

March highlights black conference

By Ward W. Triplett III

A peaceful march, purposefully designed after those led by Martin Luther King Jr., in protest of a cross burning on the Oklahoma State University campus highlighted the 1984 Big Eight conference on Black Student Government last weekend in Stillwater, Okla.

More than 400 students from seven Big Eight campuses and other surrounding schools attended the seventh annual conference, including 36 students from UNL.

The march, which took place near midnight Saturday, was in response to a cross burning in front of the Alpha Phi Alpha house, a black fraternity, last Monday.

The 6 x 4-foot cross was discovered burning at 1:30 a.m. by Oklahoma State police.

"I guess you could say it was sort of a welcome for the conference," Terri Collins, president of the Oklahoma State Black Student Government, said.

"A lot of people here are trying to say it was a joke or pass it off as a prank. But we feel it happened just too close to the conference time, and somebody was trying to tell us something."

The Big Eight council, the 24-student body that governs the conference, passed a resolution presented by Missouri to actively oppose the incident and the silent treatment given it by OSU administrators.

After the Big Eight pageant, which ended the regular activities of the conference, 300 persons made the half-mile long march to the Alpha house, some with candles and most singing "We Shall Overcome," and "Lift Every Voice."

Keith Borders, a sophomore at Oklahoma who was voted president of the 1984-85 council, encour-

aged the crowd to take the incident and the march back to their campuses as a sign that racism still exists. He also encouraged them to take back King's reaction to the campuses.

"I know some of you think this is funny, and just a step back to the 1960s," Borders said. "But I see this incident as a sign of racism. This march is a sign of peaceful protest to that."

As of Saturday, no one had taken credit for the cross burning, but Collins said an investigation was underway and police had obtained fingerprints and information about where the wood was bought.

Howard Shipp, multi-cultural affairs adviser for Oklahoma State, said the cross burning angered more than frightened students there.

"Whatever the reason was that caused it to happen, it is still a very, very bad thing to happen to our campus," Shipp said. "We cannot stay silent and let whoever did it think they've gotten away with something. Our university has got to show that we are people of good will, and we do not condone this type of thing."

Despite the incident, Shipp said he was pleased with the turnout and reaction for the conference.

Debra Pitts, the former BSG adviser, left OSU for another job in November, leaving Shipp in charge with a \$24,000 conference budget and no money.

"We went around to each college, and I personally saw each dean and each VIP," Shipp said. "We were fortunate that those people saw a purpose in what we were trying to do."

The BSG had a late start contacting schools about the conference, and getting registration information to the other conference schools. As a result, less than 200 students were registered in January, and many of them were OSU students.

"It is a good feeling to see this many black students

in the same place and to hear this kind of communication," Shipp said. "Before the Friday dinner, there were 300 or so black students in the lobby out front. I only wished that it would have been noon and the whole campus could have seen it."

The Kansas BSG, who will host the 1985 conference, was selected the top black student organization. Renee Jones of Oklahoma State and Ben Holder of Missouri shared the top delegate honor.

Nebraskans William H. Watkins, a senior advertising major, and Carla Johnson, a senior broadcasting major, both finished second in the Mr. and Miss Black Big Eight pageants. Charlene Pennybaker of Oklahoma State and Rodney Bullock of Kansas were crowned King and Queen of the second annual pageant.

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