Baltimore people

State Fair Practices officer has reasons for feeling good

David Watt

By Paul Evans

Alfred David Watt, the 40-year old division director of the Fair Practices Office for the state Department of Transportation (DOT) since 1976, and known as "Dave" to his friends and close associates, says he has a lot of reasons for feeling really good about things these days.

With rounded face and sparkling eyes, he welcomed a repor- ter's questions Wednesday during an interview - visit to his office at transportation headquarters near Baltimore-Washington International Airport.

Right off the bat, he tells just what he is supposed to do for the state. His job, or a big part of his job, is seeing that state transportation services are provided to the public in a "completely non-discriminatory manner" as demanded by the Civil Rights Act of 1964.

Some of the departments and offices under his direction to ensure equal access are state toll facilities, the airport, motor vehicles, highways, the Maryland Port Administration, and the Maryland Railway Administration.

Both his special glint and broad-faced smile become more studied, more intense when the subject gets around to black participation in his division.

Just a little history first though.

You may recall that former governor Marvin Mandel's long-stabnding contribution to state government was the consolidation of Maryland's far-flung, and sanctiones wayward bureaucratic system, into a a cabinet-type system with secretaries heading state departments and agencies.

This reining - in brought agencies as motor vehicles, promotions, and aviation, along with others, into one super-structure in the transportation department; Harry Hughes, now governor, became its first secretary in 1971.

Now, there are 9,3000 workers, 22-25 percent of whom are black.

For example, in the state railroad administration, the director of administration is black, Gregory Harshaw. The state railroad administration's rail planner is a black woman, Ms. Kathryn Waters, and her assistant, Melvin Jackson, is black.

And, the DOT lawyer, an Assistant Attorney General, Benjamin Clyburn, is a black. "I'd like to think that some of these I am responsible for," Mfr. Watt said, flatly, but obviously proudly.

Then, he and the reporter got down to the heavy stuff, the pur pose for the meeting.

"One of the areas for which I am responsible is the DOT's Minority Business program. This program has been successful in awarding in excess of $210 million in state contracts to minorities, primarily blacks, for the fiscal years beginning July, 1977 through June, 1982."

" Of that, blacks specifically received $174,013,554, nearly 82 percent of the minority allocation. All the others, the Asians, the Hispanics, women, etc. received about 18 percent of the set-aside monies during that peruod," he said.

DOT's Minority Business Enterprise Program has been in existence since February, 1978.

"The Maryland DOT Minority Business Enterprise Program has been in existence since 1978 and continues to be used, as a national model for other political jurisdicitions. "Recently, the MDOT received an Exceptional Service Citation from the U. S. Department of Transportation in recognition of its efforts to utilize Minority Business Enterprises," the governor said in a recent letter to Rep. Parren J. Mitchell.

What kinds of businesses have received money under this program over the last five years, the AFRO wondered.

"They are black businesses that could provide services to state transportation such as carpenters, highway types, etc. We have all kinds. The status of the minority set-aside is healthy, and it is going to get healthier. And, I am going to supervise it," Watt said.

The division chief begins to get serious, the smuile fades, and he becomes less jovial when he commences talking aboit his latest pride and joy: the $140 (10 percent) of the $1.4 billion, over four years, that by law must go to minorities, more probably blacks.

All this stems from the Surface Transportation Assistance Act of 1982, signed by the President on January 6, and shepherded to passage by Mr. Mitchell."

His sponsorship secured an amendment to the bill called the "Minority Business Enterprise Amendment," which in previous and past legislations has become commonly known as "set aside."

Reagan singed the bill as an effort to stimulate the economy by pumping millions of dollars into repairing highways and bridges and related efforts. Congress passed the measure in Decembe' with substantial majorities in borh houses.

The minority set-aside aspect of the bill became effective as soon as the president signed it, Major L. Clark, an aide to Mitchell said Thursday. ."

"When the funds will become avaiable is contingent upon the availability of the states to make application to the federal Department of Transportation," he added.

Dave Watt will have a major responsibility in implementing the new monies' program for minorities in Maryland.

Noting this, Congressma Mitchell said, "These are desperate days for minority businesspeople. My amendment comes at an excellent time to stimulate to struggle to save minority. businesses from economic starvation."

A similar victory was scored by the congressman in 1977 with a 10 percent set-aside for minority business in the Local Public Works Act. The 1977 amendment resulted in more than $625 million being awarded to minority businesses nationwide.

" This was an exciting period in the development of minority business, and the recently enacted amendment will provide even greater opportunities or the minority business community," said Mitchell.

The potential effectof this $140 million descending from on high to the state's minority community has Watt all excited

He began to wax philosophically about it . "

"Such funds will result in a new,stable black business base. With these funds there should be the development of a more avid black entrepreneurial base thatwill help result in thecombating of social problems in the black community. It will meet mean jobs and economic development. Blacks, now, will become employers of the last resort, meaning they will begin to have their destiny on in their own hands instead of someone else.

Waxing intellectuality and all that high stuff appears to come to him easily.

Through his mother, he is a seventh generation ean who can trace his ancestry back to the Rev. Abner Coker, city born in 1767. He is reputed to be one of the founders of Bethel A.m. M.E. Church, founded in 1785. The family attends there.

Dave was born in East Baltimore. His paternal people, the Hilliards,used to own a China store on Orleans St. .

"Though born at Gay and Caroline Sts., the family moved over to the westside because he was graduated from Edmondson High School in 1961; from MOrgan, with an A.B. in history, in 1965; and from the Geogre Washington University, in Public Accoun Administration, with a Master of Arts degree in 1968.

