

Annual Black and White Gala held to raise funds for travel abroad program

BY TEVIN STINSON
THE CHRONICLE

The gymnasium of Carter G. Woodson School (CGWS) was filled with fun and excitement last Friday night as dozens came out to celebrate the school's 19th anniversary.

Donning their best evening attire, elected officials, community leaders, and other supporters of the school came together for a night of dancing, dining, and entertainment. The memorable event known as the Black and White Gala is designed to raise funds for the school's study/travel abroad program.

Every summer CGWS

sends students to the continent of Africa to learn and connect with those native to the second largest continent on the planet.

On past trips to the "motherland," students visited Tanzania, Kenya, Arusha, Dar es Salaam, and Zanzibar. While on their visit, students have the opportunity to create different types of art such as paintings, drawings, and even poems, while interacting with students from Africa.

CGWS founder Hazel Mack said the main goal of the trip is to get students thinking about their purpose in life and where they fit in the world. She men-

tioned it also allows students to connect with their roots and learn more about their heritage.

More than 59 percent of students at CGWS are African-American.

"Traveling to Africa teaches the students more than they could ever get in a classroom," said Mack. "Most importantly, after the trip students understand how much God has blessed them."

Junior Tiara Logan who traveled to Tanzania last summer said since the trip, she values the life she has here in America a lot more.

She said the things she experienced while in Africa are something she



Photo by Tevin Stinson
Founder of Carter G. Woodson, Hazel Mack.

will remember for the rest of her life. She noted what really opened her eyes was the lack of assistance people in Africa receive from the government.

"I value life a lot more since the trip," she continued. "In Africa, government assistance is not an option people really don't have in some places and it's really sad."

"Since visiting Africa, I now give 100 percent effort in everything I do in the classroom and at home."

Junior Christopher Price echoed Logan's statements. He said, "Unlike America where we have corruption and corrupt peo-

ple, on the continent of Africa everyone is working towards the common goal of becoming better people.

"Everybody is just trying to better themselves," he said, "That's what I enjoyed most about the trip, that peaceful atmosphere and connecting with the people."

According to school officials, this year students will travel to Kenya and Tanzania. For more information on Carter G. Woodson School or the travel abroad program, visit the school's official website at www.cartergwoodsonschool.org.

Experts say build trust, prepare for worst with mental illness

Editor's note: May is Mental Health Awareness Month.

BY TEVIN STINSON
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Many people in the community are affected by mental health issues in some way. A friend, loved one, or colleague probably has struggled with a disorder at some point in time.

Statistics show in 2014, one in five American adults experienced a mental health issue. At the same point in time, one in 25 lived with a serious mental illness, such as schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, or major depression.

With that said, mental health is still a topic that people rarely discuss openly which has led to a number of misconceptions and myths.

Last Thursday, the Winston-Salem Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, the Phi Omega Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, and the Psi Phi Chapter of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity joined forces to dispel some of those myths when they hosted "Let's Talk About It," a community mental health forum and

panel discussion.

During the forum held inside R.J. Reynolds Auditorium on the campus of Winston-Salem State University, a panel of healthcare professionals and caretakers, scholars, and other community stakeholders sat down to discuss mental illness and treatment options.

The panel also featured those who have been directly affected by a mental illness.

Moderator for the event, assistant professor of sociology and criminal studies at Salem College Dr. Kimya Dennis, started the conversation by asking panelists to define mental illness in their own words. President of the Northwest Piedmont Chapter of National Alliance of Mental Illness Louise Whealton said, "When it comes to mental health, I try to take a holistic approach to what needs to occur." "Sometimes that means education and other times that means treatment."

When asked about the short-term and long-term effects of mental illness, Kathy Cunningham said when diagnosed with a mental illness, you are treated with little respect.

Cunningham noted when she was diagnosed with serve depression and bipo-

lar disorder in 1996, her life changed forever. Not only did she lose her job shortly after being diagnosed, Cunningham mentioned when people find out that she has been diagnosed with a mental illness, that's all they see.

"You are treated with so little respect," she said. "When they look at your medical records, bi-polar is what they see first. Not my heart attack or my diabetes, but bi-polar, and that's the way they treated me."

Cunningham mentioned the disrespect is something she has to deal with every day.

According to experts on the topic, Cunningham's treatment from peers, family members and even doctors is nothing new for those dealing with a mental illness. Founder of Our Brother Legion, an interfaith organization which seeks to educate the community to help reduce stigma on behalf of people living with mental illness, trauma and addiction, Reverend Beth Cantrell said the people she knows with a mental illness has the worst medical stories.

