

# The Iowa African-American Journal

Volume 5, Issue 3

July 1999

### Upcoming Events:

- ? Quarterly Commission Meeting  
10:00 AM August 7, 1999. Holiday  
Inn Convention Center, Waterloo.  
Public forum – submit request for  
presentation time to ICSAA by  
August 2.
- ? "Patten's Neighborhood: Memories  
of the Center Street Community"  
Exhibit of African-American life in  
Des Moines from the 1920s to the  
'60s. State of Iowa Historical Build-  
ing. (515) 281-6412.
- ? "Shaping Earth: African Vessels," an  
exhibition of African pottery, will be  
on view at the University of Iowa  
Museum of Art Stanley Gallery from  
July 10– Dec. 31.
- ? "A Touch of Jazz" mixer sponsored  
by the Mu Omicron Chapter of  
Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Inc. July  
30, 5:30-8:30 PM. Embassy Club at  
Capitol Square, \$6.
- ? The 6th Annual Statewide Diversity  
Conference, titled "The Faces and  
Voices of Iowa: Building Commu-  
nity" will be held October 5-6 at the  
Polk County Convention Complex in  
Des Moines. For more information  
contact Allison Engel at 515-281-  
0192.

Want to spread the word about an up-  
coming event or activity? Send the infor-  
mation to ICSAA before September 15,  
1999 for inclusion in our October issue.

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## Fourth Annual Women's Conference : A Success in Sioux City

On June 11 and 12, 1999, nearly 200 participants convened at the Sioux City Convention Center to learn, laugh, and fellowship with one another at the Fourth Annual African-American Women's Conference. The theme of the event, "The Light That Shines" was an appropriate title with regard to its success because the conference was nearly cancelled this year. The recent administrative transition in state government and within the ICSAA left the conference planning committee with only two months to organize. In spite of the circumstances, the staff of the commission, along with the Sioux City Planning Committee, led by Mrs. Flora Lee and Mrs. Linda Dean, prevailed and attendees were treated to an outstanding slate of workshops and dynamic speakers.

Keynote addresses were provided by African-American women who are nationally recognized in their respective fields. Dr. Andrea Sullivan, author of "A Path To Healing: A Guide to Wellness for Mind, Body and Soul" delighted and amazed the audience with her insights on how black women can be more in tune with their bodies. Adrienne Watson, the national director of the



AAWC presenters (l to r) Cathee Connor, Adrienne Watson, and Rhonda Nelson

NAACP's Back to School / Stay in School Program, discussed the importance of advocating for our youth and was a great source of inspiration for the young people in attendance.

The spiritual brunch on Saturday featured the all-girl choir "Young and Blessed" who rocked the convention center with four songs, after which conference attendees had the privilege of hearing the testimonials of Cathee Connor and Rhonda Nelson. Both women have triumphed over adversity – one is a breast cancer survivor and the other was an unwed teen mother. Each of their testimo-

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## Census 2000: Make It Count for African-Americans in Iowa

Census 2000, the largest peace-time mobilization in U.S. history, is about to begin. About 300,000 workers will be needed to reach an anticipated 275 million people across the United States. And you are needed to make it a success for African-Americans in Iowa.

Census 2000 will be the information cornerstone for the next century. Billions of dollars of federal, state and local funds will

be spent on thousands of projects across our nation. How and where that money is spent depends on the census numbers. For example, decisions about education, health care, job training and business are based on information about African-American children, elderly, the unemployed or underemployed. Moreover, the development of public transportation systems and traffic control are based on where people work and live. Census 2000 is a

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## Governor Vilsack Appoints Rose Vasquez to Lead the Department of Human Rights



Rose Vasquez  
DHR Director

As you walk through the halls of the Department of Human Rights you will see several new faces. Among them, the new director of the department, Rose Vasquez. Ms. Vasquez took office as the new director of DHR on February 5, 1999, following her appointment by Governor Tom Vilsack, but she is not new to state government. For thirteen years prior to her appointment, she served as an assistant attorney general for the state's Justice Department. As an assistant attorney general, she was assigned to represent the state's Department of Public Health. Her work experience and her interest in issues of human rights prepares her for this directorship.

Ms. Vasquez said she is grateful to Governor Vilsack for the opportunity to advocate for and foster an environment in the state of Iowa that will recognize and value diversity and will promote economic and social opportunities for a diverse population. She firmly believes that Iowa has the potential to be receptive to the ideas of inclusion and that it is "just a matter of getting our message out there."

