

note
not
Its

Life —
spend
ear on
carrot
danc-
ams of
at you

review
ing 57
y fail-
y real
y kids
appons
mc of
r the
these
nclude
work-
vski, a
aston's
e who
disap-
il pilot
110



MICHAEL P. FARRELL/TIMES UNION

The brilliant fireworks celebrating Independence Day at Empire State Plaza outshine the rainy weather as Charlotte Decker of Albany enjoys the display Wednesday night sponsored by Price Chopper. The weather could have been better, but hardy Capital Region residents didn't let the rain get in the way of enjoying holiday events. **Story/D5**

Sharing a trailblazer's story

At 92, black pioneer seeks to publish an autobiography on beating segregation

By DENNIS YUSKO
Staff writer

NISKAYUNA — H. Noble Simms, a 92-year-old civil rights leader, is preparing to move into a retirement home. But the African-American pioneer and entrepreneur is still

trying to close one more deal: having his life story published.

The longtime Colonie resident who smashed racial barriers throughout the last century in the military, music and business fields, spent the last 12 years of his life writing about it in the recently-completed "My Life Before and Beyond Tuskegee: from Roots to Fruits." To finish the autobiography, Simms learned to use a computer starting on his 80th birthday,

and beat bladder cancer and, more recently, a stroke.

The 300-page manuscript is the lifetime musician's pride and joy. While Simms has produced a lot in his career — sassafras tea, souvenirs, a specialized line of greeting cards — his uniquely American experiences and perspective suggest his rich past may be the best product he's ever tried to sell.

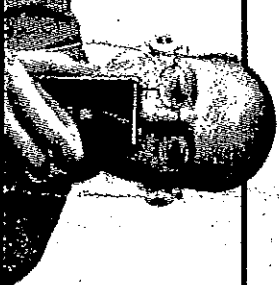
"It represents a very happy Please see **SIMMS A7**



LORI VAN BUREN/TIMES UNION

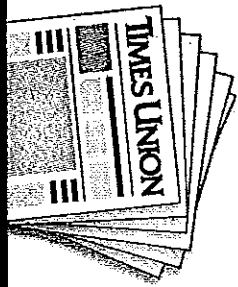
H. NOBLE SIMMS

plays at Northwoods at Hilltop in Niskayuna. Simms has spent much of his 92 years fighting for equality.



INDEX

Dear Abby	E9	Opinion	A8
Horoscope	E8	Scoreboard	B6
Lottery	A2	State	A3
Movies	Preview	Stocks	C2
Nation/World	A4	Television	E2
Crosswords	D8, E7	Obituaries	D7
		Weather	D2



Today's Times Union

- A:** Main news
- B:** Sports
- C:** Business/Classified
- D:** Capital Region
- E:** Life • Food



is looking for an editor

▼ CONTINUED FROM A1
 life, the good and the bad," Simms said in a firm but raspy voice Friday in Northwoods at Hilltop, where he's undergoing physical rehabilitation.

"Roots to Fruits" recounts Simms' struggles and successes, from growing up in segregated Alabama near Selma, where the Ku Klux Klan would pay visits, to becoming one of the Navy's first black music directors and then an education staffer for former Gov. Nelson A. Rockefeller.

It's an inspirational story about a conquering spirit who triumphed because he wasn't afraid to fail. More than anything, he says, it reflects the power of dreams.

"Anybody with a dream, if they have the willingness to stick to it, work, prepare themselves, then anything is possible."

Simms entered the world in the American South to loving-but-strict parents who were musicians.

His father permitted him to play only classical music, and sent Simms to Alabama's Tuskegee Institute, the prestigious academy founded by Booker T. Washington in 1881 to educate African-Americans.

Simms graduated from Tuskegee in 1938, just before its training of the nation's first black military pilots, The Tuskegee Army, who flew missions in World War II.

It was a place where black people were welcome with or without funds," Simms said. "They came in droves, almost naked some of them. They grew up to be somebody, and Tuskegee encouraged them to be all they could be."