While she admits at times it's not easy, Cantrell encouraged those who need help to go to the doctor.

"If you are sick or need help, go to the

doctor," she continued. "You will find ways to cope, but be prepared because it can be worse than you ever imagined."

Others who participated in the panel discussion included executive director of the Mental Health Association of Forsyth County (MHAFC) Andy Hagler, Winston-Salem/Forsyth County Schools (WSFCS) program manager Kathy Jordan, licensed professional counselor Mary Jane McGill, WSFCS director of psychological services Corliss Thompson-Drew, and qualified healthcare professional Yolanda McArthur.

Hagler, who has been with MHAFC since 1997, mentioned a number of programs offered in Forsyth County that offer help for those dealing with mental illness and their families. According to Hagler, MHAFC offers support groups, crisis intervention team (CIT) training, and mental health awareness campaigns, just to name a few.

Hagler noted while seeking help may not work every time with every situation, it is important to try to see if it works. He said it all begins with trust.

"Mental illness is real and very common, but it can be treated," he said. "We have to build that trust."

Happy Hill Cemetery cleanup continues after storm wreaks havoc

BY TODD LUCK
THE CHRONICLE

Cleanup efforts continue at the historic Happy Hill Cemetery after a recent storm hit the area hard.

The Happy Hill Cemetery Friends has been working for the last seven years to clean up the cemetery that had been in disrepair for decades. The old cemetery is located at the corner of Willow and Pitts Street, with a lower section that's now covered in forest off Free Street. Weeds that at times were taller than the people clearing them, have been cut out of the upper portion of it, revealing many graves that now bear flowers from loved ones and flags honoring veterans. But a recent storm has left large parts of trees littering the cemetery.

On Saturday, it was just Maurice Pitts Johnson, who started the clean-up efforts, and volunteer David Gall clearing the debris. Gall picked up smaller branches and used a hack saw to cut some of the larger ones into pieces he could carry. Neither owns a chainsaw that was needed to cut the largest branches. Since it's private property, the city can't clean it up, but can pick up branches left on the side of the road, which formed a large five-foot tall pile at the cemetery's edge.

Johnson said the amount of help varies during the cleanups held twice a month. Sometimes it's just her and Gall who come out.

"We've had some groups to come out and help us from time to time, but it's not a steady flow of

volunteers," said Johnson.

Gall, a member of Preserve Historic Forsyth, said Johnson came to one of the group's meetings seven years ago looking for volunteers to help with the cleanup. He said he's been volunteering ever since.

"I just felt like it was a



Photo by Todd Luck

Maurice Pitts Johnson has been leading cleanup efforts at Happy Hill Cemetery for years.

worthy project," said Gall, who is an architect whose projects often involve historic preservation. "I came out here the first time and saw how much work there was to do and we've been persistent ever since, clearing the cemetery and making it presentable."

Over the years, they've had many volunteers and groups to help, including Church of Jesus Christ of Latter Day Saints in Clemmons, the Winston-Salem Jaycees, the Liberian Organization of the Piedmont, and Wake Forest University history students. The near-by Rising Ebenezer Baptist Church has been active in the cleanup and one of its

members regularly mows the cemetery. Johnson is currently working with the Wake Forest Community and Business Law Clinic to change ownership of the land to Rising Ebenezer, which has entailed a long legal process since the churches that originally owned the property no longer exist.

Johnson's grandparents, Columbus and Alice Pitts, and great-grandmother, Matilda Simmons, are buried there. Columbus Pitts was an early land owner in Happy Hill, who the nearby Pitts Street is named after. She said she was inspired to begin cleaning up the cemetery when she tried to take her grandson to the cemetery, but found the weeds hid her grandparent's grave marker.

"I wanted to show my grandson where it was and it was so overgrown I couldn't find it," she said.

The oldest grave in the cemetery found so far is that of Jerry Swepson who was buried in 1901. The cemetery is believed to have more than 113 people buried there. There were more than that before 1965, when construction of U.S. 52 cut through the cemetery, causing graves to be moved to a cemetery in Walkertown near Oak Grove Baptist Church.

The next cleanup is this Saturday, May 28, at 9:30 a.m. Regular cleanups are the second and fourth Saturday of each month at 9:30 a.m. Volunteers are encouraged to bring gloves, chainsaws and other yard tools. For more information, contact Maurice Pitts Johnson at 336-815-8417.



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