Ms. Vasquez was born in Davenport, Iowa and raised in Moline, Illinois. She earned an AA degree from Blackhawk Community College and her BA from the University of Iowa. In 1985, she graduated from Drake University with her JD and began working for the state of Iowa almost immediately after. In the next few years, Ms. Vasquez hopes to make the Department of Human Rights more visible to Iowans as a resource and an advocate for human rights issues. She is encouraged by the support of the new administration and says, "Right now there is a momentum upon which we need to build in order to deliver our message that as a state agency we can serve the interests of diverse populations as well as the interests of the whole state." She said that with regard to the Division on the Status of African-Americans, "it is going to be the leadership of the commission and the dedication of a very talented staff that will lead us into the 21st century. With a renewed energy and a sincere commitment on behalf of the Department of Human Rights, the needs of African-American Iowans will be addressed like never before."

### Census, continued

chance for black Iowans to make sure that the new century begins with an accurate and complete picture of our community.

Our contacts, knowledge, and concern about the community are the keys to an accurate census. Start by spreading the word about the importance of the census. Set the record straight by helping to dispel myths about the confidentiality and uses of the census. Reassure others about census confidentiality and that the information collected in the census is protected by law. Emphasize why the information collected in the census is important to the African-American community.

The Census Bureau also needs help to recruit candidates for census taker positions in every neighborhood across Iowa.

Spread the word about census jobs to your family, friends and associates. It takes over 300,000 workers to do the census. Visit the Census Bureau's Internet site (<http://www.census.gov/index.html>) to get ideas or contact one of these local offices:

1111 San Marnan  
Rms. 103, 105, 106, 106A, 121  
Waterloo, IA 50701  
319-234-8404

Federal Building  
210 Walnut St., Ninth Floor  
Des Moines, IA 50309  
515-323-2550

311 3rd Ave. SE  
Cedar Rapids, IA 52407  
Phone # unavailable at this time

Commerce Building  
520 Nebraska Street, Suite 324  
Sioux City, IA 51101  
Phone # unavailable at this time

## Be A Part of Iowa's Strategic Plan!

Governor Vilsack has assembled a group of 37 Iowans from both political parties to prepare a strategic plan for the state's entry into the new century. "We invite all Iowans to participate in this exciting process – working across party lines to discover what we value and what we want Iowa to become over the next dozen years and beyond," Vilsack said. Group members will be sponsoring a series of town meetings across the state this fall to gather ideas. The goal is to come up with a vision of Iowa in 2010

Iowans can contribute ideas by e-mail at [ideas2010.org](http://ideas2010.org) or by writing to Governor's Strategic Planning Council, 200 East Grand Avenue, Des Moines, IA 50309.

and then to plan the steps that it will take to reach that vision in the next ten years. Governor Vilsack has encouraged Iowans to participate in this project by sending their ideas and suggestions for Iowa's future. In order to prevent the needs of African-American Iowans from being overlooked, ICSAA intends to play a role in the early phases of the strategic planning. Citizens are greatly encouraged to share their ideas for Iowa's future with ICSAA in addition to submitting their thoughts to the planning council. Don't let this opportunity pass without getting

## Traevana Potter-Hall Begins Appointment as Director of ICSAA



Traevana Potter-Hall  
ICSAA Director

On April 12, 1999, the Commission on the Status of African-Americans welcomed its third administrator since its creation in 1988. Born in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Traevana Potter-Hall graduated from Prairie High School and went on to receive a baccalaureate degree with honors in African-American Studies at the University of Iowa. In 1994, she entered the University of Iowa College of Law and became actively involved in the Black Law Students Association. Additionally, Ms. Potter-Hall served as President of both the Equal Justice Foundation and Phi Alpha Delta Legal Fraternity.

After receiving her law degree in 1997, Ms Potter-Hall was the Director of Scholar Recruitment Programs at the University of Iowa, began a solo legal practice in Iowa City and served as a volunteer assistant Johnson County attorney. She served as a member of the University of Iowa Committee on Diversity and as a Court Appointed Special Advocate for chil-

dren in the judicial system, as well as Treasurer for the Board of Directors for the Rape Victim Advocacy Program. She is married with a two-year-old son.

Ms. Potter-Hall was appointed by Governor Vilsack this spring to lead the Commission on the Status of African-Americans into the new millennium. She is honored to have been given the opportunity to be an advocate for African-Americans in Iowa and intends to continue the outstanding programs that were developed by her predecessor, particularly the African-American Women's Conference and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Celebration. "The key to taking this commission to the next level," says Ms. Potter-Hall, "is to gather the ideas and concerns of black people across the state and incorporate them into a legislative agenda. As director, it is my duty to serve as a conduit between African-American Iowans and state government."

