



Photo by Layla Gurns

From left: Kimberley Park students Jazmin Castillo, Graciela Guzman, Tamyra Hardy, Tre'Shaun Withers and Da'Mon Stokes were among the toy recipients.

Kimberley

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the student body, which hails almost exclusively from low income homes.

Les Arbres, which is home to just over a dozen active members, collected 76 toys from those who attended the club's annual Black and White Ball, which was held at the private club on New Walkertown Road last month. An additional 24 toys were donated by Dr. Robert Benningfield of Benningfield Chiropractic & Acupuncture in Mooresville. The delivery hit home for Dr. Amber Baker, Kimberley Park's principal.

"For the first four years of my child's life, I couldn't afford Christmas. It was things like this that helped my child get Christmas," revealed Baker, the mother of one daughter. "...I always get overwhelmed because I know how impactful it is when you need help."

The Les Arbres - or The Tree (its English translation) - social club was birthed from a private club of the same name. A local institution for more than 50 years, Les Arbres was founded to give African

American professionals a classy venue in which to dine and socialize, Johnson said.

"We had no place for the blacks to go, so I figured they should have something," commented the 95 year-old. "To run a private club in the community when I came along, it wasn't no such thing."

The Club recently opened its membership to women, attracting new members like Sims, who joined three months ago. Sims, who is currently studying at Forsyth Technical Community College and the University of Virginia, said she was glad to lend her support to the toy drive.

"Doing the toy drive was a good thing," said the city native. "I used to drive a school bus, so I love the kids."

Many local agencies and organizations have supported Kimberley Park students in a variety of ways over the years, but Baker said receiving the help of a historically black organization made the gifts even more poignant.

"When we have people who are so kind like them, who give us gifts, it helps make (students') Christmas a little better," she declared. "It warms my heart even more so than what others have done,

because it says that they didn't forget about us."

For Williams, a city native who attended Kimberley Park as a youngster, returning to his old stomping grounds evoked a wave of nostalgia.

"I actually did a play on this stage when I was in fifth grade," recalled the father of four, surveying the gymnasium where the toys were held. "It's a warm feeling that you get when you come back."

The delivery marked the first collaboration between the school and the club, but it likely won't be the last. Baker and Mr. Williams, a flight attendant for US Airways, have already begun discussing holding the school's fifth grade graduation ceremony at the Club.

Mrs. Williams said partnering with the school could help Les Arbres fulfill its newly adopted philosophy, which emphasizes community service. She added that the Club plans to make the Kimberley Park toy drive an annual event.

"I see there's a lot of work that could be done here," said the retired US Airways customer service manager and mother of four. "The kids were in need, and I like to work with children ... I really feel good

when I do that."

Baker is also putting together a male mentoring program to help expand the students' horizons.

"So many of our students don't have a positive adult influence in their lives, so if we can show them a positive influence, it will go a long way," she said. "Getting them exposed, getting them out of the community (is important)."

Baker said she will always remember the kindness of those who helped her in her time of need, and thanks to the support of groups like Les Arbres, she is able to make sure that her students and their families have the same joy of knowing that someone cares about them.

"I have to always remember where I came from so I can always stay humble, and this is a way of remembering my journey," she said of the toy drive effort. "Where you are is not where you have to stay, and just like somebody helped me, I'm going to reach back and help somebody else."

For more information about Les Arbres social club, contact Michael Williams via email at michaelawilliams1@flica.net.

Taylor attends gathering for young elected officials

SPECIAL TO THE CHRONICLE

City Council Member James Taylor Jr. traveled to Los Angeles recently to meet with education policy experts and young elected officials from around the country about ways to improve public education for Winston-Salem families.

At the Young Elected Officials Network's Education Policy Academy, Taylor discussed education in Winston-Salem with officials from the U.S. Department of Education, school district leaders, and education policy groups.

At the conference, Taylor studied innovative educational approaches such as community schools, parent accountability, technology in education and modern benchmarking.

