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Bill Cosby joins Call Me MISTER

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CLEMSON — The need for black male elementary teachers is no laughing matter to comedian Bill Cosby, who's taken a new leading role in a spin-off of Clemson University's Call Me MISTER.

"He believes that Call Me MISTER will save lives," said Roy Jones, national director of Call Me MISTER, founded at Clemson in partnership with Claflin University and Benedict and Morris colleges. Call Me MISTER is now found at 15 institutions in South Carolina and 13 institutions in six other states and will celebrate its 10th anniversary in 2010.

Cosby has agreed to serve as honorary chairman of the Call Me MISTER advisory council at Cheyney University near Philadelphia, Cosby's hometown, Jones said.

"He believes it is saving lives of young men and creating a new generation of parents committed to the communities where they are raising children," Jones said.

Cosby, who holds a doctorate in education from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst, has "dedicated his whole life to the types of things MISTER is fulfilling today," said Jones, who coincidentally earned a doctorate in education at Amherst at the same time as Cosby, 40 years ago. Cosby also was affected by the murder of his son, a special education teacher in California found in his car near a freeway exit in what appeared to be a random killing.

Here in South Carolina, Call Me MISTER has increased the number of black male elementary teachers by about 25 percent, Jones said.

"Our graduates are the ones that make it happen. There are well over 50 teachers out there currently and well over 100 in the pipeline, and that's just in South Carolina. Across the seven-state Call Me MISTER network there are easily another 200 in the pipeline," Jones said.

Call Me MISTER (Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models) is a teacher leadership program founded at Clemson University that is aimed at training and placing more teachers from diverse cultures and backgrounds to serve in economically disadvantaged and educationally at-risk communities.