Celebrate!

Special issue of the DAS
Times features Black Heritage
Month events

By Donna Micklus

The musical refrain of “Freedom” filled the room as young women from the Dance Like David School of Dance moved with precision and elegance.

It was the inspirational opening celebration of Black Heritage Month before a standing room only crowd.

Mistress of Ceremony Holly Hart of the Department of Public Works introduced Commissioners Jim Fleming, Linda Yelmini, Edwin Rodriguez and Associate Commissioner George Coleman who offered greetings from their sponsoring agencies.

“For so many of us this has been a very reflective time,” Yelmini said in her remarks.

“We’re celebrating Black Heritage month while mourning the recent passing of two African-American women who became legends. First, Rosa Parks in late 2005 and then, just weeks ago, the loss of Coretta Scott King. Their quiet dignity, courage and determination became the very core of the civil rights movement more than half a century ago.”

Yelmini paid special tribute to Hattie McDaniel who was being honored with the dedication and unveiling of a U.S. Postal Service stamp in her memory.

“Today, we honor yet another African-American icon, a woman who was a pioneer in her own time and perhaps didn’t even realize it,” Yelmini said. McDaniel made history as the first African-American to win an Academy Award for her role in

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the classic *Gone With the Wind*.

Yelmini went on to share a little-known story.

“When the date of the Atlanta premiere of *Gone with the Wind* approached, McDaniel informed the director that she was unable to attend due to illness; in actuality, she did not want to attend for fear of heightening racial hostilities. When Clark Gable heard that McDaniel did not want to attend because of the racial issue, he threatened to boycott the premiere himself; he later relented when McDaniel convinced him to go.”

Yelmini credited Hattie McDaniel for “leaving a legacy on screen and in life that broke down color barriers and paved the way for future generations.”

The room then fell silent as the young dancers performed the unveiling of the Hattie McDaniel stamp, followed by enthusiastic applause from the appreciative audience.

Guest speaker Paulette Fox embodied what she described as the endurance of the African-American people. A native of Hartford, she was the product of the housing projects and public education. She went on to graduate from Eastern Connecticut State University and get her master’s degree in education administration from the University of Hartford.

A member of the Black Panthers in the ‘70’s, she is currently the executive director of the Opportunities Industrial Center in New Britain, but she said she “never forgets where she came from.”

The two mottos that she lives her life by are “You are your brother’s keeper” and “It takes a village to raise a child.”

It was DPW employee Mary Taylor who provided one of the most moving moments of the program when she sang the Negro National Anthem.

The beauty of her clear, strong voice captivated the standing audience as the opening verse rang out,

> “Lift every voice and sing<br>   Till earth and heaven ring,<br>   Ring with the harmonies of Liberty;<br>   Let our rejoicing rise<br>   High as the listening skies,<br>   Let it resound loud as the rolling sea.”
Ohhh, February. The bleakest, coldest month of the year was upon us again. Time to hibernate? No way! Time to celebrate! And what better way to celebrate Black Heritage Month than through the art of African-American history with stories woven, painted, printed or shaped into fine metals. With bold visuals, hot palettes, strong vibrant colors displayed, winter is but a brushstroke away from extinction.

On February 23, employees in the SOB celebrated Black Heritage with speakers and dedications, but also with artists and artisans who displayed their goods in Room G38B.

Artist David Huckabe displayed his limited edition framed giclee prints of his collage and colored-pencil art, while JoAnn Thompson-Claybourne featured her oil paintings marketed through Picture That, LLC.

Jewelry and oils by Jackie Bright and Amiri Airey were quite popular. A veteran to this celebration, Bright was so excited to be a part of Black Heritage Day again.

“I have been coming every year – I love it - it’s a wonderful event! It gives people a chance to get out and shop and we have found the Diversity Council to be wonderful and the hospitality to be great! I would love to come back next year,” Bright said.

Vibrant neckties, large winter scarves and pashmina shawls by Alfred Campbell of Neckties n’ Things were for sale as well as scarves by Sylathia Giles.

