

San Antonio Express-News (TX)

January 16, 2005

Quietly working on black success

Bruce Davidson

The most important community leaders aren't always the most visible or obvious. That may be particularly true for San Antonio's African American community.

Journalists typically call **on** political and religious leaders to speak as representatives for the **black** community, but that approach only scratches the surface, a lesser-known leader recently pointed out.

Express-News columnist Kathy Clay-Little wrote last week that many "**black** leaders" are a creation of the media.

One group of African American leaders that is not seeking media attention - and until now hasn't received any - **quietly** meets once a month at the Plaza Club, talking and exchanging information with others from outside their community.

"It's **quietly** moving in a direction that is needed - a dialogue between individuals that are in special positions now," the Rev. Claude **Black** said of the Lighthouse Group.

Black, a retired pastor and former councilman who is deservedly known as a **black** leader - indeed, an icon - founded the group.

The Lighthouse Group "is not a political action group nor an economic action group. It is a group for information only. We hope the information will lead individuals to make decisions that will be effective for everybody," **Black** explained.

The approach is new and in part a product of individual **success**, with San Antonio's **black** community moving to all parts of the city, rather than remaining segregated **on** the East Side.

The geographic spread of African Americans has created new challenges in maintaining cohesion.

"Many of our groups that have gathered have been protest groups rather than information groups. We are just trying to find more roads that will take us to our goals," **Black** said.

The new tactic is consistent with **Black's** history as a civil rights worker, he noted. "I'm not a person that is against action groups, but this is not one of them."

Black said part of the **black** community remains mired in lower economic neighborhoods, while economically successful families have moved elsewhere.

"We've got to create an opportunity for some dialogue," he added.

People participating in the Lighthouse Group are **success** stories in various fields, including financial services, law, architecture, education, telecommunications, law enforcement and government.

Participants include Republicans and Democrats.

"These are individuals who know where many of the resources are. They are no longer restricted to the segregated community," **Black** said.

By exchanging information and seeking it from other parts of the community, the group hopes to help open doors for others. Spreading diversity is an important part of the conversation. More opportunity for more people should be the end result.

Black said the group is trying to be proactive rather than reactive.

"I think that makes for a better community. It makes for a progressive community," he said.

Black got the inspiration for the Lighthouse Group over a period of time as he met successful African Americans.

"I discovered (that) I don't know these guys. There's a new set of guys, a new set of things. I need to know them. I need to know what they're doing and know how they got there."

African American leaders no longer rise exclusively from the East Side through the traditional churches and avenues.

It's a measure of the **success** of the civil rights movement and integration. But more needs to be done, and the Lighthouse Group is tackling the challenge, **quietly**.

bdavidson@express-news.net
