

# Leon Muhammad: Selling Bilalian News 'keeps me happy'

By Samuel Ayyub Bilal

When Leon Muhammad came to Chicago in May, 1973, the first place he headed for was the busy in-

tersection of 63rd Street and Cottage Grove Avenue.

There, he staked out a precious spot on the southeast corner and since has become a landmark.

"Brother, I haven't missed selling it but 12 days since I came here. I was sick then," he said, referring to the Bilalian News paper of which he sells 400-500 copies per week.

"I'm telling you, brother, selling this paper and being in this program (of the World Community of Al-Islam in the West [WCIW]) keeps me happy. I never felt better, never felt so good in all my life. And, brother, I'm telling you, I live good too. Especially in the 2nd Resurrection under the leadership of Imam Wallace D. Muhammad. And I feel even younger than I ever did," says the robust, 57-year-old Mr. Muhammad.

## TOPS ALL-AROUND

Not only is Mr. Muhammad a top paper-seller in the WCIW, he is also tops in the hearts of numerous people who regularly pass the busy intersection.

"He treats everyone with the best respect," said a passerby. "He's very courteous and friendly. Sometimes when you pass the corner you see him talking with a whole bunch of men clustered around him. Still, he will look around and speak to you."

"I feel like they are my blood brothers and sisters," Mr. Muhammad says of the passersby. "And if anything happens to them, I do whatever I can to help them. I sometimes have to do something like call the ambulance for someone who gets hurt or sick. And if I leave the corner for too long a time, they want to know what has happened to me."



LEON MUHAMMAD (left), a top "Bilalian News" salesman poses with two of "my best customers" at busy Chicago intersection. They are Mr. and Mrs. Troy Sturdivant. (Photo by Wali Akbar Muhammad)

## An interview with a developing scientist

By Emam Abdul-Alim Shabazz  
Director of Education, WCIW

Kenneth Um'rani, 17, a would-be 12th grade student at Sister Clara Muhammad Elementary and Secondary School in Winston-Salem, N.C. this school-year, has just entered North Carolina A & T State University in Greensboro on a complete scholarship to study engineering physics.

This past spring and early summer, Mr. Um'rani, because of his high national ranking on the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT), taken during his junior high school year at Sister Clara Muhammad School, was much sought after by colleges and universities all over America—among them were the Georgia Institute of Technology, Toogaloo College, Boston University, Lafayette College, the Air Force Academy, the U.S. Naval Academy, the College of William and Mary, the New Mexico Institute of Mining and Technology, the Florida Institute of Technology, the Illinois Institute of Technology, and the University of the Pacific.

They offered him scholarship aid to join their student bodies as an early-admit student, one not having completed his senior high school year.

At first sight Mr. Um'rani appears

to be an ordinary young adult, but upon direct contact with him it becomes immediately apparent that he is unusual. Standing about six feet tall, his well-formed physical body gives the appearance of stamina and strength, but his quiet shyness causes you to slow down and think—think and ponder over what's really happening in his world within.

Mr. Um'rani has two younger brothers, one 16 and the other 13. His father is a machinist and his mother presently is pursuing a college degree in physics. Without a doubt his interest and aptitude in electronics, engineering, mathematics and physics are reflections of his parents' interests and involvement in these areas.

This writer was privileged to hold the following brief interview with Mr. Um'rani for the Bilalian News, while in Winston-Salem, recently:

**BN:** How long have you been interested in mathematics and science?

**UM'RANI:** Since...or as far back as I can remember. In school, these subjects were always easy for me.

**BN:** Just how did you get interested in electronics, physics and engineering?

**UM'RANI:** About four years ago I picked up an electronics experimental handbook belonging to my father and began to read and study it.



Kenneth Um'rani

Then I began to repair old abandoned t.v. sets and put together a small transmitter from parts I collected and materials I had found—like old radios.

**BN:** Did those things you made or put together work?

**UM'RANI:** Yes, Sir.

**BN:** How and where did you get the knowledge and drive to pursue your electronics and engineering interests?

**UM'RANI:** In the classroom at school, and by independent study at school and at home.

(Brother Um'rani's teachers told this writer that very often they found him alone, between classes in dimly lit rooms, reading and studying electronics and engineering books.)

**BN:** Brother Um'rani, what have you been doing this summer and what do you plan to do in the future?

**UM'RANI:** During this summer I

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## REWARD IN ITSELF

Mr. Muhammad likes to treat people nice because he is convinced that "for those who believe and do good, for them are gardens of bliss," as he has read over and over again in the Holy Quran.

"Brother, I'm telling you, Islam has done more for me than you can imagine. When I came into the World Community of Islam I couldn't read or write. But the brothers taught me how. I began learning how to read and write because of Allah and the Master (Elijah Muhammad). I had to write a letter of acceptance, accepting his teachings.

Mr. Muhammad never learned to write when he was a boy because there were no schools for Bilalians on the turpentine plantation where he grew up.

Instead of attending school, he worked from sunup till sundown cutting down trees and dipping turpentine from the trees into cups. It was a severe life with no hope.

When he was old enough and wise enough, young Leon bid goodbye to his grandmother who reared him as an only child, and hitched a ride on a potato truck heading North.

It was in the early 1930s, during the Depression.

"Like everybody else, I was hustling, scuffling and doing everything else. Going from city to city, looking for work and a decent place to lay my head."

While moving about on the road, he remembers hearing on honky-tonk

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