

Bethlehem Community Center Celebrates and Renovates

by Melissa Pettigrew-Jackson

On September 29, 2002, the multipurpose room in the Bethlehem Community Center, Inc., was the place for the center's 75th anniversary and dedication! Newly elected district court judge, Denise Hartsfield, was the host. Hartsfield, also holds the secretary's seat on the center's board of directors.

Guests were uplifted by musical selections from The Burke Singers of Winston-Salem State University, by current four-year-old students from the center, and Devin Walker graced the crowd with a solo.

Winston-Salem State University chancellor, Dr. Harold L. Martin, Sr. gave reflections about being the parent of a child who was a student at Bethlehem years ago. He spoke positively about the experiences-praising the staff for nurturing his son. Alumni, Harold L. Martin, Jr. followed with reflections of his own. The 2001 Morehouse College graduate was valedictorian and president of the student government association.

Bishop Kammerer of the Western North Carolina Conference-The United Methodist Church, was in charge of the dedication. The dedication comes after renovations to the center, which enables them to increase the quality childcare in the East Winston community. The 11,000 square foot expansion includes: two infant rooms and two toddler rooms; multi-purpose classroom with a computer lab for before and after-school care; conversion of the old auditorium into two classrooms; and improvements to the old building that brought it into

compliance with codes. This is the first time since 1970 that the center will serve infants.

This successful expansion positively helped in two ways. It enables parents to become employed. Parents know they have a place in the community that offers quality child-care. Working mother of a two-year-old, Monica Pouncey, says, "I like the fact that Jalen is here [Bethlehem] for many reasons. I like the ratio of teachers to students. I can work and not worry about getting good care and the center is close by." The expansion also created more full-time jobs. Many of the staff are single female parents from the community.

The renovations were needed but costly. "We are still raising money to help defray the cost for the renovations," says executive director, Patricia Shouse. She says they are requesting assistance from foundations, corporations, United Methodist Churches, alumnae and friends. A native of Winston-Salem, and educational background in education, she has been the center's director since 1991.

Bethlehem Community Center serves everyone. Vouchers from Social Services, as well as Smart Start programs and for those who do not qualify for assistance, there is a sliding scale fee.

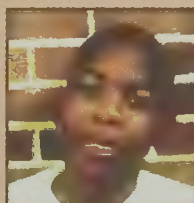
Bethlehem Community Center is a national mission project of the United Methodist Church. The history dates back to 1912 when Mary Debardeleben began the Bethlehem Center movement in a few of the larger southern cities- offering professional childcare for working black mothers. Fifteen years later the center was brought to Winston-Salem. It began in the basement of Reynolds Temple Church.

The Center started small-enrolling 25 children and 16 infants. Over the years the center expanded and has been at it's current location on the corner of Fifth and Cleveland Avenue since 1965- the enrollment is now 125 and hopes to double now with the renovations.

Phoenix People's Voices:

What Christmas Means to Me...

From: Bethlehem Center After-School Age Students- The students attend Moore Elementary School.
photos by L. B. Speas



"Christmas means the birth of Christ."

Jay Bennett



"It reminds me of God and others."

Nyasia Williams



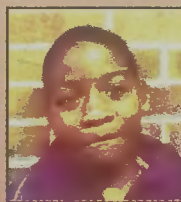
"Christmas means the birth of Christ. How he was given to his people so the people could be saved and that is why Christmas is a special day."

Krystal Oglesby



"Christmas is about giving and receiving and about Jesus' birthday."

Jeremy



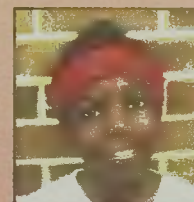
Lee-"Christmas reminds me of when I had my first Christmas with my biological mom."

Daquan Lee



"Santa Claus bringing me presents. We celebrate Jesus."

Anna Jolly



"That Santa brings presents and you're thankful of him."

KaRonne McNeil