

Spreading the news

Twenty-five local churches join literacy campaign

By YVETTE N. FREEMAN
Community News Editor

About 25 local churches will join the fight against illiteracy this weekend.

The churches will take part in "Literacy Sabbath," a campaign sponsored by the Literacy Roundtable of the United Way Literacy Initiative, to heighten the awareness of the need for improved literacy, and to encourage adults needing assistance with reading skills to seek help.

"Literacy Sabbath was another avenue that we chose to spread the word through the congregations," said Sandra Pennington, executive director of the Literacy Initiative.

"Because we know that lots of people that need help are in church. And Saturday and Sunday of this weekend, we have asked churches to celebrate literacy in some way in their churches."

In addition to informing more people about illiteracy, the campaign will also promote the services that are available to combat the problem. One such service is a free hotline number for people to call anonymously

for help and information (1-800-642-2909).

"Literacy Sabbath" will also focus on the need to enhance the quality of literacy services in Forsyth County, and implementation of more community/education programs to attract adult learners.

Pennington said that as a result of "Literacy Sabbath," more churches may open their doors and facilities on a regular basis to fight illiteracy.

"They may have spaces in their facilities for tutorial classes or GED or Adult Basic Education classes. And Forsyth Tech would love to utilize that space if they could," she said.

As of press time, only 25 churches had agreed to participate in "Literacy Sabbath," out of the nearly 400 that were initially contacted.

Some of the local churches that will participate in the campaign will include Saints Home United Methodist Church, St. Paul United Methodist Church, United House of Prayer, Bethania AMEZ Church, and First Assembly of God.

One reason the responses to the campaign are coming in slow,

may be because of the Christmas holidays. Pennington said that next year the campaign will probably take place when the

program to expand by bringing in the members of the clergy to talk with the Literacy Initiative coordinators about the prob-

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churches are not as distracted by other events.

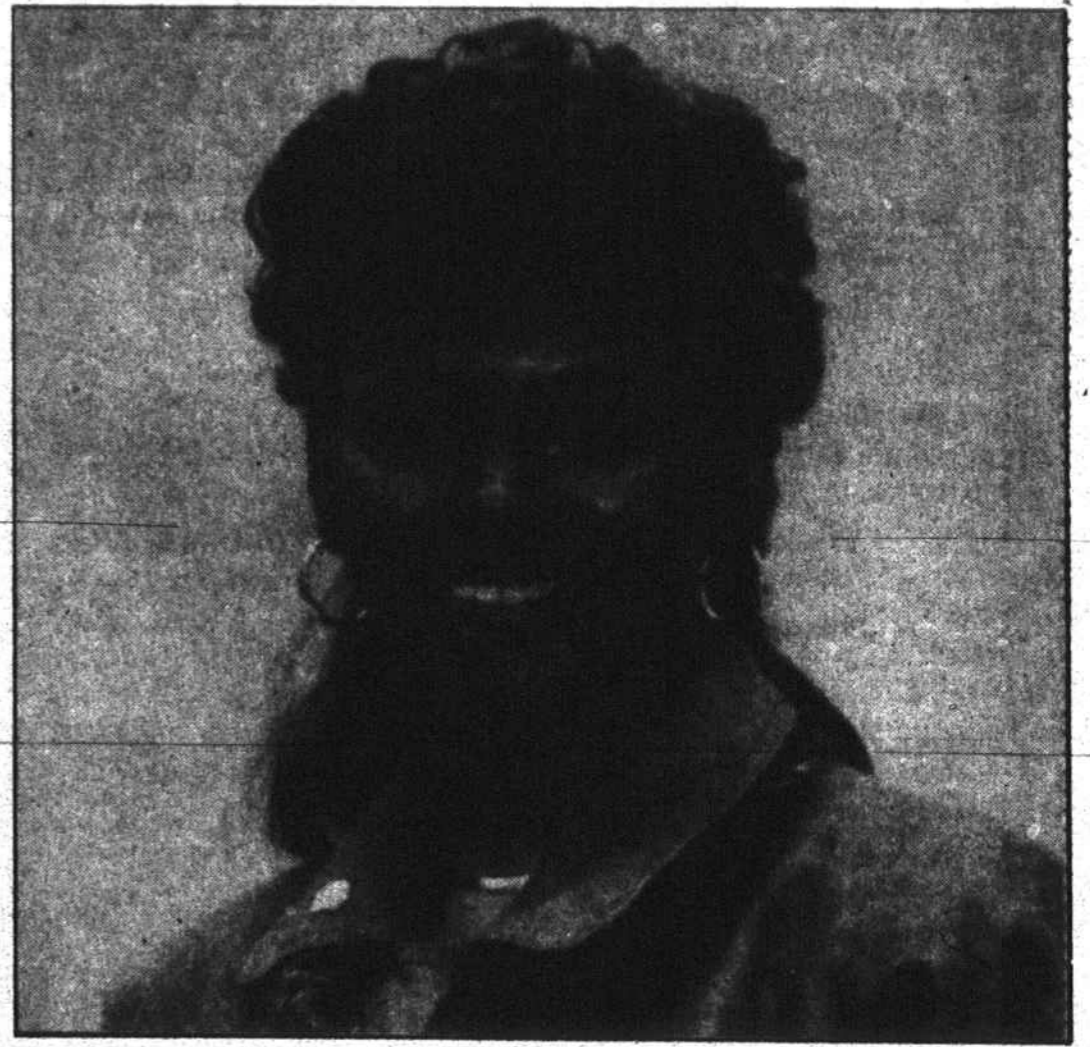
"We hope that it will become an annual affair," she said. "And next year we will probably select another time of the year that will not conflict with Christmas. I think a lot of people may not have responded because they will still be going through advents."

