

Hamlin's make presidential guest list

honor some of the nation's best and brightest during the National Medals of the Arts and National Humanities ceremony in Washington.

The annual event draws a string of guests, especially many corporate and artistic bigwigs. Among the invited guests for yesterday's event was Winston-Salem's own Larry Leon Hamlin.

Hamlin, the founder of the N.C. Black Repertory Company and the creator of the biennial National Black Theatre Festival, also received an invitation to the event several years ago, early in Clinton's first term. Nevertheless, he said he was still surprised and honored when the fancy, embroidered invitation arrived this time around.

"I feel very fortunate to be on that list," Hamlin said last week. "I did not know they were aware of my work....It goes to show you that eyes are watching from afar."

Hamlin has been a key player in the theater world for the last 20 years. The 10-year-old theater festival has elevated his name to much higher levels. The festival draws visitors and performers from throughout the world.

Hamlin is originally from Reidsville. He joked about "a little country boy" like him going to the White House and meeting the president. On a more serious note, he said, he hopes the invitation will show young performers to do their best work, regardless of the venue.

"People think you have to be in a big city to make (it)," Hamlin said. "But if you are doing excellent work, it doesn't matter where you are. Good work will get you recognized."

Hamlin's wife, Sylvia Sprinkle Hamlin, was expected to join him for the event, which was expected to also include a holiday tour of the White House guided by the president and first

lady and a lunch with the Clintons. Sprinkle Hamlin is active in the Black Rep and the theater festivals. Her full-time job, though, is heading the Forsyth County Library.

Last time Hamlin attended the ceremony, he was not allowed to bring a guest. The ceremony was Sprinkle Hamlin's first time at the White House.

Hamlin expected to be doing more than taking in the holiday grandeur at the White House. Last time he attended the ceremony, he recalled, he managed to nab \$50,000 in corporate sponsorship dollars by hobnobbing with other guests. He had a similar mission this year.

Hamlin is already a year into planning the 2001 festival, which will be held July 30 through Aug. 4. Hamlin said raising money for the upcoming festival has been no easier than previous festivals.

In fact, he said, new obstacles are in his way this time. Several

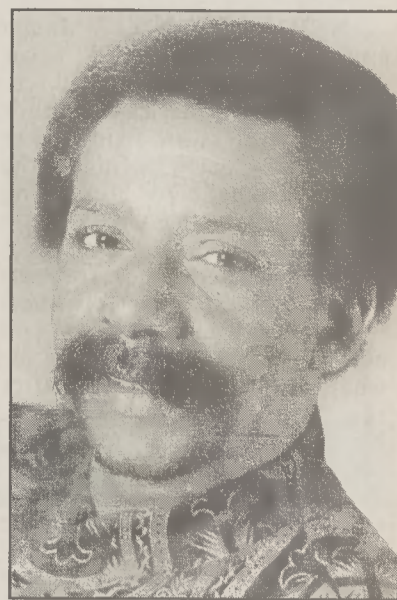
prominent black theater companies have closed over the year because of financial troubles.

Because his is the first festival of its kind, Hamlin said he had no blueprints to follow. He added that he has tried to stay clear of the problems that plagued the doomed theater companies. But at the same time, he says African Americans need to support the black theater more than they are now.

Hamlin said he will call on black businesses and African Americans in general to step up for the upcoming festival.

"We can't rely on other people to support this....We have to start with ourselves," he said.

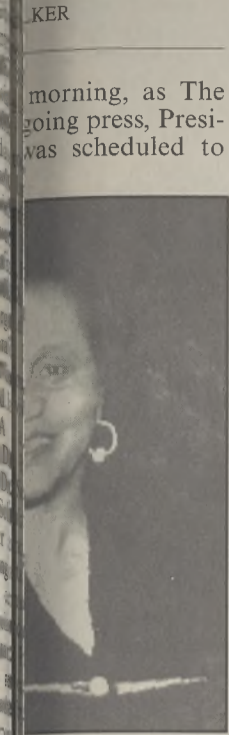
Among the luminaries scheduled to receive medals at yesterday's ceremony were world renowned poet Maya Angelou, who lives in Winston-Salem; and Pulitzer Prize-winning author Toni Morrison. Writer Ernest J. Gaines was also expected to



Larry Leon Hamlin

receive a medal.

Tickets for the 2001 festival gala are available now. Call 336-723-2266 or 336-723-7907.



inkle-Hamlin



Photo by Kevin Walker

Santa Claus, takes a violent toy from a young man at the Sims Center in Happy Hill by got a non-violent toy in exchange.

'Peace toys' given to youths

BY FELECIA P. MCMILLAN
COMMUNITY CORRESPONDENT

More than 180 children, teens and adults came to the William C. Sims Recreation Center to support the eighth annual citywide Peace Toys for War Toys Exchange on Friday, Dec. 15.

Since the program received state and national recognition, support for the initiative has grown.

"The community has taken the Peace Toys for War Toys by the horns and has accepted it as a holiday tradition," said Ben Piggott, supervisor of the William C. Sims Recreation Center. "Kids look forward to trading their violent toys in for peaceful ones."

To set the stage for the evening, Santa led a two-minute vigil in recognition of the "fallen angels" who have been lost through gun violence around the

community. George Woosley, former teacher at Jefferson Davis Diggs Magnet School, led the audience in a moment of silence.

Executive Assistant U.S. Attorney Loretta Biggs nominated Piggott and his program for a national crime prevention award this year. She was on hand to offer remarks.

"I love the program that Ben Piggott created called Peace Toys for War Toys Exchange. Ben is a pied piper for children to get them involved in positive programming," she said.

State Rep. Larry Womble offered his support of the program as well.

"Ben Piggott has done an outstanding job rounding up volunteers and children and creating an excellent program that helps promote nonviolence among the Winston-Salem community," Womble said.

Beverly Liggins, assistant

supervisor of the Sims Center, served as the head elf in charge of distributing tickets to kids who had violent toys ranging from pellet guns, BB guns, water

See Toy Exchange on A10

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