

SCREEN

SALUTE TO FILM OFFICES
plus STAGES plus STOCK FOOTAGE

June 19-26, 2000/\$3.50

THE CHICAGO PRODUCTION WEEKLY

Vol. 22, No. 18

INSIDE

SYKES ON A ROLL

Producer Gloria Sykes has plenty of programs in the works since "Cheaters." See Newsreel, page 7.

THE CFO AT 20

A salute to the Chicago and Illinois Film Offices. See Salute, page 17.

RAH REVITALIZED

RAH production services back with a vengeance. See Facilities, page 20.

HAIL BRITANNICA

Encyclopedia Britannica films now a popular library. See Stock Footage, page 29.

WHITE IN WASHINGTON

WPA Library founder Matt White now heads National Geographic's new TV division. See Stock Footage, page 30.

MPG CELEBRATES 15

The \$1.2 million creative resource serves corporate, broadcast and itself. See Anniversary, page 39.

Mission possible

Richardson builds major African American archives

by Ruth L Ratny

In order for Julieanna Richardson to hit her \$1 million funding goal for The HistoryMakers, her Shoah Foundation-like archives, Harry Belafonte has graciously agreed to be the subject of "An Evening With..." and his good friend, Danny Glover, as interviewer.

Richardson is the founder, president and driving force of The HistoryMakers, a library of African American oral history provided digitally over the Internet and as videotapes.

The black tie Nov. 2 event at the Cadillac Palace should yield sufficient funds to enable the fledgling organization to tape 100 to 200 stories by the end of the year.

Richardson calls them, "Stories of success against the odds, stories of achievement in the face of adversity and stories of inspiration."

Forty such stories have been captured thus far in the year since she launched The HistoryMakers. That's a weighty number considering that Richardson moved her offices into a building



Julieanna Richardson is making archival history with her The HistoryMakers.

Continued on page 2

crc₁=(dvd)

The formula for DVD authoring



Chicago Recording Company



African American oral history lives with The HistoryMakers

she purchased early this year, sought grant money and works with a minuscule staff of four, including herself.

A Harvard trained lawyer, with a degree in American studies from Brandeis, Richardson concedes the African American community "is not as open about its history and tends not to share stories about the past."

Still, Chicago African Americans quickly and enthusiastically agreed to earlier taping sessions; Carol Moseley Braun, Bobby Rush, Dempsey Travis and Charlie Hayes among them. Through persistent networking, a referral got her to civil rights leader Julian Bond—an interview that took a year to book—who in turn referred her Myrlie Evers, widow of slain civil rights leader Medgar Evers.

One networking link paid off handsomely. Richardson told Aerial Investment Bank president John Rogers and son of prominent attorney, the late Jewel LaFontant MANKarious, what she was doing. He introduced her to his father, retired Judge John Rogers Sr. who introduced her to Col. Bill Thompson. "Ever hear of the Golden 13?" Thompson asked Richardson. She had not and was intrigued. "They were the Navy's version of the Tuskegee Airmen," Thompson informed her. "Only four of them are still alive and one lives upstairs from me and wants to talk to you," he said.

And so Richardson fell into a surprisingly valuable trove of documents about an unknown sector of black military history that will provide hours of the kind of fascinating stories she wants for The HistoryMakers.

"Associations like that keep me going," says Richardson. "I have found passion and it has energized me like nothing before."

She also continues to own SCTN Teleproductions (now run by Matthew

Hickey), which for eight years provided local cable programming.

One of its earlier prospective clients, Tanqueray Gin, had planned to create video shows based on a year-long Black History Month calendar. Tanqueray dropped the project a'borning, but not before Richardson had begun taping locally prominent African Americans.

She remembered back when she captured oral history audiotapes of the writer Langston Hughes, Lee Whipple, the oldest living black actor at the time, and actress Butterfly McQueen ("I don't know nothin' about birthin' babies, Miz Scarlett") who was living in poverty. "Those stories stuck with me over the years."

When SCTN's contract with the cable companies expired and she decided to move on, Richardson had to do some soul-searching. If she stayed in the production business, she wanted to continue to be involved in content. Well, The HistoryMakers would keep her in production and also allow her to make a significant historical contribution.

Before committing to the long-term project, she had to answer two questions: did such an archive exist and who would be interested. Answers came quickly.

Poring over a hefty reference book of stock footage she lugged on vacation showed nothing was available like the first-person narrative collection she envisioned. "That's when I decided to go for it."

To find out who would be interested, Richardson wrote a business plan. In it, she mentioned the Shoah Foundation, Steven Spielberg's on-going collection of first person Jewish stories, especially

those of Holocaust survivors. "Our goals were strikingly similar: both are first person narratives, both are massive acquisitions and attention is paid to video quality."

Before long, she received a \$250,000 grant from the State of Illinois and \$50,000 from the McCormick Tribune Foundation. She hopes to raise another \$250,000 through other foundations and is counting on netting \$150,000 from the Belafonte-Glover evening.

To stretch her dollars, Richardson has made various "partnerships" with area universities, such as Roosevelt, whose president, Ted Gross, immediately responded to her letter and said they would like to participate, and Northwestern, the University of Chicago, Columbia College and DePaul followed suit.

Technology partnerships are essential, since The HistoryMakers is designed for Internet access. She has three: Signal Interactive donated a site; local IP firm ProVillage is developing the site's back end for greater interactivity and Silicon Valley-based Activate.net is hosting The HistoryMakers content and streaming it.

Relentlessly attempting to interview in ever-expanding circles, The HistoryMakers, with its tiny staff (researcher-writers Steven Rozier and Crystal Foster and administrative assistant Loretta Jackson), is especially needful of researchers and camera operators that the academic partnerships should provide, at least as summer interns.

Typically, interviews take two hours, plus set-up time. They are then transcribed and short segments go online. "Eventually, we will have a digital archive connected to historically black colleges and other educational institutions."

Meanwhile, The HistoryMakers is inching its way into the public consciousness. WBBM-AM program manager Georgann Herbert liked Richardson's idea of providing mini-stories and agreed to run them Tuesdays through August. Felicia Middlebrooks is the host.

More exposure will come next November when the Belafonte-Glover interview is aired over PBS. Northern Trust Bank has agreed to be the lead sponsor.

The HistoryMakers is located at 1900 S. Michigan Ave., 60616; phone, 312/674-1900. www.thehistorymakers.com.★

'I have found passion and it has energized me like nothing before.'



CATFISH
music
phone: 312/280/0906
www.catfishchicago.com