



Photos by Layla Garm
Haja Niang (second from the right) with her children Kadijah, Abdoul, Mohamed and Noorah.



Noor Shehata (left) decorates Noor Siddiqui's arm with a Henna design.

Festival

from page B1

interfaith storytelling festival.

"The beauty of this personally, for me, is that I've been able to meet a lot of different people," said McLeese, a longtime Methodist. "It's made me appreciate the community more to see the kind of response that we've gotten from it. To me, it shows that there's hope for the future when you have this kind of thing in the community, people of very different traditions coming together."

Sita Somara brought a group of teens from her congregation at Balavihar Winston-Salem to teach the youngsters about Hindu.

"We believe that good always wins over evil, and truth always wins over the lie," she explained. "It takes time, but it will be to your victory if you stay with the truth and the goodness."

At the Hindu table, children made crafts featuring Ganesha, "the god of beginnings." Somara, a scientist at the Wake



Jerry McLeese and his longtime wife, Sybil, coordinated the festival.

Forest Institute for Regenerative Medicine, said the festival presented a golden opportunity for the Balavihar girls to teach others and expand their own horizons as

well. "It's good I think, because normally when you read about the religion and you get it from a book, that is totally different because we are

imagining things," said the mother of two. "But when you actually see it and you talk to the people, you actually see it more clearly."

Kuwait native Mido Hamdan regaled festival goers with Arabic calligraphy, writing their names in fluid strokes. Hamdan, the president and founder of Mocksville-based Blessed Meat, Inc., said the city's open and inclusive attitude is what first attracted him to Winston-Salem.

"It's a diverse community, people love people from other cultures, and they appreciate them. It's a great environment to raise kids," said the father of one. "...Winston-Salem is really a unique town because you see a mixture of people and they live together in peace; you can be yourself and not be afraid of harassment."

Hamdan, who is Muslim, praised the festival for creating a safe space where people can explore and appreciate the diversity that surrounds them.

"It's phenomenal," he declared. "It gets people to meet other people and understand they're not really strangers, they're a part of the community - they're just like you."

City native Tammy Pearson manned the Kwanzaa table on behalf of the Victory in Life youth organization, teaching festival attendees about the holiday, which has its roots in African American culture but is not associated with any religion. The group, which provides positive outlets for youth through drama, dance, step and modeling, is slated to perform during this year's Citywide Kwanzaa Celebration in December. Pearson, a mother of three, said she was truly

getting an education by being a part of the festival, which she called "amazing."

"It's my first time being in anything like this, and I didn't think it would be such a big turnout," she said, surveying the rainbow of cultures and religions on display in the gymnasium. "It's really lovely to see all the kids come together and be real interested in what your culture does, and I'm learning a lot."

The next Journeys interfaith breakfast meeting will be held Sunday, Dec. 1 from 8-9:30 a.m. at the Community Arts Cafe, 411 W. Fourth Street. For more information, visit www.if-ws.org or call 336-722-9112.

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