with Student Loans

By Charlene Crowell
NNPA Columnist

With outstanding student loans totaling more than \$1trillion and still counting, the White House and Congress have proposed measures to ease the financial burden now borne by 25 million borrowers.

At the White House on June 9, President Obama endorsed Senate and House bills that would allow student loan borrowers to refinance their loans into lower interest rates. He also directed the Department of Education to begin a public rule-making procedure to expand the most generous income-based repayment options to an estimated 5 million more borrowers.

The new "Pay as You Earn Program" limits monthly loan payments to no more than 10 percent of income and forgives any remaining money owed after 20 years of payments. It is also expected to save the average student loan borrower \$2,000 over the life of the loans.

President Obama said, "I'm only here because this country gave me a chance at higher education with help in the form of loans, grants and

scholarships. This is why I feel so strongly about this."

The president also directed the secretaries of Education and Treasury to find new and innovative ways to best serve students and taxpayers, while ensuring that distressed borrowers learn about repayment options available to them. Treasury and Education will also work together to educate students, families, financial aid administrators and tax preparers to ensure that all consumers better understand and receive the education tax benefits for which they are eligible. The two departments will also create a pilot program to investigate improved loan counseling.

A new report, co-authored by the White House Domestic Policy Council and the Council of Economic Advisers, underscored why loan refinance is urgently needed. The report states, "Over the past three decades, the average tuition at a public and four-year college has more than tripled, while a typical family's income has barely budged. More students than ever are relying on loans to pay for college.

"Income-driven repayment plans, like the President's new 'Pay

as You Earn Program' can be effective tools to help individuals manage their debt and avoid the consequences of defaulting on a Federal student loan, especially for borrowers whose college investment has yet to deliver its full benefit," the report noted.

Meanwhile in the Senate Elizabeth Warren (D-Mass. drew support for her bill enabling student loan debt to be refinanced at lower market interest rates. Entitled the Bank on Students Emergency Loan Refinancing Act (S. 2432), it was introduced in early May and gained 39 co-sponsors.

The measure was also supported by 30 national and state organizations, including the Center for Responsible Lending (CRL). Spanning organized labor to educators, mortgage bankers and youth advocates and others, the broad coalition sought to influence the Senate floor vote scheduled for Wednesday, June 11, just days following the President's actions.

Despite this broad and diverse advocacy, the Senate invoked its procedural cloture vote instead of allowing the bill a full vote on its merits. The cloture vote failed to

reach the necessary 60-vote threshold that would cut off debate.

In response to the filibuster actions, Senator Warren acknowledged the bipartisan support the measure has and vowed to continue fighting for passage. Additionally, Sen Tom Harkin (R-Iowa), chair of the Senate's Health, Education, Labor and Pensions Committee termed the June 11 vote as "only a first step."

"We're not giving up. We still have 40 million Americans out there who are trying to deal with \$1.2 trillion in student debt," said Warren. "We're going to prove that Washington can work for American families. . . . What the people care about is getting a fair shot and we are going to give it to them."

Maura Dundon, CRL senior policy counsel posed a key question, "The ability to refinance is something we take for granted in other consumer credit. Why treat students differently?"

Charlene Crowell is a communications manager with the Center for Responsible Lending. She can be reached at Charlene.crowell@responsiblelending.org.

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Making Money via Facebook



LaVina Swapsy
Data News Weekly Contributor

Facebook has quickly emerged as one of the most popular forms of communication to date. With its über reliable servers, Facebook is the - go to- for everything ranging from social events to mechanic referrals. Most users spend approximately three hours a day on the site. While Facebook boasts 1.2 billion accounts, many business owners have successfully turned their

time on Facebook into extra revenue. If you are looking for ways to grow your business via Facebook, these fundamental steps will set you up for success.

GET STARTED

If you haven't developed a following for your products, services or business, you could start your marketing plan on your personal Facebook page. Most of us trust referrals from friends rather than online reviews from strangers. You may be surprised at how many of your Facebook friends are willing to give your products or services a try.

STAY CONNECTED

Post about your services often to increase visibility and

stay connected. This is a great way to build trust with your audience. Your posts may be pictures or even videos that advertise your product. Pay close attention to posts that receive more engagement and replicate it. When friends like, comment or share your posts their friends can see those posts. Some comments may be complaints, but you should always respond professionally, positively and with great enthusiasm. Your audience is always watching for how you will resolve potential problems. Use this as a chance to showcase your commitment to client satisfaction. This is your product and if you stand behind it and are genuinely excited about it, others will be as well.

TARGET AUDIENCE

It is essential to figure out who your target audience is and how to speak their language. Are they college students, working Moms, or senior citizens? No matter who the target audience is you will need to engage them in a two-way conversation that is informal and authentic. People like having some knowledge of the person behind the business. Through trial and error you will figure out exactly who your target audience is and how to appeal to them.

PROMOTE

Promoting your business is essential to becoming successful. It's relatively free and only requires minutes of your time to create a post that will draw viewers to your

page. The posts should never be over eight characters. They are more effective when they are short and to the point. Contests are also a creative and fun way to engage your fan base and promote your business. The friends and family of the contestants are potential new customers. If you or your business volunteers it's services, be sure to post pictures. Volunteering your service is a great way to solidify your connection to the community which is good for business.

Remember, patience as well as persistence is key when building a new business. Be as creative and unique as possible without compromising your integrity. Stop thinking about it and at least try! Great luck with your new Facebook business.



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