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Town Hall Meeting Of African American Business Owners To Be Held At Rainier Beach This Sat.

In honor of Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the Western Washington Business Association is

calling on all African American Business owners in Western Washington to attend a Town Hall

Meeting this Sat., Jan. 16 at 10:00 a.m. at the Roberson Performing Arts Center at Rainier Beach High

School in Seattle.

The Town Hall Meeting — sponsored by Chris Bennett

African-American Civil War Museum Expanding To Unveil More History

By **Pharoh Martin**
NNPA Washington Correspondent

WASHINGTON (NNPA) - Every year, an estimated 100,000 people pour into Washington, DC and make their way to see the striking "Spirit of Freedom" sculpture and the etched names of over 209,000 African-Americans who served in the U.S. Colored Troops during the Civil War. And yet, the associated museum where tourists learn about the story of how these heroic souls turned the tide of the war is the size of a very small one bedroom apartment.

"It's not so much that we don't have much on display," said Dr. Frank Smith, founder and director of the African American Civil War Memorial at 1200 U Street. "It's that we have such a small space that they can't enjoy it the way they would like it."

With only 700 square feet, Smith needs more room. And he's finally getting it. The former D. C. city councilman plans to relocate the museum to a bigger building in September, using a \$5 million dollar grant he has been awarded from the District of Columbia city government. The foundation that oversees the museum aims to relocate into the city-owned Archibald Grimke Building, which has 2,500 square feet of potential display space and is directly adjacent to the memorial statue in Washington's historic Shaw neighborhood.

The proposed site gives Smith the ability to expand exhibits and programs as well as take advantage of modern presentation technology such as touch screens and high-end audio-visual equipment. The museum currently has only 700 square feet of display space, which is only enough room to hold 10 percent of the museum's elaborate collection of Civil War and Antebellum-related artifacts, documents, letters, photos and other historic keepsakes. When a bus load of students come to visit the museum is unable to accommodate everybody, some are forced to wait outside.

The memorial, museum and namesake Metro subway station anchors the historic U Street corridor, Washington's longtime epicenter of Black arts and culture. P.B.S. Pinchback, the most well-known Black soldier to fight in the Civil War, went on to live an affluent life as a brief stint in Louisiana as America's first Black governor and then as a philanthropist in Washington where he earned the moniker of the "Mayor of U Street".

Ironically, the Shaw neighborhood that U Street is a part of is named after Robert Gould Shaw, the White Civil War general that the all-Black 54th Massachusetts regiment made famous by the 1989 movie, "Glory". The Academy Award-winning war drama ignited public interest in the topic of Blacks in the Civil War.

"Before that movie most people weren't even aware that Black soldiers fought for the Union army," Smith said.

Harry Jones, the museum's



Former D.C. Councilman Frank Smith shows artifacts that reveal truths about the service of African-American soldiers during the Civil War. NNPA Photo.

curator, is more critical of Glory's glaring historical inaccurate portrayal of dates, events and the regiment itself. For instance, the 54th Massachusetts was depicted as a regiment of uneducated runaways when in reality a majority of the soldiers were free-born men, some who came from independent militias.

"Glory was completely false," Jones said. "In the movie's final battle at Fort Wagner, the producers claimed that the 54th Massachusetts regiment was completely wiped out and that the fort was never taken. That couldn't be further from the truth. The regiment lost ten percent of its men in that battle and the fort was taken seven weeks later."

He calls the movie an advertisement, not a documentary, on the subject. Academia and the general public were operating out of ignorance, he says.

"I tell them the story that's quite different than what they've been hearing," Jones said.

A typical belief is that African-Americans in this time period were agents rather than just victims. But, an 1865 sketch titled "Federal Army Entering Richmond" by White artist Joseph Becker depicts the fall of the Confederate capitol depicts the Union troops entering Richmond - all with dark faces.

The museum uses primary source pictorials to share that experience, a variety of photographs and documents. It also uses first-hand accounts from artists and journalists through artistic renditions and news articles.

A stand out in the collection is an actual 1834 bill of sale for a young Alabama girl. An original Abraham Lincoln-signed

Emancipation Proclamation was also displayed at the museum for five days at one point. That document was essential to nationally outlawing slavery.

Blacks who fought in the Civil War have been a long time passion for the 16-year city politician. He first learned about the U.S. Colored Troops four decades ago as a Civil Rights organizer. As a student at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Smith became a leader of Atlanta's student movement and a founding member of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, known as SNCC. He dropped out of school his junior year in college so that he could do civil rights activism in Mississippi and Alabama. While registering voters in the Magnolia state, Smith met an NAACP worker whose great-grandfather served in the U.S. Color Troops. That was a revelation for Smith. At that point, Smith had no idea that Blacks fought for the Union army. He spent the next 40 years studying the subject intensely and collecting Civil War-related memorabilia with the idea that a museum would come along one day.

The Georgia native made his mark on the Civil Rights movement until 1968 when he moved to the Nation's Capitol to become a researcher on education and planning issues. His work led him into community politics where he served on his neighborhood advisory board, and later, a term on the city's Board of Education in 1979, which came after a failed run for the City Council. In 1982, Smith again ran and won a seat on City Council. He remained a councilman for four consecutive terms. He got his chance to start the museum in the

mid-1990s when the Council needed something to compliment U Street's then-proposed subway station.

