



## Black Heritage Month at the SOB

*Inside this Issue*

By John McKay, Nina Ritson & Donna Micklus

With speeches, songs and celebration, the State Office Building launched its ninth annual Black Heritage Month event on February 19.

To add an historical perspective, the celebration of Black Heritage Month began 84 years ago, when Carter G. Woodson first established what was then called Black History Week in 1926. He realized the importance of providing a theme to focus the attention of the American public; the intention was never to dictate or limit the exploration of the black experience, but to bring into people's scope the important developments in the African – American story.

Over the years, that story has chronicled changes in both the influence of social movements on racial ideologies, and the aspirations of the black community.

This year the ceremony commemorated the life of Oscar Micheaux, the 33rd honoree in the U.S. Postal Service's Black Heritage Series. Oscar Micheaux wrote, directed and produced more than 40 films from 1919-1948 and wrote seven novels.

From the start, Micheaux's films were controversial. He ensured that his typical heroine was intelligent and strong and that his films advocated hard work and education while



**DAS Deputy Commissioner Martin Anderson presents a Black Heritage Month Proclamation from Governor M. Jodi Rell to Committee Chair Nate Jenkins.**

condemning the depictions of racism and criminal behavior that often attracted audiences to the theaters. His first picture with full sound was the 1931 film "The Exile" this was the first all-black sound film made by a black producer. In 1938 Micheaux courted further controversy with "God's Stepchildren" a depiction of conflict over shades of skin color within the black community. Oscar Micheaux died on March 25, 1951, while traveling in Charlotte, North Carolina.

Representatives from each agency spoke about the significance of Black Heritage Month and what it means to them both personally and professionally. Public Works Commissioner Raeanne Curtis opened the ceremony and dedicated her remarks to former Department of Labor Commis-

*Continued on next page*

**More pix from Black Heritage Month**

2-6

**"Testimonies"**

7

**DAS Gets Red Cross Award**

8

**Charitable Giving**

8

**The Biggest Losers!**

9

**Go Red Day!**

9

sioner Patricia Mayfield, who was the first African-American to be named as commissioner of that agency. “Sadly, Pat Mayfield died earlier this year, so my speech is dedicated in memory of her.” Curtis offered a moment of silence for her friend, colleague and peer.

In his remarks, DAS Deputy Commissioner Martin Anderson thanked the Black Heritage Month Committee “for organizing this event and for their efforts to enhance the understanding and appreciation of the African - American culture. It is a privilege for me to be here with you today, representing DAS and Commissioner Brenda Sisco.”

Anderson continued: “Today, following an historic election and inauguration in 2009, Black Heritage Month will be celebrated with a deep and unique appreciation for the impact that African - Americans have had, and continue to have, on American life and culture.”

“As we unveil the commemorative stamp honoring Oscar Micheaux, one of the most significant figures in the history of African-American cinema, a pioneer among independent filmmakers of all races, and the first African-American to write and publish a best-selling novel, we are reminded of the many extraordinary and ordinary people over the centuries who have paved the way for freedom and equality.”

“A monument at Micheaux’s grave in Great Bend, Kansas – and I mention that because it is a neighbor of my home state of Oklahoma - bears the simple yet poignant inscription: ‘A man ahead of his time.’ Indeed he was.”



**DPW Commissioner Raeanne Curtis**



**Agriculture Commissioner Phil Prelli**



**DAS Deputy Commissioner Martin Anderson**

The DAS Times is published monthly by the Department of Administrative Services Communications Office 165 Capitol Avenue Hartford, CT 06106

**M. Jodi Rell**  
Governor

**Brenda L. Sisco**  
Commissioner

**Donna J. Micklus**  
Editor

Visit our website at [www.das.state.ct.us](http://www.das.state.ct.us)

*Continued on next page*



**Above: DCP Commissioner Jerry Farrell; Right: Education Associate Commissioner Charlene Russell-Tucker; Below: Education Deputy Commissioner George Coleman**



Anderson then read a proclamation from Governor M. Jodi Rell in honor of the event and presented it to Black Heritage Committee Chair Nate Jenkins.

