

Verl Thomas showing the world of wonder

By CYRIL JOSH BARKER
Amsterdam News Staff

Verl Thomas wants African-Americans to see the world, and he's doing it one tour at a time. Along with his wife, Latifah Chinnery, Thomas is co-owner of the New York City-based, Black-owned travel agency Equator 3 Tours LLC.

Numbers indicate that Black tourists spent approximately \$40 billion in 2013 on travel. Many are looking to get connected to the Motherland and are willing to spend the money needed to make the pilgrimage.

Through his company, Thomas said he's making trips to Africa more accessible. He said he and his wife got the idea to start a travel agency after seeing the world through their own personal travels and noticing a lack of marketing to Black travelers.

A Marine Corps veteran, Thomas was also exposed to the world through his travels in the military. He later worked for WNEW and applied for a guide license as another way to provide income. He and his wife then decided to start their own tourism company.

Black New Yorker

"About 15 years ago, my wife and I used to travel on our own, and we've come to meet people around the world from South America, the Caribbean and Africa," he said. "We always came to find that a certain something was missing."

What was missing was marketing to the eager Black travel market. Thomas decided to start his own travel company and provide tours. Over the years, Thomas has taken groups to South, West and North Africa; Brazil, along with other parts of South America; the Caribbean; and Europe, including the Mediterranean.

While people of all ages have traveled with him and his wife, he said that a noticeable population that is traveling consists of retirees who want to see the world in their later years.

"I'm finding that it is really enlightening that a lot of people are visiting places like



Verl Thomas

Africa for the first time," he said. "What they read in the press and what they see on television is not what they experience in real life."

Along with traveling internationally, Thomas also does local tours showcasing New York's rich Black history. Local tours include educational

two- and four-hour walking and guided bus tours of city landmarks, including Harlem gospel tours and brunch.

"We see and experience the joy of others being pleased in the sense of educating themselves and witnessing in real life the rhythm," he said.

This year, Thomas and his

wife have set up a 16-day cultural tour to South Africa this fall, which includes a trip to Victoria Falls. In 2015, they have plans to travel to the Mediterranean and a 12-day heritage tour to Ghana for Panafest. For more information, go to www.equator3tours.com.

