

Firsts

from page A1

Carolyn Woods, who sits on the Forsyth County Public Library Black History Committee, moderated the discussion, which was held in the library's auditorium before a crowd of dozens.

"We too break glass ceilings," said Woods. "It takes a lot of hard work, a sense of determination and understanding who you are as a person."

Forsyth County native Sprinkle-Hamlin grew up poor, but said she was rich when it came to strong female role models.

"We were poor but we didn't know we were poor ... so I was always taught I could be whatever I wanted to be," said Sprinkle-Hamlin, who is also the driving force behind the National Black Theatre Festival and N.C. Black Repertory Company, both of which were founded by her late husband, Larry Leon Hamlin.

Sprinkle-Hamlin, who earned an education degree from Winston-Salem State University, discovered her love for libraries when she worked in WSSU's media center. She studied library science at Clark Atlanta University before landing a job as a children's librarian in Philadelphia. She opened a new branch in a Philly community that was equal parts black,



The crowd listens to the discussion.

Hispanic and Ukrainian and became a one-woman marketing machine in order to attract kids to the library.

"I would walk the streets of Philadelphia ... trying to get children to come to the library," said Sprinkle-Hamlin. "I realize now it's not the safest thing to do, but I was young and I wanted people to use the library, so that's what I did."

She eventually returned to Winston-Salem and was offered a job as children's outreach director at the Forsyth County Library. She said it was one of the few management positions black librarians could get at the time. She worked her way through the ranks until she

was promoted to library director in 2000. Although most librarians are female, library directors tend to be white men, but Hamlin said she never let being a black woman hamper her.

"That was sort of hinderance, but not really," she said. "I came here and I showed everybody that I had the right stuff, and you can see that I'm the director now."

Evans, who grew up on a farm in Martin County, said she aspired to become the "female Walter Cronkite." She earned a degree in broadcast journalism from Wake Forest University. She eventually realized that the notoriety of being television news reporter wasn't to her liking. Radio was better suited

for her. She took an internship at WAAA. The black-owned AM radio station signed on in 1950 and played gospel, jazz and R&B music and aired news, sports and local programming. Evans climbed her way up the station's ranks and was eventually offered the chance to own WAAA. She asked her parents for advice and got a mixed reaction.

"My mother's initial reaction was 'Oh baby, no! You'll be in debt for the rest of your life,'" said Evans. "...My father on the other hand, listened very quietly and his initial response was two things ... 'I don't know anybody who has anything worth anything that they didn't go in debt for,' and his second comment was, 'I don't know anything about radio but if you need anybody to come help move some boxes, help clean it up, call me and Daddy will be there.'"

With the support of both her parents and a lot of personal courage and determination, Evans accepted the offer. In 1979, at the age of 26, she became the owner of WAAA. She broke lots of new ground with the station, including starting the city's first large scale Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. birthday celebration, years before the federal MLK Holiday was adopted.

The station went silent in 2001 as a result of financial problems. WAAA returned with limited staff

and broadcast until Evans sold it in 2005.

Several audience members told Evans how much they miss the station.

Evans said none of today's profit-driven radio stations offer what WAAA did for the community.

"There were things we provided that were not moneymakers, but they benefited the community," said Evans.

About 50 people attended the event to listen to both women, including Natalie Sheppard, 26.

Sheppard, who holds a degree in mass communications, is currently looking for work in her field of study. She said she came to the forum to learn from the women and draw inspiration.

"It was great, there was so much insightful information," said Sheppard, a 2008 graduate of Lee University in Cleveland, Tenn. "...It encouraged me a lot."



Woods



Sheppard

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