

**Toni Beckham's
PR Success**

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**Patient Voter,
Desilene Victor, 102,
Attends State of
Union Address**



**Teen "Jeopardy"
Leonard Cooper
Wins \$75,000**

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Next Pope, Non-European?

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Oakland Post

"Where there is no vision the people will perish..." Proverbs

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The Roots of Toni Beckham's PR Success

By Lee Hildebrand



Toni Beckham has been doing volunteer work most of her adult life. She contributed her time and English-language expertise to the Milpitas Library Adult Literacy Program while living in the South Bay and, after moving across the Altamont Pass to Mountain House five years ago, spearheaded Tracy African American Association drives to collect school supplies, backpacks and winter coats for children in need.

In 1999, while employed at a Silicon Valley electronics firm, she offered her services without charge to help promote a San Jose luncheon, at which economist Julianne Malveaux was to speak. Beckham's press release caught the attention of newsman Tavis Smiley's book publicist, who was so impressed that she hired Beckham to handle the Bay Area leg of a tour for his book "Doing What's Right."

It was the first paying assignment for Beckham's company, PR, et Cetera, and she soon left her corporate job.

Smiley's national book publicist, Beckham reflects while sitting in the kitchen of her elegantly furnished Mountain House home, "didn't know I'd never been paid for anything before, so I had to make it sound like I knew what I was talking about."

Beckham, who was born and raised on Chicago's South Side, put together a mailing list of reporters she'd seen on TV, heard on radio and read in newspapers, none of whom she knew at the time.

“It worked beautifully,” she says. “We did 12 interviews. When I took him to the airport at the end of the evening, he told me it was the most productive day on his entire tour. He said, ‘My person gave you some real good contacts.’ I said, ‘No, I got all those myself.’”

Beckham worked for Smiley on two subsequent book tours, until he changed publishers. PR, et Cetera is now one of the most successful African- American-owned publicity companies in the United States.

The company handles Bay Area and some national publicity for many individuals and organizations, including actress Teri J. Vaughn’s Take Wings Foundation and playwright and motivation speaker Carl Ray, whose one-man play, “The Power of Forgiveness.” recounts the 1962 murder in Alabama of his father by a racist in retaliation for then-18-year-old Carl having refused to address the white man as “sir.”

One of Beckham’s most successful campaigns was for Ken Carter, a Richmond High School basketball coach who locked players out of the gym until their grades improved. He had been doing speaking engagements without pay until she got him one at the University of Indiana for \$4,000.

“He thought I walked on water,” she says.

A local press conference led to a front-page story on Carter in the Los Angeles Times, and Beckham immediately began getting calls from the Disney Channel and Oprah Winfrey’s Harpo Productions, among others. Carter was soon signed by the powerful William Morris Agency and stopped working with Beckham. He did, however, acknowledge her efforts in obtaining what he called “overwhelming media coverage,” which led to the making of the 2005 Paramount Pictures film “Coach Carter” starring Samuel L. Jackson.

CORRECTION:

The *Oakland Post* article inaccurately read "*PR, et Cetera is now one of the most successful African-American-owned publicity companies in the United States.*" Rather, it should read "*In 2011 The Atlanta Post—a New York-based national news site targeting African-American business news and politics—listed Beckham among its selection of 10 of the nation’s top African American Public Relations agents.*"

Also, the article inaccurately read "*the University of Indiana*", when it should read "*at an Indiana University*"

<http://www.postnewsgroup.com/publishedcontent/2013/02/15/the-roots-of-toni-beckhams-pr-success/>