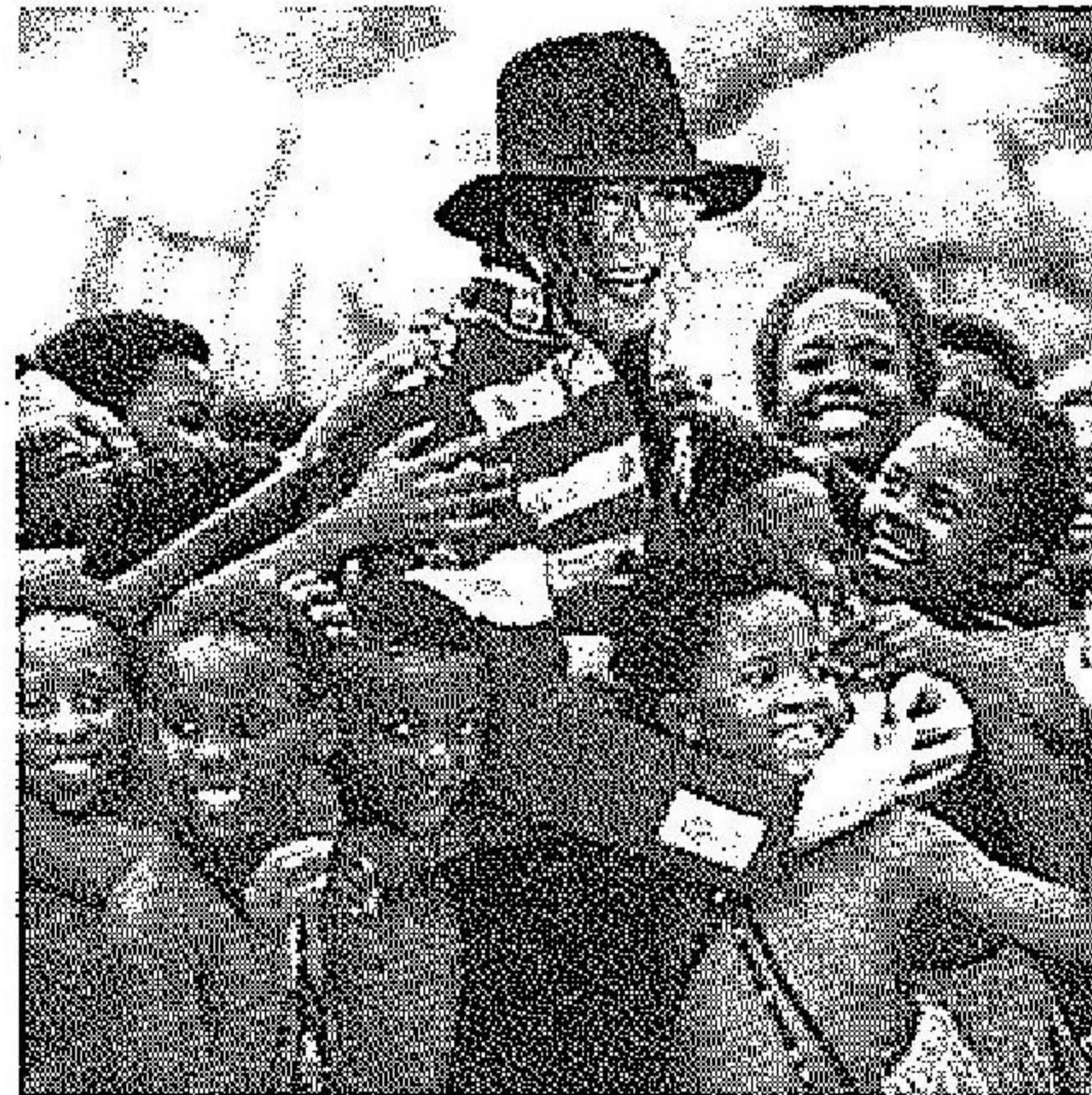
Remembering Michael Jackson: The global humanitarian

By AUTODIDACT 17
Special to the AmNews

Wednesday, June 25 marked five years since legendary entertainer Michael Jackson transitioned onto the ancestral realm. While the mainstream media has covered various conspiracy theories surrounding the circumstances that caused his untimely departure from this physical plane, it rarely mentions his generous contributions toward numerous noble causes, charities and organizations that assisted many people in dire need, regardless of their ethnicity.

In 1984, he provided East Harlem's Mt. Sinai Medical Center with a 19-bed unit for cancer and leukemia patients. Later that year, he revisited the Brotman Memorial Hospital, where he was previously treated after being badly burned during the production of a Pepsi commercial. The "King of Pop" donated his entire \$1.5 million fee from the soda's sponsorship to the Michael Jackson Burn Center for Children.

With the Commodores' Lionel Richie, Jackson co-wrote the biggest selling single of all time, 1985's "We Are the World," in an effort to raise awareness and money to



