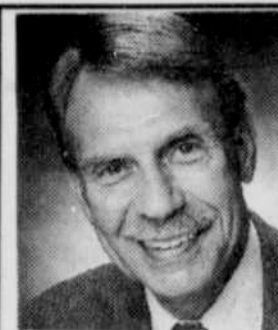




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national news

From root to branch

National black gay forum reaches out to regional communities, youth to lend resources and support

by Inga Sorensen

Responding to the shifting needs of the country's African American lesbian and gay community, the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum is launching its first major reorganization since the group was established a decade ago.

The changes include the addition of new programs, new national staff members and the first permanent board of directors; the implementation of a regional structure; and the adoption of a lower membership fee.

"These bold new steps will give us a greater presence in local communities throughout the nation," says Keith Boykin, the Leadership Forum's executive director.

Established in 1988, the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum works to empower African American lesbians and gay men by developing their leadership skills, increasing their visibility and building bridges among various communities.

It is the only national organization dedicated to the country's estimated 2 million-plus African American gay men and lesbians.

In mid-February, nearly 1,000 lesbians and gay men gathered in Long Beach, Calif., for the group's 10th anniversary conference, which brought together a number of prominent African Americans, including Dr. Cornel West, Pulitzer Prize-winning author Alice Walker, former U.S. Surgeon General Dr. Joycelyn Elders, and writer/poet June Jordan.

"The participation of so many high-profile leaders in the black community represents the important role of black lesbians and gays in the larger black struggle," says Boykin. "We plan to build on this momentum, and we expect that other prominent African Americans will become much

ers—Alice Walker, Dr. Cornel West, Dr. Elders, June Jordan—it was wonderful."

Not that there wasn't also plenty of nitty-gritty organizing going on.

"There was lots of that too," laughs Prescod, adding on a more serious note: "That's what we need to be doing in Oregon—basic organizing of both men and women."

The conference, held Feb. 13-17, attracted grass-roots organizers and scholars from around the nation who discussed vital issues concerning the black lesbian and gay community. The event featured Womyn's and Men's institutes, an AIDS Institute and two days of skills-building workshops.

Longtime activist Mandy Carter has been



Sherry Harris

named the Forum's first national field director. She will assist black sexual minority community organizations by providing resources, skills and technical assistance to build a larger multi-community coalition.

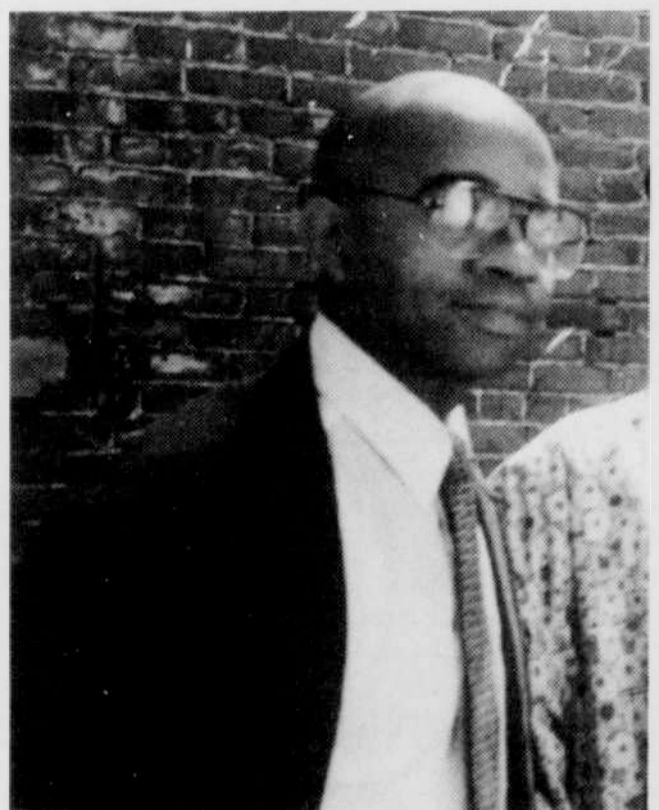
The fledgling national youth program will target black queer youth between the ages of 18 and 24 in need of leadership training, direct financial assistance and mentors.

Major components of the program include a National Youth Council, annual scholarships to support students and young community organizers, a youth track organized by and for young people at the annual national conference, and a mentoring project providing role models.

Local and regional groups can also now join forces with the Forum by becoming member organizations. In doing so, they will be eligible to apply for technical and financial assistance through a new grant process that pools the resources of various local groups.

The Forum has also established a regional structure to better represent all parts of the country. The Pacific Northwest's regional representative is former Seattle Councilwoman Sherry Harris, who is also a member of the group's 10-woman, five-man board of directors.

Additionally, the organization has decreased its annual membership dues from \$35 to \$10 to make membership accessible to a broader spectrum of community groups.



The Rev. Cecil Prescod

more vocal in their support of the black lesbian and gay community."

The Rev. Cecil Prescod was among a small group of Portlanders who attended the conference. He is a member of the local chapter of Brother to Brother, an African American gay and bisexual men's group.

"The conference had a very celebratory feel," says Prescod, who also participated in last year's conference in Dallas. "It felt more like a celebration this year, probably because it was the tenth anniversary, and there were such notable speak-

For more information, contact the National Black Lesbian and Gay Leadership Forum at (202) 483-6786.