

Dr. Margaret Savoca introduces N'Gai Dickerson (left) and Dr. John Card to the audience.

Photos by Layla Garmis

FILM, DISCUSSION PROBE DANGERS OF DOWN-HOME GOODNESS

BY LAYLA GARMIS
THE CHRONICLE

The triumphs and pitfalls of Soul Food were explored during the screening of an award winning documentary at The Enterprise Center Tuesday.

More than 50 community members were on hand for the showing of "Soul Food Junkies," a provocative documentary that delves into the tradition of Soul Food, which filmmaker Byron Hurt describes as a "sacrament, ritual and key expression of cultural identity" and how it relates to eating habits in the black community and beyond.

"Communities of color, we are facing a health crisis," Dr. Vanessa Duren-Winfield, director of research for Winston-Salem State University School of Health Sciences, said in introducing the film. "... Data doesn't lie, and we African American minorities lead the nation in obesity, heart disease, hypertension and diabetes. We're killing ourselves slowly with this food, y'all."

Following the devastating loss of his father to pancreatic cancer, which some researchers believe can be linked to a high-fat, low fiber diet, Hurt began traversing the country to learn more about the Soul Food that he believes contributed to his father's death, the cooking and eating traditions that have been handed down for generations, and the steps some people are taking to change those habits for themselves and the next generation.

"I hope that they enjoy it, that they talk about it, and to whatever level that they want to be, are inspired by it because there are a lot of things about it that make people believe in change," said Dr. Margaret Savoca, a research fellow with the Public Health Science division of WFU Medical School's Epidemiology Department who spearheaded the Foodways & Roadways effort along with SG Atkins CDC Executive Director Carol Davis. "...What we're doing is starting to open, I hope, doors for a lot of people."

The film, which was aired on PBS's Independent Lens series, was followed by a question and answer session



Dr. Vanessa Duren-Winfield introduces the film.

with Dr. John P. Card, an internal medicine specialist at Winston-Salem Health Care, and The Urban Culinarian Director/Executive Chef N'Gai Dickerson.

"It's an impactful movie that goes back to the history of who we are and why we do what we do," said Card, an internal health specialist at Novant Health Winston-Salem Health Care. "What I got from the film is it laid the foundation and where we need to go."

The audience questioned the men about adopting healthier lifestyles, forgoing cooking traditions that have carried on for generations, and encouraging their children and families to embrace healthier meal options.

"You have to start early - you've got to start young. You've got to have children understanding that there's a different way of doing things," Dickerson said. "If you start young and give them that advice that they need, show them how to do it ... then that becomes their soul food, that becomes their comfort level."

Many attendees offered testimonies about their own eating habits and how they have impacted their lives. One man said he was inspired to make better food choices after seeing the film.

"It has encouraged me tremendously, and I'm already diabetic," he said. "I'm going to try to do even better now, after watching the film."

City resident John Raye Smith told fellow audience members that

changing his diet may have saved his life.

"I'm a rare person - I'm a black man who's a cancer survivor," he declared. "I was diagnosed on my 65th birthday - colon cancer - and I survived because I got off all that meat. You just have to stop eating certain stuff, change your diet. Since I changed my diet, everything changed."

Foodways & Roadways is a great enhancement to the work that the Atkins CDC (which is housed at the Enterprise Center) is already doing in the community with respect to food sustainability, Davis said. The facility is already home to a two-acre swath of land where 10 community groups tend gardens.

"It ties right into the garden initiative," she said of the series. "...I wanted people to drive the activities here (at the Enterprise Center), and it's taken on a life of its own. The garden is just a prime example of that."


The "Soul Food Junkies" event was the first in a three-part "Foodways & Roadways" documentary film series presented by Wake Forest School of Medicine's Translation Science Institute, SG Atkins CDC, WSSU School of Health Sciences and the Psi Phi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity. The series was birthed from a Foodways & Roadways multi-media exhibit that was held at the Enterprise Center in April. The exhibit, which employed archival photographs, filmed oral histories and current photographs to explore the changing food environment in recent decades, drew over 120 attendees.

"I just think that change comes from with-

in communities. That's what's happening in other parts of the country," said Savoca. "...This is a start."

"Foodways & Roadways" will continue on Tuesday, July 16, with the screening of "A Community of Gardeners" and on Tuesday, August 13, with "Edible City: Grow the Revolution." Both events will be held at The Enterprise Center, 1922 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive. For more information, call 336-734-6900. "Soul Food Junkies" is available for sale at amazon.com.

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