### Women's Conference, continued

nials was followed by a powerful dance interpretation of their struggles that brought many audience members literally to tears. Mixed in among the speakers were the workshops which provided an excellent forum for in-depth discussion of important topics. The conference finale was a dance troupe from Benin, West Africa, which performed at the closing session. The most often heard quote from conference participants was, "Everyone who isn't here really missed something special."

The Iowa Commission on the Status of African-Americans has evaluated the positive impact of the Sioux City conference and has determined that there is a great deal of community interest and support for future conferences. The

Fifth Annual African-American Women's Conference will be held March 17-19 in Waterloo, Iowa. More information about the conference will be forthcoming on the ICSAA web site and in future newsletters. To be included on the mailing list for conference brochures, please send your name and address to Ms. Kim Cheeks, ICSAA, Lucas State Office Building, Des Moines, IA 50319. You may also send an e-mail to [kcheeks@max.state.ia.us](mailto:kcheeks@max.state.ia.us) or call 800-351-4659.

### Commissioner Profile: *Meet Jerome Thomas, Dubuque*



Jerome Thomas  
ICSAA Chair

Jerome Thomas graduated from Austin High School in Chicago, Illinois. He received a Bachelor of Science Degree in Business Administration from the University of Dubuque and is currently employed by John Deere Dubuque Works as an Industrial Engineer. Mr. Thomas serves on the Board of Directors for Substance Abuse Services Center, is an N.A.A.C.P. Dubuque Branch Executive Committee, and is Chairperson of the Deacon Board for Rock of Ages Missionary Baptist Church. He is involved with other civic organizations and is

married with two sons.

As Chairperson, Mr. Thomas would like to see the ICSAA facilitate Town Meetings that address the issues in each community. He would also like to form partnerships with various school districts and educational organizations to address issues regarding the education of African-American children. Mr. Thomas is committed to working with the judicial system to develop and implement programs that will help past offenders to develop the necessary skills to become productive in their respective communities.

**IOWA COMMISSION ON THE  
STATUS OF AFRICAN-AMERICANS**

Department of Human Rights  
Lucas State Office Building  
Des Moines, IA 50319

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Fax: 515-281-3858  
E-mail: tlphall@max.state.ia.us

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## Across Black Iowa...

In June, a Buchanan County man was sentenced to 38 months in prison for burning a cross in the yard of an interracial couple at Quasqueton two years ago. Howard Sawyer, 25, pleaded guilty to the crime along with Donald Von Lienen and Nicholas Leehey, both of whom are pending sentencing. In a prepared statement, U.S. Attorney Stephen Rapp said: "This conviction carries a message to all of those people who would act out of racial hatred to frighten, intimidate or threaten any citizen in the exercise of his or her rights – the federal government will prosecute you to the full extent of the law."

In May, Governor Tom Vilsack signed into law the Iowa Freedom Trail Program, which will commemorate Iowa's role in the Underground Railroad 130 years ago. There are several reported Underground Railroad stops already well-preserved around Iowa, including Todd House in Tabor and Hitchcock House near Lewis, both in southwest Iowa; Jordan House in West Des Moines; and Llewelling House in Henry County in southeast Iowa.

Davenport Mayor Phil Yerington offered apologies for a botched hiring process at a meeting in May to Thomas Mann, a candidate whose bid to become director of the

civil rights commission was rejected. Mann, whose resume includes working as a civil rights attorney, Iowa state senator and serving as director of the Des Moines Civil Rights Commission, is African-American. The Davenport directorship went to Judith Morrell, a white woman, who took office in March. Although the mayor acknowledged "shortcomings in the (hiring) process", he insists that the "selection will stand."

An African-American family in Keokuk have been the victims of vandalism at least 18 times since they moved there nearly three years ago. Raymond Echols and Sylvia Mills-Echols are certain that racism has motivated these crimes against them and have recently sent a request for federal investigators to U.S. Attorney Janet Reno and President Clinton.

Iowans for Sensible Priorities (ISP) is a statewide signature campaign that is calling for greater investment in public education, health care and other local priorities that are important to African-Americans by cutting Pentagon waste. For more information check out the ISP web site at [www.sensibleiowans.com](http://www.sensibleiowans.com) or call 1-877-IOWA MOM.