Room G38B was not all about shopping, though, it was about promoting good health, too. Comalita Elliott, a diabetes nurse educator from the Diabetes Life Care Center at Hartford Hospital, held a blood pressure clinic and counseled attendees on high blood pressure, cholesterol, diabetes and preventative health.

“I see a lot of people that I spoke with last year – people I advised about high blood pressure. I am always happy to hear that someone sought preventative treatment from their doctor,” Elliott said.

Many employees were overheard saying that the event “just gets better every year”, so forget those February blues for a day and mark your calendars for next year!
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 African-Americans
have made to our nation; and

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

HEREAS, since its inception in 1976, 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

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

THEREFORE, I, M. Jodi Rell, Governor of the State of
Connecticut, do hereby officially designate the month of February
2006 as BLACK HISTORY MONTH in the State of Connecticut.
It was the SOB’s own version of an auction at Sotheby’s, as DAS’ Nate Jenkins and Consumer Protection’s Cheryl Magna organized a silent auction event during Black Heritage Month to raise money for the United Negro College Fund.

Items for auction were signed photographs of baseball legend Hank Aaron, former Secretary of State Colin Powell and actor Shemar Moore.

The lucky winners were State Department of Education Associate Commissioner George Coleman who won the Hank Aaron photo, Education’s Tammy Keith who won the autographed photo of Shemar Moore, and DAS’ Dianna McKinney who went home with the autographed Colin Powell photograph. The auction raised $105 for the United Negro College Fund.

Special thanks went to Felix Rodriguez of the Department of Consumer Protection whose donations made the auction possible.
A very grateful thanks to the Black History Committee

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Nancy Bryant
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Natalie Shipman, Chair
A Chronology of the Life of Coretta Scott King

1927 – 2006

Coretta Scott King, wife of the late civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., died on January 30, 2006. After Dr. King’s assassination in 1968, Mrs. King founded the Martin Luther King Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change where tens of thousands of activists from all over the world were trained in the philosophy and practice of nonviolence. She was one of the world’s most admired women whose courage, dignity and tireless devotion to preserving Dr. King’s legacy served as an inspiration for everyone.

April 27, 1927: Coretta Scott is born in Heibeger, Alabama.

1947: Begins attending Antioch College in Yellow Springs, Ohio. She would earn a bachelor’s in music and education and later study concert singing at Boston’s New England Conservatory of Music.

June 18, 1953: Marries the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr. in Marion, Alabama.

Nov. 17, 1955: Yolanda Denise is born in Montgomery, Alabama.

Jan. 30, 1956: A bomb is thrown onto the Kings’ Montgomery home. Coretta King is in the house with baby Yolanda. No one is injured.

Oct. 23, 1957: Martin Luther King III is born in Montgomery.

Feb. 2, 1958: Spends a month with her husband in India studying Gandhi’s techniques of nonviolence as guests of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru.

Jan. 24, 1960: The King family moves from Montgomery to Atlanta, where King becomes co-pastor of Ebenezer Baptist Church with his father.

Jan. 30, 1961: Dexter Scott King is born in Atlanta.

March 28, 1963: Bernice Albertine King is born in Atlanta.

Aug. 28, 1963: At the March on Washington, King delivers his “I Have A Dream” speech at the Lincoln Memorial.

April 4, 1968: King is assassinated in Memphis, Tenn.

June 26, 1968: Coretta King founds the Martin Luther King Jr. Memorial Center in Atlanta.

March 27, 1979: Testifies for the first time before joint hearings of Congress in support of a national holiday honoring Martin Luther King Jr.

Nov. 3, 1983: President Reagan signs a bill establishing the third Monday of every January as the Martin Luther King Jr. National Holiday.

Jan. 20, 1986: First national celebration of the King holiday

Aug. 16, 2005: Suffers a stroke.

Jan 16, 2006: Watches the King Day ceremonies on television, the 20th anniversary of the federal holiday.

Jan. 31, 2006: The family announces she died overnight.

Thanks to the following websites for the information used in this article

http://www.achievement.org
http://www.npr.org

-Maureen Friedman