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AREA UPDATE

VHA receives grant for officers, services

— VALDOSTA — The Valdosta Housing Authority has been granted \$162,900 in funds to pay for police officers assigned to local housing projects, drug-prevention efforts and professional evaluation services.

The U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development awarded similar grants to 47 public housing authorities and facilities throughout Georgia, according to Congressman Sanford Bishop's office.

— Staff reports

Thanks for history closer to reality

When millions of families bowed their heads over Thanksgiving dinner, they unwittingly accepted the notion that Native people and English settlers cooperated to make sure the immigrant interlopers survived. The Pawtucket tribe helped settlers plant corn and celebrated its harvest with the settlers, but it also offered hospitality to an ungrateful band of people who, after their survival was ensured, became the "house guests from hell." The hungry settlers toppled the way of life of their hosts, going so far as to battle them over their very own land.

When we bow our heads in thanks for blessings, we also need to bow our heads in shameful recognition of the way U.S. historians have hijacked history.



Commentary

By Julianne
Malveaux

The hijacking starts with the way we name our events, our battles, our streets and our schools. Consider the backlash to New Orleans community activist Carl Galmon's proposal that community schools no longer be named after slaveholders and others who did not respect equal rights. Some describe Galmon as a thorn in the side of New Orleans bureaucracy, but others see him as a beacon of light.

In any case, the proposal he made in 1992 had been accepted and was being implemented in an orderly fashion until a school named after our nation's first president and slaveholder George Washington

was renamed the Dr. Charles Drew Elementary School.

Then the fur began to fly. How dare anyone, some said, disrespect our nation's first father. Here's the flip side — why should young African-Americans cheer and stomp and lift up the name of people who disdained them?

Galmon makes an important point when he says that majority-black schools named after white slaveholders make a mockery of self-determination. A majority-black school named after Confederacy father Jefferson Davis had a name change, thanks to Galmon. After all, there is an appalling and galling irony in the fact that a school that serves African-Americans is named after a man whose contempt for us was never hidden.

Our nation's third president, Thomas Jefferson, wrote about "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." Those who pursued their happiness in his day were branded as runaway slaves and tortured or murdered. I'm not much interested in justifications that Jefferson freed most of his slaves upon his death. That simply means he knew he was wrong but enjoyed the comfort of being wrong.

As long as white men wrote our history, Washington was revered, Jefferson admired, and Thanksgiving a universal symbol of sharing. For the longest time, anyone who wanted to assimilate into American culture had no choice but to accept these men and these events as icons. Now, some are examining history and offering needed balance to our past. For this, I give thanks.

Julianne Malveaux is a nationally syndicated columnist.

State justice speaks to 100 Black Men

By DEAN POLING
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — Being a “fire carrier” for human dignity is not an easy job, State Supreme Court Justice Leah Sears reminded listeners during a challenging keynote address to the 100 Black Men of Valdosta Saturday night.

Hailing the 100 Black Men as fire carriers, Sears noted the organization’s programs of helping young black students, helping feed the hungry, and other activities enhancing and improving residents’ quality of life.

“I look out and see all of these strong African-American men who believe they are their brothers’ keepers,” Sears said. “African-American men who have served as role models of educational, economic and social empowerment for our community.”

In explaining “fire carriers,” Sears referred to the Greek myth of Prometheus, who stole fire from the gods and brought it to man. In return for this outrage, the gods chained him to a mountain, where vultures ate anew at his vitals each day.

“Prometheus became an immortal god praised by man as someone who changed the course of the human race,” Sears said, “but he probably didn’t enjoy the vultures.

“The story of Prometheus is the story of the great fire carriers of the human race. In my six years on the Supreme Court, I’ve had time to think of individuals who have picked up the torches of independence and liberty through the ages, but I have also wondered in carrying the fire how badly were they burned.”

Copernicus, Hannibal, Shaka Zulu, Jesus Christ, Martin Luther King Jr., Nelson



The Honorable Leah Sears, an Associate Justice with the Georgia Supreme Court, chats with members of 100 Black Men of Valdosta Willie Head, from left, Roy Copeland, immediate past president, Frank Morman, director of Project Change, and Nathaniel Haugabrook, president, prior to Saturday night’s 100 Black Men of Valdosta 3rd Annual Black Tie Gala at Mathis Auditorium. — Times photo by Mike Tanner

Mandela, Mother Teresa and Lech Walesa are a few of the people she named as fire carriers of mankind. She noted the personal sacrifices these people made to do what they felt must be done — at times paying for their passions, their causes, with their lives.

