

Locals inducted into society for helping to fund NBTF

BY T. KEVIN WALKER
THE CHRONICLE

The Marvtastic Society had its coming-out party last month during a formal gala at the Adam's Mark.

Larry Leon Hamlin, founder of the National Black Theatre Festival, named the society, "Marvtastic" – a fusion of the words "marvelous" and "fantastic" – is Hamlin's signature term.

Members of the society shelled out \$1,000 to support the upcoming theater festival.

During Sunday's gala the more than 50 people who have joined the society so far were wined, dined and thanked for their support. Members received certificates and lapel pins featuring the NBTF logo. Marvtastic Society members also will get discounts on tickets to festival plays and the swank opening night gala.

This is the first year that festival organizers have tapped individuals for contributions. Hamlin said the decision was made in order to give the festival – which will cost well over a million dollars to stage – additional funding avenues. The Marvtastic Society has been so successful – raising \$52,000 so far – that it is now one of the major sponsors of the festival, join-



File Photo

Larry Leon Hamlin holds one of the pins presented to Marvtastic Society members.

ing the ranks of large corporations such as Sara Lee and US Airways.

"I am very pleased," Hamlin said. "I wasn't expecting that number of dollars."

Melba Lindsay-Bostic coordinated the Marvtastic Society. Letters of invitation were sent to hundreds of local people, many of whom have been ardent supporters of the biennial festival since it was founded in 1989. The response was immediate, Lindsay-Bostic said.

"Many people were just excited by

the opportunity to show their support for the festival. Their donations will help continue this festival," Lindsay-Bostic said.

Most of the Marvtastic Society dollars will be used for the Youth/Celebrity Project, a popular wing of the festival that allows local young people to meet performers and embrace the arts.

Warren and Lois Leggett have supported the festival and Hamlin's N.C. Black Repertory Company for two decades. They saw joining the Marvtastic Society as a way to solidify their love and respect for the festival and black theater in general.

"We had been involved for such a long time, it was only natural that we would be part of the society," Warren Leggett said before his wife added, "We support what (the NBTF) stands for and what it represents."

Hamlin is particularly pleased that financially stable African-Americans have finally decided to put their money where their mouths are. He hopes that the black support reaped through the Marvtastic Society is an indication of what is to come in terms of ticket sales for the August event.

"I am very proud of the African-American community for coming to the plate with those kind of dollars. I

think it is a significant symbol of what is going to happen this year," Hamlin said.

But the Marvtastic Society does have nonblack members. Susan King, who is white, became a staunch festival supporter after attending the 2001 event. She not only is a Marvtastic Society member but is helping Lindsay-Bostic recruit new members.

"(The NBTF) is a tremendous asset to this community," King said. "People who have not attended it are missing out on a lot."

Though the festival solely features black theater and draws a mostly African-American audience, King said she feels right at home.

"It is the arts, and the arts transcends all those things," she said.

Sidewalk celebration planned for Aug. 8

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

The 11th annual Fourth Street Sidewalk Celebration will be held in downtown Winston-Salem on Aug. 8. The sidewalks from Spruce Street to Liberty Street will be lined with more than 60 participants offering a wide range of merchandise from original art to bicycles. This year's celebration will coincide with the National Black Theatre Festival, which will bring hundreds of visitors to the city, along with some of the country's top entertainers.

Along with the array of unique merchandise, the Sidewalk Celebration also will offer a variety of food

vendors, fine crafts produced at the Sawtooth Center, produce from the Downtown Farmers' Market, live entertainment, and opportunities to visit with numerous community groups. The festivities will begin at 10 a.m. and end in mid-afternoon.

The Fourth Street Sidewalk Celebration is sponsored by the Downtown Winston-Salem Partnership, a membership organization dedicated to making downtown a destination by creating vibrant mixed uses in a pedestrian-friendly environment with an emphasis on major employment centers, restaurants, supportive retail, entertainment centers and residential uses.



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