DCP Commissioner Jerry Farrell spoke on the accomplishments of Oscar Micheaux, saying, "We all need people like Oscar Micheaux to help make sense of life."

Associate State Commissioner of Education Charlene Russell-Tucker thanked everyone for all the work on the event and for their creativity, particularly given current budget constraints we face. She also reminded us that "the purpose of Black Heritage Month is to increase awareness of the African-American culture and to promote diversity...and that all of us working together positively impacts us everyday."

deLinda Brown Jagne recited a self-written poem entitled "Through Thyne Eyes" which was a moving reflection on Oscar Micheaux's life, struggles and accomplishments.

U.S. Post Master Judith Martin was joined by Nate Jenkins for the unveiling of the Oscar Micheaux stamp.

Education's Norma Sproul sang three a capella songs, ending with "Has Anyone Seen My Old Friend John."

Following Sproul was DAS' own Sammy Thompson, of Mail and Courier, who sang a rap version of a song he wrote titled, "Wake Up." Following his performance, Education Deputy Commissioner Coleman confirmed, "Wake Up? I really did!"

Coleman, who delivered the keynote address, went on to speak on why "Investment in the black community in high quality education is paramount!" He invoked the words of Dr. Martin Luther King speaking about life's blueprint, and noted three key ingredients that should be a part of everyone's individual blueprint: Belief in your own dignity and worth and extending that dignity to others; determination to achieve excellence in all endeavors; and a commitment to duty, love and justice.

After the ceremony, it was time to savor some traditional dishes that were served up in the hallway of the first floor lobby – courtesy of the State Office Building's Parkside Café Catering. The menu included collards greens, baked and barbecue chicken, yams with marshmallows, macaroni and cheese, and corn bread.

*continued on next page*

Meanwhile in Room 126, several vendors displayed their unique products. A jewelry maker had her creative designs with some items that had a distinctive African theme. President Barack Obama memorabilia was readily available for purchase. Another participant had aromatic lotions and oils for sale while still another vendor had a large display of designer handbags including Prada, Coach, and other top designers.

Charlene Russell-Tucker summed up the event and meaning of the day when she compared the tapestry of diversity – or in Oscar Micheaux’s case – the color film of life – “it’s our individuality that makes for a great movie.”



**delinda Brown Jagne recites a poem**



**Nate Jenkins and Post Master Judith Martin prepare for the unveiling**



**Norma Sproul performs a capella**

**More pix on next page!**



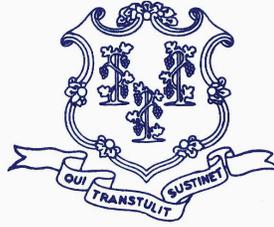
**Nate Jenkins leads in prayer**



**Rappin' Samuel "Sammy" Thompson, Jr., brings down the house**



State of



Connecticut

By Her Excellency M. Jodi Rell, Governor: an

## Official Statement

*W*HEREAS, each year during the month of February, we celebrate Black History Month to broaden our knowledge and deepen our appreciation of the countless contributions and achievements African-Americans have made to our nation; and

*W*HEREAS, while the celebration of our multi-ethnic heritage should be a year-round commitment, the designation of the month of February as Black History Month affords us the opportunity to highlight past and present African-American culture; and

*W*HEREAS, Black History Month has grown to become a well-known and observed celebration of culture and diversity that fosters appreciation of the struggles and achievements of our African-American population through the decades; and

*W*HEREAS, African-Americans have made valuable and lasting contributions to the State of Connecticut's economic, cultural, spiritual and political development while working tirelessly to maintain and promote their own history and culture; and