Simms sharpened his business and artistic skills at Tuskegee. While continuing to play the piano and clarinet, he managed the family business, the Sassafras Tea Co., and sold souvenirs, mostly buttons.

I was trying to find myself. I wasn't a high IQ person, so I really had to work like hell in everything I did."

Tea and button sales never

caught fire, so after graduating, Simms became a teacher in the only black high school in Arkansas, earning \$65 a month. He moved north to make more money, and taught industrial arts in Maryland. All the while, he instructed music on the side.

The young man's sound so impressed a school supervisor that he suggested Simms join the Navy.

Simms volunteered as the United States desegregated the Armed Forces in 1942. He was among 5,000 blacks allowed to enlist outside the steward's branch, a section reserved for blacks, and became a musician second class. He proved himself, and was named director of The School of Music for Black Servicemen at the Great Lakes Naval Training Center near Chicago.

Simms recruited black cooks and others from the Navy, and supervised the training of more than 100 band units that entertained naval personnel around the world during World War II from 1942 to 1945.

Simms was finally playing — and teaching — jazz. He said he encountered little prejudice, perhaps because the military loved the music.

The band members' helped lead to the eventual integration of the Navy and winning equal opportunity for all sailors, Navy Rear Admiral A.E. Rondeau said at a Great Lakes reunion in 2003.

"Bands are very important to the military," Simms said. They marched, played at dances, funerals, football games and more.

After his military service, Simms cashed in on his GI Bill and earned degrees in school administration from New York University. He married Lois Wilson Simms, a relationship that lasted for 23 years.

Simms worked as a public school teacher in the Bronx, an instructor at New York University and in various academic jobs before moving to the Capital Region in 1973 to become an education specialist for the state Office of Economic Opportunity. Rockefeller later appointed



H. NOBLE SIMMS plays the bassoon while in the Navy during World War II.

him to improve elementary and secondary education in the state.

Simms, of Newtonville, had come a long way from his native Snow Hill, Ala. He retired in 1978 as director of the now-defunct state Office for Education Performance Review.

But instead of going on golfing trips, Simms became one of the first black board members of the Albany Symphony Orchestra, soliciting black support and minority involvement. He and his second wife, Carrie Simms, established Noble Greeting Cards in 1979, when Simms went to the store one day and couldn't find a card that blacks could identify with.

The couple tried for years to make it work, eventually putting out a Christmas line. They almost lost it all on the venture, Simms said. "The doors opened and closed all along the way. But that never stopped me. I kept looking for doors that were still open," he said.

Simms still tinkers with the keys. He recently lit up Northwoods' dining room with a beautiful version of the jazz classic "Tenderly."

Afterward, discussion turned back to his book, which he calls a diary of a black entrepreneur. Thinking it over, he and Carrie Simms say they could use a volunteer editor to further organize the piece.

"If we could get the book published, we could sell some copies," he said.

► Dennis Yusko can be reached at 581-8438 or by e-mail at dyusko@timesunion.com.

Plus 1

W

1

BUY

Price Chopper

DOUBLE THE VALUE
SOME RESTRICTIONS APPLY

1. Our offer applies to a ma Not valid on "FREE" cou
2. The total double cash sav Limit one per manufactu
3. This offer excludes pharm other item prohibited by
4. No duplications of this c Offer good Thurs, July 5 through S Johnstown, Gloversville, Amsterd

Price Chopper

DOUBLE THE V
SOME RESTRICTIONS

1. Our offer applies to a r Not valid on "FREE" c
2. The total double cash Limit one per manufac
3. This offer excludes phi other item prohibited
4. No duplications of thi Offer good Thurs, July 5 through Johnstown, Gloversville, Amst

Price Chopper

DOUBLE THE
SOME RESTRICTIO

1. Our offer applies to Not valid on "FREE
2. The total double cas Limit one per mant
3. This offer excludes other item prohibit
4. No duplications of Offer good Thurs, July 5 thi Johnstown, Gloversville, Am