She added that by changing the time of year of "Literacy Initiative," it will hopefully allow

lem of adult illiteracy in the form of a community forum.

"What we're trying to do is bring all segments of the community together to address this problem among adults," said Pennington.

The honorary chairman for "Literacy Sabbath" is WXII news anchor, Rick Amme. For more information, about "Literacy Sabbath," call the Literacy Initiative office at 721-9318.



Sandra Pennington, executive director of The Literacy Initiative.



Dwana Smallwood and Carlotta Samuels-Fleming perform in the North Carolina Repertory Company's production of *Celebrations: An African Odyssey*.

African Odyssey to replace Nutcracker?

By YVETTE N. FREEMAN
Community News Editor

If Larry Leon Hamlin gets his way, *Celebrations: An African Odyssey*, presented by the North Carolina Black Repertory Company (NCBRC), will become as traditional a Christmas classic as *The Nutcracker*.

Celebrations: An African Odyssey recently completed its second annual run at the Arts Council Theatre on Sunday, Dec. 22.

According to Hamlin, the founder and artistic director of the NCBRC, it took the organization 11 years to find a holiday production that directly relates to the African-American experience. He feels very strongly about the importance of the piece not only as a form of holiday entertainment, but also as an educational tool.

"It's an opportunity to show the very close relationship of African-Americans with Africa," said Hamlin, in a recent interview. "And I think that anyone that comes to see this show learns a great deal about that relationship. And certainly, I think that once someone comes and takes part in this *Celebrations: An African Odyssey*, that they can leave the theatre feeling very, very good about themselves and about their ancestry as it relates to Africa."

Celebrations: An African Odyssey tells the story of a young

and beautiful princess who is kidnapped from her West African home. This year's production featured such veteran performers of NCBRC as Carlotta Samuels-Fleming, Sharon Frazier, and Randy Johnson. Other cast members included the Rev. John Heath as King Atomi, Wendy Smith as Princess Jaharri, LaTanya Black as Queen Shaale, and Kenny Malette as the Elder of the Tribe.

The musical was directed by Mabel Robinson and produced by Hamlin, who plans to continue presenting *Celebrations: An African Odyssey* as an annual Christmas tradition.

However, next year the production will be presented in Winston-Salem for one week only, before going on the road to Raleigh and Charlotte "so that we can share this *Celebrations: An African Odyssey* with more black people in the state," Hamlin said. "It's something that's very good for our children to see, and of course, it's an extremely important family production. And one that the entire family should see together. So everyone in the black community should come and see this piece first, then go see *The Nutcracker*, if you like. But certainly, your priority should be to take the family to a show that's very much reflective of their culture and history. And that's what *Celebrations: An African Odyssey* is all about."

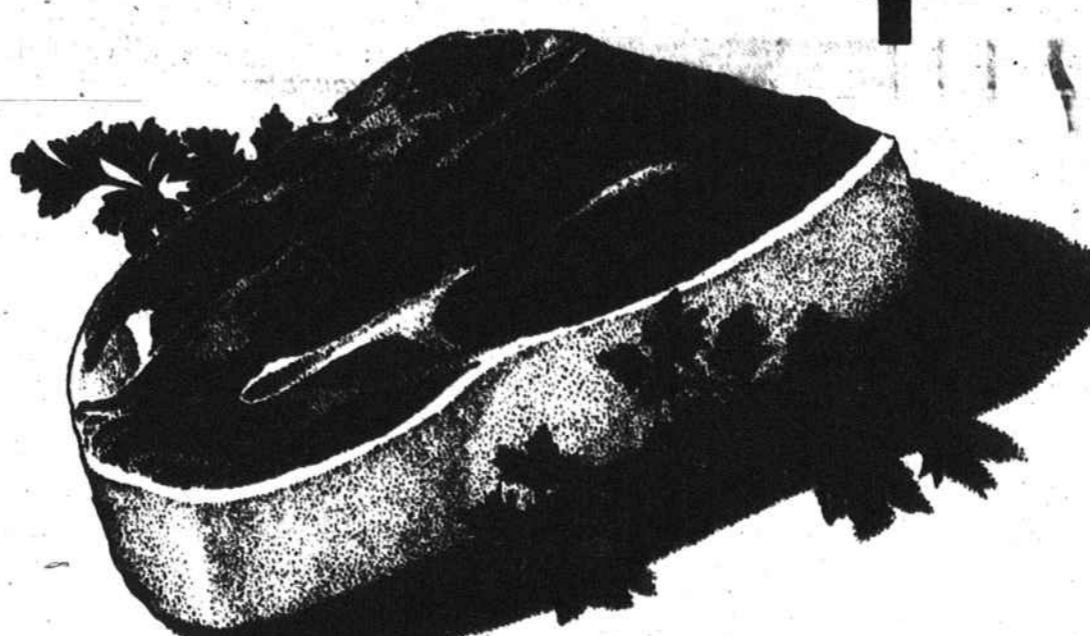
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