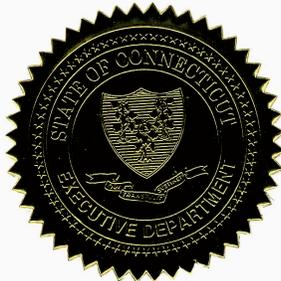
*W*HEREAS, this February marks the 34<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Black History Month observance which began in 1976 as part of the Nation's bicentennial, making Black History Week, initiated in 1926 by American historian Dr. Carter G. Woodson, into a month-long celebration; and

*W*HEREAS, it is important that public officials, educators and all of the people of our state observe this month with appropriate programs and activities that recognize and raise awareness of the many accomplishments of Connecticut's African-American citizens; now

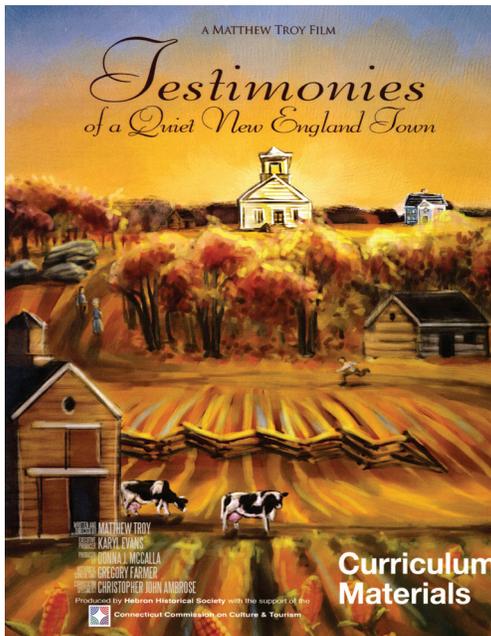
*T*HEREFORE, I, M. Jodi Rell, Governor of the State of Connecticut, do hereby officially designate the month of February 2010 as

### **BLACK HISTORY MONTH**

in the State of Connecticut.



*M. Jodi Rell*  
Governor



By John McKay

**I**t was standing room only for the DAS Diversity Council's film presentation "Testimonies of a Quiet New England Town."

The 20 minute film vividly describes the 1787 seizure of Connecticut slaves, Cesar and Lewis Peters, their eight children, and the family's ultimate rescue by their white Hebron, Connecticut neighbors. This event is the earliest documented anti-slavery movement in New England, and pre-dates Prudence Crandall's efforts by almost 50 years.

Honored guests included film Producer, Donna McCalla, and Writer/Director, Matthew Troy.

"We're excited to show our film and educate everyone on the Peters family and their struggles. It's a little-known piece of Connecticut history. Many people don't realize that slavery existed here in Connecticut," said McCalla.

"Testimonies of a Quiet New England Town" began as a collaborative film project two and a half years ago between Troy and his hometown historical society of Hebron. Driven by the passion of a small community, and funded almost entirely by a Connecticut Special Initiatives Grant from the Connecticut Commission on Culture & Tourism, "Testimonies" came into existence.

McCalla presented additional background information on the film, noting that much of it was filmed in Hebron, with some scenes filmed in East Hampton, Bolton and New York. There is also a conservancy forming in Hebron to preserve much of the land and buildings that have significant historical links to the film.

Here's what some folks in attendance had to say about the film:

### **Diversity Council Chairperson Donna Camillone:**

"The film presentation and guest speakers were timed in conjunction with February's Black Heritage Month celebration. Ms. McCalla also explained the close connections between the abolitionist movement and the women's suffrage movement - a good segue into next month's Women's History celebration. The DAS Diversity Council is always looking to expand the education of employees with new and interesting ways to share diversity related information."

### **Johnette Tolliver**

"There's a lot of history that's not revealed in our typical school textbooks. It was very educational. It was very good to have this film

during Black History Month. People don't know or believe that there were slaves in the North. Local history is always very interesting, and it is good to have young directors involved in this process as well as persons with a passion for the subject. It's great being a part of DAS' Diversity Council. I am a proud member...."