He is married and has two daughters. His wife, Grace, works for the state Department of Social Services. One daughter, Whitney, 15, attends Pikesville High School, and Sydnie, 5, is at Woodmoor Elementary School.

He comes from a proud family. One can see it in the way he talks.

The Cokers, he said, were listed in the 8th U. S. census, which of course, was only the third such counting for the new nation under the Constitution of 1789.

Finally, the AFRO blurted out, "What do you do in your spare time?"

He threw back his head.

Then, he laughed.

"I like to go to the Five Mile House at Reisterstown Rd. and Haywood Ave. and bend my elbows with my friends, talking about old times. And, I must admit that I do enjoy carpentry."

In 1967, he was commissioned at a second lieutenant from Officers' Candidate School in Ft. Benning, Ga.

CANDIDATE — A reception Tuesday, March 15, at The Governors Club for Carl Stokes, a candidate for Baltimore City Council Second District, was well attended. Stokes is a businessman and community activist.

AFRO photo by P. A. Greene

Stokes launches 2nd District campaign

Carl Stokes, owner of "Everyman's Son" clothing store in the Mondawmin Mall, recently launched his campaign for East Baltimore Second District City Council.

As chairman of the board of the Association for Sickle Cell Services, Education, Research, and Treatment (ASSERT), Stokes has demonstrated his abilities, his diligence and conscientiousness in carrying out his responsibilities during the three years that he has been serving in that capacity.

Stokes also has served as president of the Mondawmin Merchant's Association where he undertook a diversity of projects in the fields of health, education and politics.

He is the founder of the Baltimore Basketball Association, an unlimited league that concentrates much of its activities at East Baltimore's Madison Square Recreation Center.

Stokes serves as the head coach of one of the league's entries.

Hundreds attend recent school open house

The Park Heights Street Academy opened its doors to the community Tuesday, March 15, and more than 200 area residents took advantage of the opportunity.

Guests were treated to a host of activities, including student lectures, an admissions luncheon, and tours of the five-year-old facility.

Dr. Irving Hamer, the academy's headmaster, told those assembled that the purpose of his school was to provide a rigorous education to those who may have "fallen between the cracks."

He said many students who possess the skills to excel in school fail to exercise their talents because they are not given an opportunity in traditional educational settings.

Hamer stressed the ability of the academy to provide individual training to its students, and said such capability was the key to the success of the institution.

Darrell Kennan, admission coordinator and student counselor, also gave a short address, during which he outlined the simple admission process for prospective students and their parents.

After a tour of classrooms, guests were entertained by students Tony Mann, Bernard Conaway, Kevin Grey, Sylvette Black, Bernard Trent and Bryan Moore, who gave lectures on futurism, the Harlem Renaissance and several related topics.

"I can't believe this," said one parent, as she made her way home following the demonstrations. "This reminds me of a college campus."

The Academy is a non-profit, tax exempt institution, and it is presently conducting an admissions drive. For more information call Darrell Kennan at 367-3446.

RAPT VISITORS — Guests appear to be entranced with the student demonstrations they are watching during the Park Heights Street Academy Open House on March 15. They include, left to right, Aprell and Michelle Speighton and noted political science professor, G. James Fleming.

Smart kids wanted at city high schools

Is your sixth grader interested in becoming a lexicographer of Latin? Or perhaps a mathematical maven?

If so, maybe you ought to consider sending the budding scholar to one of two public schools featuring advanced junior high level studies this fall.

But you had better get moving. The application deadline is March 25 for the program's 590 seats opening this September.

Roland Park Junior High will offer a citywide program of enriched English, math, social studies, foreign language, and science offerings for 400 new seventh graders.

Classes in Latin and one other language, as well as algebra I, courses not normally offered to junior high school students, will be a regular feature of the enriched program.

Hamilton Junior High will offer an identical course load for 190 youngsters from Baltimore's northwest.

Applicants to the accelerated classes face stringent admissions criteria. Minimum standards for admittance include reading and math scores at or above the seventh grade level, an overall 85 grade average, and a 90 percent attendance record for the Fall, 1982 semester.

Letters of recommendation describing the applicant's ability to cope with the demanding program from the student's current principal and a major subject teacher are a further requisite.

Applications will be forwarded by elementary school principals to the school system's Planning department for admissions evaluations.

Further For further information call the Planning office at 396-8854.

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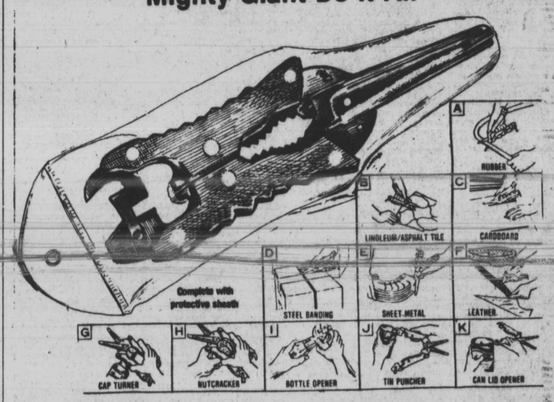

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BALTIMORE/WASHINGTON AFRO AMERICAN

Friday Plus: March 25, 1983

Volume 1, No. 21

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Mellow out with **Earl Klugh,** See Best Bets, page 2.

Spend **"A Night at the Opera"** with **"Porgy and Bess"**, See Page 3.