



# Birmingham Post-Herald

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ALABAMA: Partly cloudy, warm

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## Atlanta Rumor Center Serves As Aid In Racial Crisis

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** A Citizens Task Force has called on Mayor George Seibels Jr. to appoint a standing committee of six members and a chairman to hold evening meetings in city hall to hear problems of Birmingham citizens and to hold public hearings on subjects affecting large groups. Analysis of problems brought to the evening city hall meetings and reports on public hearings and "in depth" studies and recommendations

would be forwarded to mayor, city council or department heads. Birmingham's neighbor cities of New Orleans and Atlanta have such a program already in operation. This is the first of two articles concerning the functions and success of those groups in those cities.

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**BY LILLIAN FOSCUE VANN**  
Dial 524-3261 in Atlanta and you have called the Rumor Control Center. In operation

during a time of serious racial tension or other emergency situation, the center is ready to give out accurate information about what is really happening.

The Rumor Control Center is a creature of the Atlanta Community Relations Commission, an organization that has been on the job since November, 1966. A group of "grass-roots" citizens from Southeast Atlanta saw the need to have an official agen-

cy of city government to work exclusively in areas of discrimination and community relations.

Mayor Ivan Allen Jr. and other city officials met together in planning sessions. A majority vote of the aldermen for adoption of an ordinance establishing a Community Relations Commission was followed by approval of the mayor.

The first budget was \$25,000. This year with a staff of six,

the budget is \$50,000. The chairman is black and seven others of the 20 commission members are black.

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Various segments of the community are represented on the commission, whose members are appointed by the mayor and approved by the board of aldermen. The clergy, labor, business and the poor all have voices on the commission. Women too

hold places on the commission.

A staff of six people is headed by Executive Director Nat Welch, former Alabamian. Offices are in City Hall where the commission holds a public meeting once a month at which citizens are invited to speak. Town Hall meetings are held regularly throughout the city by the commission.

Thirty days later the commission returns to the com-

munity with a report of positive action and whatever results have come about as a result of the first meeting's complaints and suggestions.

The commission makes an annual report to the mayor, but forwards recommendations to city officials on whatever issues being investigated by the commission.

"We have been able to maintain a pretty good dialogue in Atlanta," said the commission chairman, the

Rev. Samuel W. Williams, pastor of Friendship Baptist and, with the late Dr. Martin Luther King, one of the founders of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. The Rev. Williams is also professor and chairman of the Department of Philosophy and Religion, Morehouse College.

"We do not have too serious a generation gap in Atlanta," said the chairman, "but the See ATLANTA, Page 2

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young people are pushing hard, as I think they should."

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The commission has asked for subpoena power to aid in making investigations and holding hearings. General areas of concentration for the commission are in housing, education, employment and police-community relations.

The thrust of the commission's program, according to Executive Director Nat Welch is to create programs which alleviate injustices and to foster mutual understanding, tolerance and respect among all economic, social, religious and ethnic groups in the city.

The commission has held a workshop on black business opportunities, sponsored by seven organizations, including the Atlanta Chamber of Commerce and the NAACP. Thirty-five national companies were represented and the workshop was attended by 350 people.

The commission has been critical of the slowness of school desegregation and is calling on the Board of Education to call for technical assistance from the Division of Equal Education Opportunity of the U. S. Office of Education.

"If Chattanooga, Mobile and Hattiesburg, Miss., can call for technical assistance, we think Atlanta should ask for it," declared Welch.

Recently Welch accompanied four "welfare mothers" to Washington to give testimony to Georgia's senators and Atlanta's two representatives. As a result, Welch said he thought all four congressmen took a more sympathetic view toward the importance of repealing the welfare freeze.

Another area in which the commission has been helpful in Atlanta is housing. Welch said the commission called a town hall meeting to hear grievances of tenants of the Atlanta Housing Authority.

"Since then the Housing Authority has held several meetings and these have gone a long way toward improving relations there," said the executive director, and a letter of congratulations was sent to the Housing Authority.