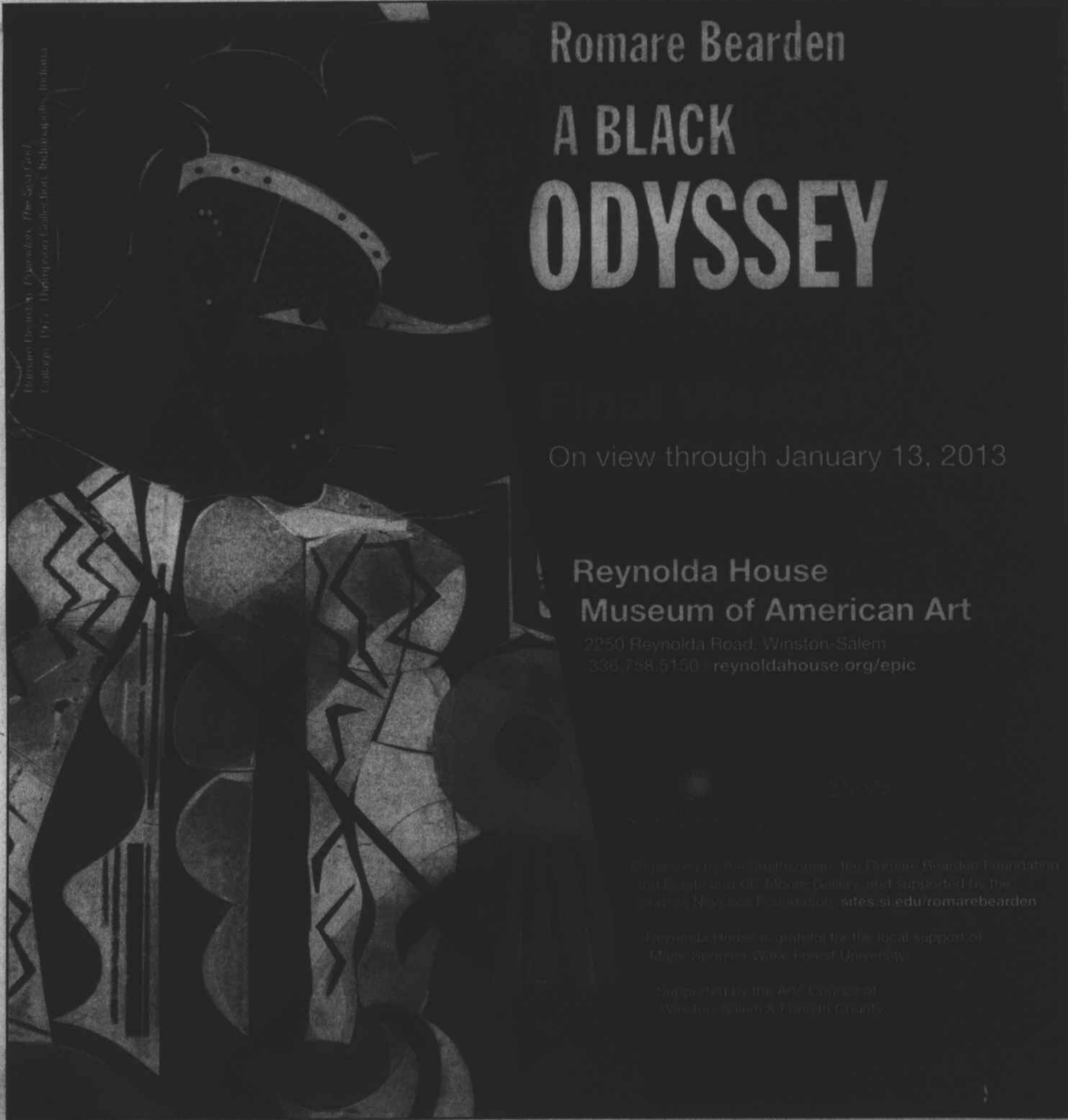
"As an elected official, I am concerned about those things that affect the quality of life and vitality of our community," Taylor said. "Education is a big part of that, and attending the academy helps me better understand the issues affecting education."

Andrew Gillum, the executive director of the Young Elected Officials Network, said, "Every elected official, at any level of office, has a significant role to play in creating an opportunity to learn for all of our children. Our generation of young leaders can serve as agents of change on education reform, given the access to research and tools to develop effective policies."

The Young Elected Officials Network, a program of People for the American Way Foundation, unites and supports leaders under the age of 35 who share a passion for building communities that reflect the values of freedom, fairness and opportunity for all.



Taylor



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