### **Melissa Colonese-Scutt**

"I thought it was fascinating that the producer considered herself a 'conversational historian'. She said that just talking about historical events leads to more questions, and more data to be unearthed - again bringing about more questions.

I was also amazed that the family patriarch Cesar Peters' death certificate was recently discovered in an unmarked folder in the Hebron town records. It is hard to believe that the efforts of a few diligent people can still bring important historical documents to light that were ostensibly lost for hundreds of years.

The film, and the topic itself, made me very emotional - even upon my second viewing. I hope adding this movie to the state's educational curricula will do the same thing for the students, which is to bring this subject to a personal level so kids can find relevance in their own lives to these events that took place here so long ago."

### **Deborah Peterson**

"Most comments I received stated that it was "great and very informative" especially being that it pertains to Connecticut's history."

# And In Other News...

By John McKay

## Red Cross Award

The American Red Cross has awarded DAS the Life Share Program PLATINUM Level Award in recognition of the agency's achievement and its ongoing efforts in support of the American Red Cross Blood Services Program.

In a letter to Michelle Burns from Paul Sullivan, CEO of Connecticut Blood Services Region, he wrote, "I'm pleased to share that your organization has achieved the Platinum level based on your employees' donations during 2009. Platinum is the highest achievement in the Life Share Program and is awarded to sponsors with a participation rate of greater than 30 percent. Congratulations again on your achievement."

The letter and the certificate are in the display cabinet outside the Commissioner's office.



## 'Twas The Season!

It was the season of giving late last year at DAS. And did employees give!

For the Campaign for Charitable giving, employees opened their wallets to donate to worthy causes. The events for the campaign were purse sales, a chili sale, book sales, jewelry sales and of course the golf tournament.

Adding in payroll deductions and one-time donations DAS raised \$13,177.60 for charitable giving.

And there's more.

FoodShare Donations from DAS were \$140 and the online FoodShare virtual Food Drive raised another \$285. DAS hosted a pizza party fundraiser for FoodShare totaling \$290 and between enrollment and sponsoring players; the Volleyball tournament raised \$787.

The grand statewide total for FoodShare was an impressive \$31,016.20!



CONNECTICUT STATE EMPLOYEES' CAMPAIGN

# The Biggest Losers...

By Nina Ritson

**CT** FIT celebrated the closing of Ready, Set, Lose and announced the winners of the program on Tuesday, February 2. Peggy Zabawar, Chair, and newly appointed Co-Chair, Frankie Rivera, thanked everyone for the great turnout. The results were awesome! After 12 weeks that included the notorious weight gaining holidays, members collectively lost a total of 279 lbs.

The two top winners, South Beach (Paul Pryzgocki and Donna Wadhams) lost a total of 12.37% from their starting weights and collected their prizes of \$180 each from participants' entrance fees. Second runner up was US 2.0 (Sue Pawloski-Burke and Donna Camillone) lost 8.68 % total weight walking home with \$50 each in winnings.

New teams of "losers" signed up for the next round of Ready, Set, Lose which launched on Tuesday, February 9. This 12-week weight loss program will run until May 4.

Ready, Set, Lose will feature the same pay-to-play weight loss competition with teams of two. All prize money will be paid out to the winning teams who lose the greatest percentage of weight.

Again, this contest is confidential and teams need only report the team name and percentage - identity and weight are private.

On another note, in the spirit of healthy living and healthy communities, DAS helped raise \$70 for the Red Cross, to benefit the victims of the earthquake in Haiti.



**DAS employees were reminded to wear read on Friday, February 5, in observance of GO RED Day, the American Heart Association's event to bring awareness to heart health. In response, DAS not only wore red but raised \$220 for the AHA, and took a fun photo sporting our red attire which AHA is using in a slide show for their annual luncheon. GO DAS!!**