“What is the fire? Some have called it the light of redemption, God’s will,” Sears said. “In Joseph Cambell’s *The Power of Myth*, he writes of every culture

having a myth of a hero who goes on a quest to save his people, losing everything during his journey, to finally discover redemption.

“These heroes have been called lunatics and saints, extremists, radicals, fanatics, fools and criminals, and perhaps it is all the same,” she continued.

Public-opinion labels probably never entered into any of the fire carriers’ minds, she said, because they are driven by “pas-

sion. Fierce, single-minded, undaunted passion. They would not just die for the pursuit of the truth, but live for it as well, which may be harder.”

She challenged everyone to explore things of meaning in their lives, adding “I am not going to wish anyone a balanced or easy life, but wish for all passion, obsession and joy in everything attempted. I am challenging all to carry the fire.”

Valdosta tears down to build up

By JODI M. SCOTT
Times Staff Writer

VALDOSTA — City officials can usually be found at ground-breakings and ribbon cuttings, measuring progress through new construction.

But on Wednesday, they were on hand to watch the destruction of buildings, which they hope will help revitalize Valdosta neighborhoods.

The city demolished or burned nine dilapidated houses on Wednesday as the initial phase of a federal community revitalization Weed and Seed program.

The houses targeted for destruction on Wednesday were located at 707 Canal Street, 125 St. Augustine, 816 Gainer Street, 617 South Troup Street, 305 and 314

McDougal Street, 716 Hill Terrace, 408 East Gordon, 1001 and 1003 Smith Street and 704 Holiday Street. All are included on a list of some 200 substandard houses targeted for destruction. One was too wet to burn and officials hope to destroy the house today.

During a recent election and in Weed and Seed public hearings, dilapidated houses led the list of concerns.

Neighbors said they want to see more houses destroyed.

"I'm glad," Teresa James said of the destruction of a house on Canal Street. "We have a lot of problems. Kids come through here and see them (drug users) smoking in the doorway. They've got no respect. I'm real glad. We

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need to tear down some more.”

James and Linda Lewis live near the targeted house on Canal Street, the first destroyed by the city Wednesday. They said most dilapidated houses are used by trespassers to smoke crack, drink and have sex. City Manager Larry Hanson said two of the houses were identified by the newly formed drug squad as being used for drug activity. Inspector Bob Jordan said some of the houses are used to store stolen goods.

“There’s all kind of stuff going on,” Lewis said.

Hanson said the cleanup was part of a community effort. Standard Contractors and the Carlton Co. loaned excavators to demolish the houses, while the Valdosta Fire Department burned others. Hanson expects the Lowndes County Commission to agree next week to allow use of its equipment for future projects. Mayor Jimmy Rainwater said he hopes to see the destruction blitz take place once a quarter.

Councilmen Hoke Hampton and Bunnis

Williams praised the efforts. The houses are located in their districts.

“Hopefully this is just the first step in getting rid of all the dilapidated homes in Valdosta,” Hampton said.

The city works throughout the year to force repair or demolish substandard houses, but the process is lengthy, usually taking up to 12 months. Houses are added to the list as quickly as others are destroyed, Jordan said.

He estimated that the city tears down or burns about 26 houses a year. This year, the council included \$32,000 in the budget for use of a full-time prison detail dedicated to demolition.

Jordan said that trying to find the owners of such houses can be difficult. Problems include the property’s often being sold or owners living out of town or spending time in prison. Once owners are located, they have 30 days in which to get a city permit and bring the houses up to code. Hanson said state law allows the owners to do a minimal amount of work, and the city must accept that as an

attempt to improve the houses.

Jordan said while some owners fight the city’s efforts, others ask that the houses be torn down. The city recoups the money spent on demolition by placing liens against the properties, which takes about three years, Jordan said.

Hanson said a newly appointed city court judge, John Kinsley Edwards Jr., has been aggressive in working with the city in forcing owners to repair their houses. Owners usually are ordered to repair the houses within six months. If nothing is done within that time, the city is allowed by the court to destroy the homes.

Hanson said the city of Macon has a program in which the demolition process takes six months. The city plans to send representatives to study the program.

Jordan said the city held a similar cleanup about five years ago, when 35 houses in the Dollar Day area were destroyed. The Fry Street pool and 10 Habitat for Humanity homes are now located there.