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# THE CHRONICLE

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## Black History: Storytellers

Throughout the month of February people across the country will be celebrating the lives and legacies of great African-Americans who made contributions to society.

### Local couple has coffee table art book published

BY JUDIE HOLCOMB-PACK  
THE CHRONICLE

Cornelia and James Webster admit right off that they are opposites: she's the creative artist and free spirit, often working on several projects at one time; he's the serious, former college football coach, who writes poetry. The combination works for them as they have been married for 45 years and still hold hands and look in each other's eyes like newlyweds.

Cornelia grew up in Roxboro and attended A&T State University, Winston-Salem State University and the University of Florida. She received her master's degree from the University of Kansas. James graduated from the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill where he played football, then went on to coach football at colleges across the country. As the "trailing spouse," it was difficult for Cornelia to maintain a career as they moved about every four years.

When she was 26 years old, she started painting what she called "Sash Art," painting designs on old wooden window frames. When she finished the first project, she told herself, "I will never do that



Cornelia and James Webster with their recently published book, "Society Conscious."

again." But she continued to paint and create unique art. When the couple lived in Denver, Colorado, they

opened an art gallery to show her work. But James' frequent moves always interrupted her art career.

Cornelia said she used art to "occupy her time" while James coached football.

In the early 90s they moved to Winston-Salem and Cornelia continued to create art, including painting, collages and mixed media. In 2010 James saw an ad for a publisher looking for submissions. He had an idea for a book of Cornelia's art and told her, "You should do this." They contacted Mike Simpson of Empire Publishing, who looked at Cornelia's art and agreed to work with them on a book project. They decided that the art needed narratives to accompany them and James nicknamed her art "his-pictorials" because each piece has an historical component or comment.

Some people say if you want to test the strength of your marriage, endure a home remodeling project. Cornelia and James said you should try writing a book together. The project began in 2011, but during the time they were working on it, Cornelia was hospitalized four times. Cornelia said, "We were pretty much pulled in opposite directions." The project, they said, took "patience, understanding, forgiveness, creativity," and was an emotional experience.

See Art on A2

### Pat Stepney, the 'Mother of Storytelling'

BY NIKKI BALDWIN  
FOR THE CHRONICLE

Pat "Mardia" Stepney, known to many as Ma Pat, Aunt Pat or Ms. Pat, is recognized for her commanding, soothing voice when sharing a story. Stepney has been a storyteller all of her life. "I grew up during a time when there was no TV, just radio. The older people would tell stories to the children and then the children would tell stories to each other. The practice of sharing is how I began storytelling."

Stepney's passion for storytelling is obvious and passion is her driving force as she shares her unique gift with so many in the Winston-Salem area. "I love storytelling because for one thing, it is my passion. I always loved children. I always had someone's baby, when I was old enough to do so, sitting on my hip. I loved making the babies and children smile by sharing a story with them. Storytelling is not just my passion, it is like a spirit connecting, it is just love. Overall, it is a spiritual thing for me."

The North Carolina Association of Black Storytellers (NCABS) honored Stepney on Nov. 3 with a Founder's Appreciation plaque for her vision and establishment of the organization. As a member of the National Association of Black Storytellers, Stepney was inspired to create NCABS.

She believes storytelling is important to the African-

American community in helping everyone learn about their history and culture. Stepney expressed her concern about the unfinished work that is lacking from curriculums in today's schools. "Missing in today's schools is the lack of knowledge about the culture and history of African-Americans. There is only one short month celebrating and teaching about the culture and history of African-Americans. Unfortunately, it does not include a lot of information about the culture and history. Children can barely name key figures who contributed to African-American history. The children farther up north know about their history and culture, some of the children join the storyteller's association. Back in the day, teachers taught about the history and contributions of African-Americans; nowadays, it is lacking in today's school system."

Storytelling has such a powerful influence. Stepney believes and understands the gift storytelling plays in her life. "In thinking about storytelling, I just want to continue sharing stories that encourage people to be free and who they want to be. People want to be loved and know someone cares. One can do that by telling your own story. I just want to be me, whatever God places in my spirit, to reach and touch someone through my stories, potentially healing broken hearts, truly inspires and gives me hope. Overall, my passion and love for all of mankind inspires me to continue sharing my stories with so many."



Storyteller Pat Stepney shares a story

Stepney's gift of her captivating stories can be heard at this year's National Black Theatre Festival where she will perform at two sessions during the festival.

### Author Fair showcases modern-day storytellers

BY TEVIN STINSON.  
THE CHRONICLE

Storytellers, and the art of storytelling, has always been a rich tradition in African and African-American culture. In recognition of Black History Month, last weekend the Forsyth County Central Library held a

showcase for modern-day storytellers when they hosted their first African-American Author Fair.

The event, held in the auditorium, featured more than a dozen authors, each with their own story to tell and share with the public. Each of the authors had a table displaying their book and contact information. Throughout the day, they took turns at the microphone to talk about their book.

Sage Chioma, a local poet, playwright and counselor, had her book there. A collection of various poems written by Chioma, "Earth is a Mother's Hood" features poems that "honor the feminine divine." During a brief conversation with The Chronicle, Chioma said her book is an exten-



The African-American Author Fair held at the Forsyth County Central Library was designed to give local authors a chance to connect with readers.

sion of what she does every day.

As a certified substance abuse counselor, Chioma provides counseling for homeless men, women and veterans at Caring Services Inc. in High Point. She has also conducted workshops with teens in New York State juvenile detention centers. Her most recent endeavor is the development of "Reunited Love," a substance abuse program that aids families with loved ones embarking on the path to recovery.

"I have worked on the front lines of addiction for over 20 years and so I'm doing poetry and counseling together. What we're doing is using poetry and expressive arts for healing," said Chioma. "...

The work is like marrying two things I enjoy most - the arts and healing. I'm a practitioner for arts and healing."

Chioma said the power of storytelling is important because it gives a voice to the voiceless and gives people hope that they can overcome life's obstacles. She said, "The power of story is everything, because everyone of us has to make the hero's journey."

"... We're all creating stories all the time. So now I'm constantly re-writing stories about victimhood, about womanhood, about motherhood, and I'm writing it from a place of triumph."

One of the most popular

See Author on A2

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