

Wake Forest celebrates the life of Dr. Maya Angelou

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

Earlier this week Dr. Maya Angelou would have turned 88, and while the civil rights activist, author, and educator is no longer with us, her words continue to live on and inspire.

Last Friday, the words of the champion of civil rights echoed through the halls of the Southeastern Center for Contemporary Art as a number of students and faculty members from Wake Forest University performed selections of Dr. Angelou's poetry during a celebration of her life.

Throughout the event, faculty members, students, and a number of Angelou's family members talked about how she impacted their lives.

"I feel like I am a part of her lineage and what she

represented," said poet and performance artist Nina Foster.

"Her words are living on through me. I am able to feel myself and understand myself through her words."

One close relative Matema said her great aunt inspired her to start writing. She also noted that Angelou often encouraged her to read as much poetry as she could out loud, so that it would continue to live and resonate through her mind. As she battled to hold back tears, Matema said she will always carry her great aunt with her.

"There's so much of her that I hold in my heart," she continued. "She will always be with us."

Angelou's niece Rosa Johnson said after the death of her son, Angelou persuaded her to move from California to Winston-

Salem. Johnson noted, if it wasn't for the love and compassion that Angelou showed her during her time of grief, she never would have made it through.

"My aunt saved my life many times. It was truly a blessing to be around her," Johnson said.

One of Angelou's former students, Rogan Kersh, who now serves as the provost of the university said students were always eager to attend Angelou's lessons. Kersh noted Dr. Angelou pushed her students to think more creatively, read more thoroughly, and dream more magically.

"We learned so many things from Maya Angelou," said Kersh. "Perhaps the most important thing we learned is that respect should be bestowed freely."



Rosa Johnson, a relative of the late Dr. Maya Angelou talks about how the civil rights activist saved her life during a celebration at SECCA on Thursday.

Now until April 8, the Sawtooth School for Visual Arts will feature a gallery with work done by students from Carter G. Woodson School. The exhibit is inspired by the students' cultural heritage.

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Over the years, the Sawtooth School for Visual Arts gallery in the heart of downtown has been known to feature works from artists from all around the globe. Now the gallery located on Spruce Street has opened an exhibit featuring the artistic genius of up and coming artists from right here in Winston-Salem.

The gallery is filled with African work masks, Aztec and African textile designs and self-portraits, all created by the young talent at Carter G. Woodson School.

With the help of a grant from the Reynolds American Foundation, Sawtooth was able to provide 18 weeks of art classes for 350 students. The curriculum, developed by Sawtooth's youth program director Nannette Davis, focused on art inspired by the students' cultural heritage.

"After speaking with administrators from the school, we found out that 90 percent of the student populations' ancestors traced back to West Africa or the Costa Chica region of Mexico," Davis said.

Every week throughout the semester, students took bus trips to Sawtooth Center to work on their projects. In addition to painting and drawing in the youth studios, the students also had access to all of Sawtooth's other resources, such as the metals and fiber studios.

Sawtooth decided to use the grant funds to help the students at Carter G. Woodson because, although the school does a remarkable job with their resources, the school does not have funding to offer any visual art classes.

Davis said although the students had never taken an art course before, they were eager to learn.

"By looking at the gallery, its hard to believe many of the students have never taken art before. The students have been fantas-

tic," she continued.

The majority of the works featured in the gallery are from students in the sixth, seventh and eighth grades. Pieces from the fourth and fifth grades are included as well. According to Carter G. Woodson Director Ruth Hopkins, they decided to focus on the middle school age students because that is when children tend to struggle the most with their identity and self worth.

"Middle school is an important time for our students. We thought it was important to focus on that age group to show students that there are alternate ways of expressing themselves," Hopkins said.

"Visual art has a way of getting what's inside out. That's what we wanted our students to get from this experience."

Hopkins said that as the weeks passed, students started to look forward to their weekly trips to the gallery. Hopkins mentioned students rarely missed school on days they had art lessons.

"On the days they went to the Sawtooth Center, we had perfect attendance," said Hopkins. "That shows us the type of impact the classes had on our students. They really got into it."

Next year if awarded the grant from Reynolds American Foundation, Sawtooth School plans to introduce the rest of the elementary grade levels at Carter G. Woodson to the world of art and the importance of self expression.

Hopkins and other administrators at Carter G. Woodson said they would love to continue their relationship with the Sawtooth School.

The show, which opened on March 18, will be on display at the Sawtooth School for Visual Arts until Friday, April 8. For more information and a list of other exhibits, visit Sawtooth's official website, www.sawtooth.org.

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