

Black Issues Forum revives discussion on Durham's black-owned businesses

By Sabrina Berndt and Samantha Perry

The Durham VOICE

Although the 22nd annual Full Frame Documentary Film Festival has come to an end, UNC-TV will continue highlighting the work of award-winning filmmaker Stanley Nelson throughout the month.

On Tuesday, April 23, UNC-TV will show the premiere of Nelson's most recent documentary, "Boss: The Black Experience in Business." The film touches on rarely discussed stories of black entrepreneurship over the past 150 years.

"Boss: The Black Experience in Business" shares the remarkable stories of a community facing tremendous obstacles to pursue social, political and economic progress," Nelson said in a PBS press release.

Leading up to the premiere, Deborah Holt Noel, producer of UNC-TV's Black Issues Forum, will moderate a discussion around North Carolina's African American business owners and pioneers as a companion piece for the documentary.

"We learned about the 'Boss' documentary coming out and wanted to produce a companion piece that looks at the history of blacks in business," Holt Noel said. "But I thought it was also important to talk about current day concerns and accomplishments and connect the two."

The future of black-owned business

On Tuesday, April 16, at 8 p.m., UNC-TV will air "Black Issues Forum Special: Durham's Black Wall Street — Grounds for the Future." The panel, featuring both established and upcoming African American leaders, will discuss the history of Durham's black-owned businesses.

The panel features North Carolina Central University professor Henry McKoy alongside business owners Nish Evans and Carl Webb.

Holt Noel said that Evans represents a young community that is eager to keep the Black Wall Street brand alive and the strength of African American women who face additional challenges on their way to success.

Carl Webb is a Durham native and attended NCCU.

"He's got that knowledge of the history, that sensibility and also an interest in connecting with new entrepreneurs and

building business for African American communities," Holt Noel said.

While working as a banker, McKoy noticed the disparity between access to capital for minority businesses. In the mid-2000s, he left banking to begin his own firm and worked to close the gap between minority-owned and white-owned businesses.

"A lot of my research and work has been focused specifically around entrepreneurship broadly but also understanding different demographics, race, gender and class," McKoy said. "And so one of the areas that I've dug very deeply into is the history of Durham and Black Wall Street — what made it unique, what made it special, how it rolls and how it fails."

Along with the panel discussion, UNC-TV will air an in-depth interview with filmmaker Nelson on Sunday, April 21, at 11:30 a.m.

A black filmmaker's experience

Nelson has won multiple Emmys, is a MacArthur "Genius" Fellow and holds the record for the most premieres at the Sundance Film Festival. He is a member of the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences and received the National Humanities Medal from President Barack Obama in 2013.

Nelson's films cover multiple topics in African American history, including the Black Panthers, Emmett Till and the Freedom Riders.

Nelson's film "Boss: The Black Experience in Business" discusses African American business pioneers throughout history, many of whom having been historically overlooked.

"African Americans have played a central role in the history of American



Deborah Holt Noel has been the producer of UNC-TV's Black Issues Forum for 20 years. The Black Issues Forum covers issues such as politics, public policy, social concerns and justice. (Staff photo by Sabrina Berndt)

business, but their stories are often left untold," said Nelson in the same press release. "Today, we see talented black businessmen and women not only building successful companies in mainstream America, but also emerging as managers and CEOs for some of the most powerful corporate entities in the world."

Holt Noel said that viewers will see the incredible strides that African American entrepreneurs made in the face of institutional racism.

"They're going to take away a really rich and incredible history of African Americans working hard and starting from nothing, building from nothing, to own property and to own businesses and contribute to our economy," Holt Noel said. "And they're going to learn how much further we have to go."