

CHRISTMAS CULTURES

ECSU CELEBRATES CHRISTMAS HOLIDAYS

Erika Cooper

The holidays are right around the corner and Elizabeth City State University has many activities planned for the students, faculty and public.

On Dec. 18, there will be an Employee's Christmas Party held in the K.E. White Graduate Center. The party will start at 3:00 pm and end at 6:00 pm.

So that students would be well informed of the way other cultures celebrate Christmas, the Office of Student Life held a Cultural Celebration on Nov. 20.

"We had representatives talk about Ramadan, Hanukkah, and Kwanzaa," said Jean Holt, Assistant Dean of Student Life.

Ramadan is a special month of the year for many Muslims throughout the world. Ramadan is a time of worship, reading of the

Qur'an, purifying one's behavior, doing good deeds, and giving charity.

Hanukkah is celebrated for eight days and nights starting on the 25 of Kislev on the Hebrew calendar (which is November-December on the Gregorian calendar).

Kwanzaa is a celebration which focuses on community responsibility, the traditional African values of family, self-improvement and commerce. Kwanzaa is celebrated from Dec. 26 through Jan. 1.

"We had the Chancellor do the official lighting of the Christmas tree," said Holt.

Different organizations on the ECSU campus are conducting various drives such as food drives and clothes drives. The ECSU Commuter Services and Psychology Club, in conjunction with the

U.S Marine Corps Reserve, are gathering toys for tots. The drive will be held Dec. 3-Dec 13.

"I love the joy of seeing the kids' faces and their parents. I love to make them happy," said Willa Lamb, Commuter Services Coordinator.

Toys for Tots was originated under the U.S. Marine Corps Reserve.

"We work with the Marines out of Jacksonville, N.C. We service the area children. We've had support from the Elizabeth City Fire Department. They used their antique fire truck and delivered toys to 12 families. This is our third year helping out with Toys for Tots. Our first year, we serviced 84 children and 42 families in Pasquotank," said Lamb.

The ECSU Planetarium hosted its annual Christmas

Feature Presentation Dec. 2, 4, 7-9, 2002. The ECSU Planetarium sponsored a Christmas laser show entitled, "Tis the Season." The dates were Dec. 2 - Dec. 7 (Dec. 6 at 6:00pm and 7:30 pm), and Dec. 7 at 6:00 p.m. The Planetarium is located in the Jenkins Science Complex, Room 146.

Admission is free and open to the public.

The ECSU Choir and the Evelyn A. Johnson Community Singers presented a Christmas Concert on Dec. 5 at 7:30pm in the Moore Hall Auditorium. The choir performed George Frideric Handel's Messiah. Admission is free and open to the public.

All residence halls will close Dec. 19 at 12 noon. They will re-open for all students Jan. 12 from 8am to 5pm.

STUDENTS GAIN A BETTER UNDERSTANDING OF CHRISTMAS CULTURES

McKeith Cordell
mckcordell@hotmail.com

As the Christmas season quickly comes and goes, Elizabeth City State University took a moment to recognize the various traditions in which this beloved time of the year is celebrated in cultures other than our own. On November 20, 2002 at 7:00 pm, ECSU held a very intimate program that was open for all titled "A Cultural celebration for the Season." The event included various guest speakers who explained the importance of Hanukkah, Ramadan, and Kwanzaa.

Dr. Jean Holt introduced the Hanukkah tradition. Hanukkah is an eight-day Jewish holiday that begins on the 25th day of the month of Kislev according to the Hebrew calendar, or during November and December. Hanukkah celebrates the victory of the Jews

over Hellenistic Syrians that occurred in 165 B.C. After the battle, they went to the Holy temple in Jerusalem for the purpose of rededication only to find that there was not enough oil to light their lamps. Amiably, they found enough oil that would normally last for one night, but that oil instead lasted eight nights.

Next, Dr. Mamadu Yakubu, professor at ECSU, introduced the celebration of Ramadan. This Muslim holiday, also known as the month of fasting, is a time for inner reflection, devotion to God, and self-control. The Muslims believe that many special benefits come from fasting such as, the body's digestive cycle getting a break, thankfulness, as well as appreciation for food. While fasting the Muslims get the chance to engage in intensive worship, giving charity, purifying their behavior, and reading of the Qur'an. Fasting is by all

means voluntary, and Ramadan is known as the most widely practiced form of Muslim worship.

