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Stella's Column

January 30, 2007

BY **STELLA FOSTER** Sun-Times Columnist

A STELLAR REMINDER: Mayor Daley will speak at the Rotary One luncheon at the Union League Club today. **AND JUST IN:** The mayor's lovely better half, first lady **Maggie Daley**, has agreed to keynote the Rotary's luncheon Feb. 27, also at the Union League. I am sure that **Don Garner**, president of the Rotary, is most pleased about this winning combination!

MAYOR DALEY'S African American Heritage Month reception is Feb. 22 at the Chicago Cultural Center and is sponsored by the Commission on Human Relations. Of course, the mayor is the keynoter for this event, too.

THE SCOOP: Christopher Gardner, the multimillionaire owner and CEO of the Gardner Rich & Co. brokerage firm whose life story is the basis for the hit movie "Pursuit of Happyness" (starring newly Oscar-nominated actor **Will Smith** in the lead role) has been snared by WVON's **Melody Spann-Cooper** and N'Digo's **Hermene Hartman** for their awesome "Breakfast for Champions" event March 23 at Chicago Hilton & Towers.

The theme for this hot ticket, 7th annual breakfast -- which always brings out our town's top movers and shakers -- is "A Dialog with Chris Gardner."

Chris started out years ago as a homeless single father in San Francisco, later relocated to Chi Town, and through hard work and a strong desire to make a better life for himself and his son, finally hit the mother lode. He is an inspiration to us all and a real champ.

Hey, brother, can you spare a dime for a little gossip columnist? (Hey, just kidding. ... I meant to say a million!)

And I want to take a moment to say congrats to Spann-Cooper, who is hosting a ribbon-cutting ceremony on Thursday for her new state-of-the-art WVON radio headquarters on East 87th Street. Thanks to a sweet deal with ClearChannel, WVON is now a 24-hour operation.

ANOTHER CHAMP: February is Black History Month, and on Feb. 13 at Navy Pier a VIP reception and tribute will take place in honor of Chicago's **Don Thompson**, the new president of McDonald's USA based in Oak Brook. Thompson is the first African American in that prestigious position.

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SARAH FERGUSON, the Duchess of York, comments on "The Insider" show today on the rumor about her nephew **Prince William** and marriage: "I have no idea if Prince William is going to marry **Kate Middleton**. She is pretty and lovely and he's the most wonderful credit to his mother [**Princess Diana**]."

"**THE APPRENTICE**" **Bill Rancic**, of Chicago, his fiancée, E! News' **Giuliana DePandi**, and ski champ **Picabo Street** hosted the annual Sara Lee Picabo Street Ski Challenge last week in Park City, Utah, benefitting the National Children's Alliance. Other celebs on hand included **Tara Reid**, "Grey's Anatomy's" **Kate Walsh** and young **Dakota Fanning**. Local soul-singing Sara Lee exec **Jon Harris** performed.

SCOOP II: "THE COLOR PURPLE's" Tony-nominated actress **Elisabeth Withers-Mendes**, who hails from Joliet, ha (Can Happen to Anyone") coming out today on the Blue Note label. She's having a private listening party Thursday at

MISS ILLINOIS Heidi Ekstrom competed in the Miss America contest in Vegas and was sponsored by Houbigant Tr company exec, **Joey Majumdar**, accompanied Heidi there.

WLS-CHANNEL 7 president and general manager **Emily L. Barr** will be part of a panel discussing "Charting a New C Communications in the Digital Age" today at the Executive's Club Joint Committee breakfast meeting at the Mid-Amer **Lorenzo Clemons** is currently featured in national TV commercials for U.S. Mint and Sears.

ON THE SCENE: The Food Network's bubbly southern belle **Paula Deen**, in town to tape an **Oprah** show, found time chef, **Art Smith**, at the RL eatery. ... The Jokes and Notes comedy club is celebrating its first anniversary.

SOME MORE SCENES: The Dallas Mavericks' **Jerry Stackhouse**, **Devin Harris** and **Greg Buckner** supped at Gibbs Bulls game. The owner of the Mavericks, **Mark Cuban**, stopped off at LuxBar. ... The Bears' **Brian Urlacher** and friend Volare. On separate occasions at the eatery, former U.S. House Speaker **J. Dennis Hastert** chowed down with family manager **Ozzie Guillen** and his son dined.

CONDOLENCES TO City Treasurer **Stephanie Neely** on the death of her mom, **Doris Neely**, from a massive heart a Daley appointed Neely to fill the term vacated by **Judy Rice**. A fund-raiser for Neely at the home of attorney **Linda C. Feb. 1** has been postponed until Feb. 7.

BIRTHDAY NEWS: WMAQ-Channel 5 anchor **Warner Saunders**, **Norman Ross**, **Kim Dyson** and Vice Prez **Dick C Baseball's Ernie Banks**, **Bernie DeMeo** and **C'est Si Bon's Renee Bradford**.

Well, that's Stella in the City!

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