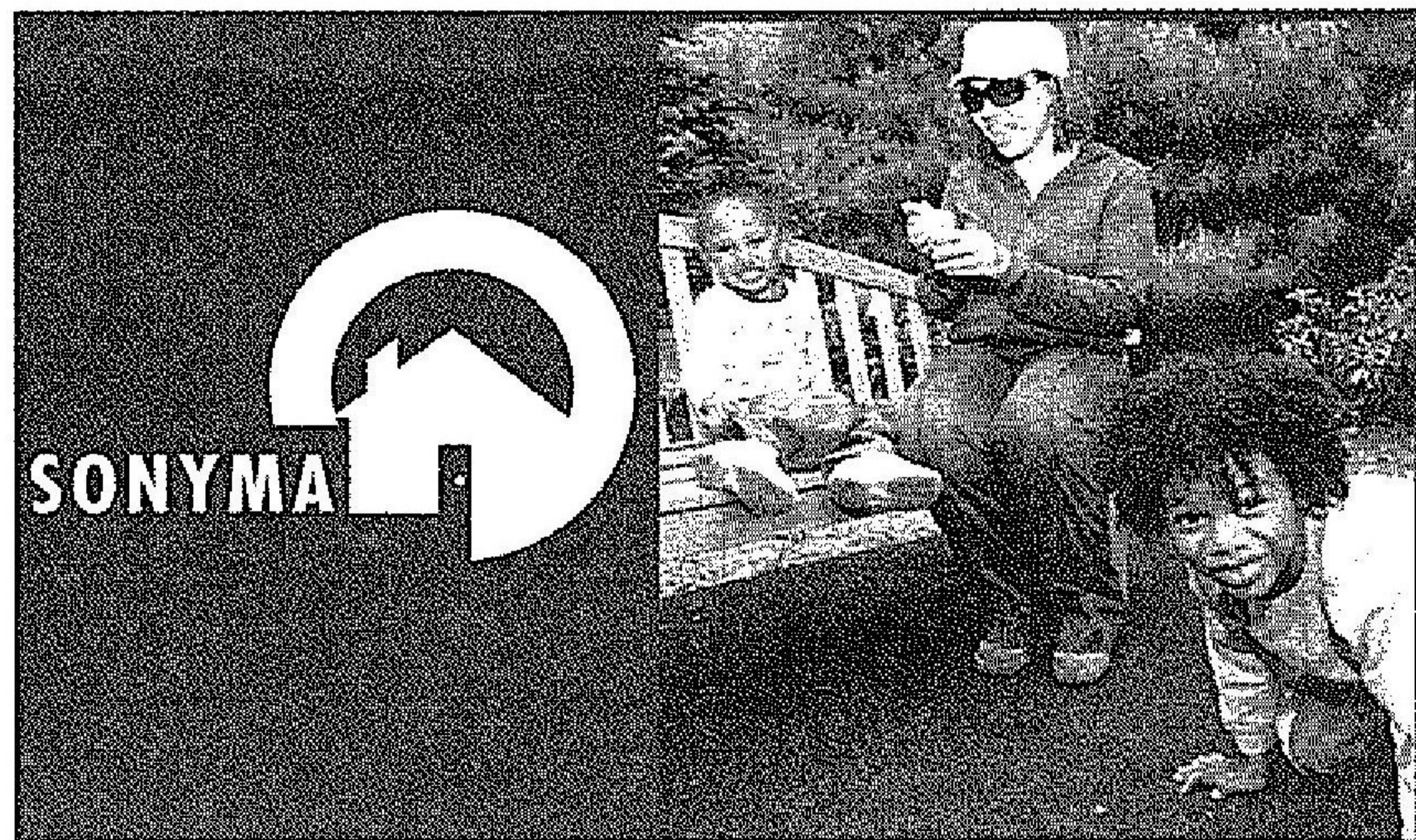
Michael Jackson at a charitable event

combat famine in Africa. The following year, the Michael Jackson United Negro College Fund/Endowed Scholarship Fund was established by him. This annual \$1.5 million grant is aimed at college students majoring in communications or the performing arts.

He unselfishly donated proceeds from his 1988 single "The Man in the Mirror" to Camp Ronald McDonald for Good Times, a retreat for cancer-stricken children.

In 1989, the generous Jackson donated blocks of tickets for his "Bad Tour" to underprivileged youth, and the proceeds from a Los Ange-

see GLOBAL on page 36



If You're Ready to Buy a Home, We are Ready to Help.

The State of New York Mortgage Agency offers:
Up to \$15,000 Down Payment Assistance

www.sonyma.org



1-800-382-HOME(4663)