Conclusively, the ceremony did not conclude until after ECSU's Concerned Black Awareness Council introduced the celebration of Kwanzaa. People of African origin from December 26 through January 1 celebrate Kwanzaa. Kwanzaa, which means "first" in Swahili and signifies the first fruits of harvest, is described as a time to reflect on the use of basic principles, a time of recommitment to us in order to achieve a better life for our families, and a time to enjoy the fruits of our labor. Among the customs practiced during Kwanzaa is fasting. Fasting is done to cleanse the mind, body and soul. Also, a symbolic candle-lighting ceremony is held among families. The candles are black, green and red. Black is for the color of

African Americans everywhere, and it is located in the center of the kinara. Then there are three red candles representing the blood of ancestors. And lastly, are three green candles that represent the earth, life, and the ideals of the future.

After the presentations were done, James Hill, ECSU senior, recited a poem he wrote entitled, "Love Guided My Steps." Also, Keith Richardson, Mr. ECSU, read a speech he wrote about the "Reason for the Season."

By the end of the ceremony a Christmas tree in the University center was lit, the Essence of Praise gospel choir performed for spectators, and Dr. Anthony Brown made a presentation to the Albemarle Food Bank. This was a special celebration to all who attended. Each person left with knowledge on new ways to celebrate this wonderful time of the year.

KWANZAA: IS IT STILL RELEVANT?

Quentona Cothran

Kwanzaa, which means "first fruits of the harvest" in the African language Kiswahili, is an African-American celebration that focuses on the traditional African values of family, community, responsibility, commerce, and self-improvement by observing seven guiding principles from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1. Kwanzaa was founded and created in 1966 by Dr. Maulana Karenga and has gained a large audience over the years.

Today, the debate about whether of not Kwanzaa is still relevant to African-American college students still burns in a lot of people's hearts. More than 18 million people observe Kwanzaa worldwide, but one wonders if it is still an important celebration.

Travis Billups, a senior at Elizabeth City State University feels that Kwanzaa is still relevant.

"Kwanzaa is still an important celebration to college students. Many of my friends no longer celebrate Christmas and only concentrate on Kwanzaa so that they can get closer to their roots," said Billups.

Shinah Hawkins, an ECSU senior feels that Kwanzaa is still important, especially for those that have been raised celebrating it.

"I was not raised celebrating Kwanzaa, but I do feel that it is important to those that were. I do realize the benefits of Kwanzaa and more young African Americans should learn more about it" said Hawkins.

Kwanzaa's seven principles are: Umoja (unity), Kujichagulia (self-determination), Ujima (collective-work and responsibility), Ujamaa (cooperative economics), Nia (purpose), Kuumba (creativity), and Imani (faith).

Can it be assumed that the

seven principles of Kwanzaa should be common knowledge to students or should it be something that is taught at Historical Black Colleges and Universities?

Shanon Penn, an ECSU junior, feels that Kwanzaa is not mentioned enough at HBCU's.

"I know when I was in elementary school, the seven principles were taught to us. Now that I am in college, you hardly ever hear about anything relating to Kwanzaa, let alone mentioning the seven principles. I feel that it would be beneficial to the students if the principles and the symbols of Kwanzaa were taught," said Penn.

These seven symbols are; mazao, mkeba, kinara, vibunzi, zawadi, kikombe cha umoja, and mishumaa saba. There are plenty of aspects that fall into Kwanzaa, such as the way the home is decorated, the gifts, and

the Kwanzaa feast or the Karamu. Some students believe that by placing so much emphasis on Kwanzaa take away the true meaning of Christmas. KerryAnn Cummings, a senior at Elizabeth City State University, does not agree with celebrating Kwanzaa.

"To me, Kwanzaa takes away from the tradition of the holiday season. The purpose of the holidays is to celebrate the birth of Christ," said Cummings.

Kwanzaa is a celebration of our heritage and allows families and communities to come together. Kwanzaa is neither political nor religious, and it is not a substitute for Christmas. Kwanzaa is a time of reaffirming African-American people, their ancestors, and culture. Kwanzaa is a special celebration of our past, present and future.

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