

CHRIS BENNETT: DEAN OF THE BLACK PRESS IN THE NORTHWEST

By Connie Bennett Cameron

Chris Bennett sits behind this desk at his two-story stacks of pink message slips. It's early morning still; already Bennett is swamped with messages, and his phone is ringing off the hook.

There are obvious frustrations at times in running any business. But there are also the rewards, however small they may appear. While some seek gratification in the power and monetary rewards successful business brings, Bennett's gratification lies in the fact that he has helped his community move steps ahead toward achieving economic and political freedom.

Much of Bennett's strong desire to help his community comes from a Southern upbringing. He knows first-hand what it's like to be poor, and what it's like to be discriminated against. He knows what racism is all about, and he doesn't flinch when it comes to speaking out against injustices either through his newspapers or his radio station. "That's what the Black Press is all about. That's why it was founded in the first place. If we don't fight for justice, who will?"

Bennett started The Medium with little more than a prayer. But as he grew, he brought others in the family from Georgia to help them, and they in turn helped him. "That's the kind of person he has always been. He knew the hardships we faced back there, and he was determined not to live the rest of his life that way, and he wanted to help others in the family do the same," said Mrs. Anderson, his mother.

Bennett's three newspapers --- The Seattle Medium, Metro Homemaker's Shopping Guide, and Tacoma True Citizen --- have done much to uplift the spirits of the community. The publications have taken bold stands against drugs, child abuse, discrimination, racism and other hard-pressing issues. They have won several local and national awards for journalism excellence in news, feature writing and advertising. A trophy case in the lobby of The Medium displays many of the awards.

In addition, a journalism internship program at The Medium had played a pivotal role in the careers of many Black journalists who have used their training and experience as an opportunity to effectuate change at major dailies and national publications. A similar program now exists at many Black newspapers around the country.

The Bennett family's communications empire also consists of a regional full-color entertainment magazine, Soul Town Review, founded just last year, and a Seattle-based radio station, KRIZ, acquired four years ago. The 24-hour KRIZ 1420 AM, now located in the heart of the Black community, is the only Black-owned and operated soul station in the Pacific Northwest.

Bennett recently purchased another station, KAAR 1460 AM, in the Portland area. The 24-hour full-power station is pending FCC approval. It will take on the same format as KRIZ, including regular and religious programming.

Bennett is also a man of national stature. He served two consecutive terms (1983-87) as president of the National Newspaper Publishers Association. Last June, he was instrumental in helping the NNPA elect its first woman president, Patricia Thomas, who published the Milwaukee Community Journal.

In 1985, he was voted the prestigious Publisher of the Year by fellow publishers. The motto, "All for one, one for all," became the trademark of his remarkable administration.

Often referred to as the Dean of the Black Press in the Northwest because of his outstanding contributions, Bennett attributes much of his success to prayer and a caring and devoted family, including wife Gloria, sons Bernard, Jawann, Khalid, and daughter Malika. Of the future, the 44-year-old Georgia native said, "I believe it is my mission through the newspapers and radio stations to help set my people free economically, spiritually and politically. With God's help, we will see the Promised Land..."



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