

African leaders program gets \$1m

By David Abel
GLOBE STAFF

If Charles Stith has his way, Nelson Mandela could be strolling along Commonwealth Avenue next semester. And if not Mandela, then another retired African president.

Stith, a Boston minister who served as US ambassador to Tanzania for two years, recently took charge of Boston University's newly created African Presidential Archives and Research Center. As part of the center, Stith has launched a Presidents-in-Residence Program, intended to bring former African heads of state to Boston.

Yesterday, Stith and BU announced that the program had received \$1 million in funding from the Lloyd G. Balfour Foundation.

His goal is to build ties between America and African countries. The former presidents from Africa's democratic governments would spend six months to two years as visiting scholars at BU.

"There's nothing like this program in the world," said Stith. "We hope it becomes a base from

which they will talk about policy in Africa, as well as US policy in Africa."

Stith doesn't have any presidents lined up for the program yet. Later this week he will fly to Ghana, Botswana, South Africa, Malawi, and Tanzania, where he will speak to heads of state and other leaders to seek candidates.

How will he persuade a former head of state that it's worth a year or two of his life to live in Boston?

"It offers an opportunity to transition from public life to private life. We expect they will see Boston as a home base to travel around the country," he said. "There's also an appropriate stipend."

Stith wouldn't comment further about the compensation. He also acknowledges that the countries some of the former rulers come from may not fit the American definition of democracy.

In addition to Mandela, other former presidents he hopes will consider coming to Boston include Ketumile Masire of Botswana, Jerry Rawlings of Ghana, Abdou Diouf of Senegal, Ali Hassan Mwinyi of Tanzania, and Kenneth Kaunda, and Frederick Chiluba of Zambia.

Ultimately, Stith said, the program's goal is to improve US scholarship about Africa, strengthen ties with the continent's emerging democracies, and educate Americans about Africa.

"Americans need to know more about the rest of the world, especially after Sept. 11," he said. "We think this is a way for them to learn about a significant part of the world."

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REV. CHARLES
STITH
Former US
ambassador
to Tanzania



The Rev. Charles Stith hopes the Presidents-in-Residence Program will enhance US ties with Africa.