Today, the African-American Civil War Museum's founder works the phones to get funding to keep the museum's lights on and educating curious patrons about Blacks fighting in the Civil War.

"Most of the tourists we get are young people," Smith said. "They are college and high school students and they knew it took this. War is brutal. But on the other hand, fighting to save your family and fighting to save your community that's something that you can hold on to. Three out of four people listed on that wall were slaves."

The memorial's 9'1/2" bronze statue, "Spirit of Freedom", was sculpted by Ed Hamilton. The award-winning sculptor also designed renowned monuments such as the Amistad Memorial in New Haven, Conn., and Joe Louis Memorial statue in Detroit, Mich. The front side of the statue shows three armed Black Civil War infantry soldiers and a sailor. The back side shows a family seeing a soldier off to war.

The 209,145 names on the memorial's wall come from the official records of the Bureau of US Colored Troops at the National Archives. The names also include 7,200 White officers who commanded Black troops.

"People naturally just associate the major important monuments with the National Mall," Smith said. "People ask, 'Why isn't this on the Mall?' And we took that into account when we built it. But our job was to put something up here that was valuable enough to be on the Mall but not be on the Mall."

Enterprises (The Seattle Medium Newspaper and Kris Bennett Broadcasting), The Black Dollar Days Task Force, The Central Area Chamber of Commerce, First Thursdays, Arunga and Associates, Former State Rep. Dawn Mason, and Nat Jackson's Wellness Plus — will focus on training and meaningful employment for African Americans, the easement of redlining through credit scores, and opportunities for Stimulus dollars.

"This Town Hall meeting very well could be the most important one in recent memory," says Chris H. Bennett, chairman of The Seattle Medium Newspaper Group and the Z-Twins radio stations and co-facilitator of the event. "All of Washington benefits from African American economic inclusion, yet stimulus funds sent to Washington State are not reaching our business owners in ways that bring and sustain equity."

"In keeping with the principles of Martin Luther King, we are focused on the ideals he put forth not only for civil rights but he gave his life also for 'silver rights,' added Bennett.

According to organizers, Chris Gregoire and the Democratic led Legislature, Regional and Local Elected Officials have all been asked to attend. Many African Americans elected officials have already confirmed their attendance, including: State Sen. Rosa Franklin (D-Tacoma) State Rep. Eric

Pettigrew (D-Seattle) Martin Luther King County Councilmember Larry Gossett, Seattle City Councilmember Bruce Harrell, Tacoma Mayor Marilyn Strickland, Tacoma City Councilmember Victoria Woodards, Tukwila City Councilmember Joe Duffy, and Port of Seattle Commissioner Robert Holland.

"We need to know how Federal Stimulus funds are being disbursed in ways that bring economic recovery to African American businesses and families," said Dawn Mason, co-facilitator of the event. "And we need to know how our state officials, at all levels, are holding financial institutions in receipt of TARP funds accountable to our community."

The Western Washington African American Business Association is formed and exists for the purpose of this common interest, during these challenging times.

"All African-American community members are welcome to attend," said Bennett. However, we need as many business owners as possible to stand united with us as we address these concerns with our elected officials.

This is about the economic well-being and preservation of the Africa American Community, period," concluded Bennett.

Senator Rosa Franklin and Representative Eric Pettigrew are co-chairs of the event.

County Council Approves Creation Of Child Care Center In County Facility

On Monday, the King County Council unanimously approved the construction of a child care center in the County's Chinook building. The adopted legislation authorizes the Executive to execute a 20-year covenant with the city of Seattle for dedicated child care space along with authorizing a 20-year sublease with Northwest Center to provide the child care.

The Chinook Building, which opened in 2007, houses Public Health, the Office of the Public Defender, the Department of Community and Human Services, the Office of Information Resource Management, and the Finance Division. During its construction, the County reached an agreement with the city of Seattle that allowed the building to have additional floors without paying added development right costs. The County received a waiver from the city because it agreed to implement certain features that benefit the public. The child care center is the result of that agreement.

"Finding quality childcare can be a daunting task for families in the downtown core," said Councilmember Larry Gossett, the sponsor of the ordinance. "When we voted to build the Chinook Building, we decided that we were going to make space for a childcare facility. Through the partnership of King County, city of Seattle,

Northwest Center and the developers, Wright Runstad and Associates, we will make this childcare facility a reality in the very near future."

"When the Council approved building the Chinook building, I advocated for the building to include child care space, and our vote today brings that vision to reality," said Councilmember Larry Phillips. "It will be so beneficial for King County employees and families of all income levels to have access to childcare right in the downtown core. Northwest Center has an excellent reputation and will provide quality care to all children including those with disabilities."

The interior of the child care center will be nearly 7,000 square feet with an additional 2,900 square feet of outdoor play area. It is expected that the facility will be able to provide child care for up to 60 children, and the agreement between the County and the city of Seattle reserves 20 percent of the available slots for low income families.

Northwest Center will operate the facility, serving children from infants (6 weeks) to preschoolers, with and without developmental disabilities. The organization will pay \$0 base rent for 20 years, but will be responsible for costs associated with the county's exterior maintenance of the area, such as outside window washing.

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