

'I DREAM A WORLD...'

County Employees Form Chorus, Celebrate Black History Month

BY TERRY POPE

Two years ago, a group of Brunswick County government workers planned an employees' appreciation banquet on a shoestring budget.

They cut corners to save on food expense by serving fried chicken and green beans from the county cafeteria. For entertainment, they entertained themselves.

The employees formed their own choral ensemble. Brunswick County Commissioner Gene Pinkerton even joined the chorus for an evening of singing.

"We received a lot of positive feedback to keep us going," said Regina Alexander, clerk to the county Board of Commissioners. "We have a lot of talented employees, but sometimes that talent is kind of suppressed and hidden."

Like a reserve unit, the ensemble appears ready to spring into duty when called upon to sing. They are workers from various departments: social services, public housing, finance, clean county, the clerk of court's office and many others.

From that larger group has formed a branch organization, the Performing Arts Players, which will sing and read original poetry during a lunch break show this Friday, from noon to 1 p.m., in the cafeteria at the government complex in Bolivia.

Brunswick Clean County Director Terry Munn came up with the name for the group. The singing will conclude a month of Friday shows for the second annual Black History Month observance at the government complex hosted by the county em-



MEMBERS OF THE Brunswick County Arts Performers are, from left, Veronica Manlove, Mildred Bellamy, James Miller, Terry Munn, Linda Green, Linda Stanley, Evelyn Johnson; (front row) Joyce Gardner, Starie Grissett, Nancy Johnson. Vickie Jenerette, far right, is the chorus director.

STAFF PHOTOS BY TERRY POPE



VICKIE JENERETTE, chosen as director of the chorus, feels things are looking up for the performing arts group.

ployees. This year's theme is, "I Dream A World..." based on an original poem by Linda Stanley, who works in the finance department.

The lyrics relate the need for harmony among races and different nations, especially today when war rages in the Persian Gulf between Iraq and American-allied forces:

"I dream a world where tomorrow, all wars will cease to be. I dream a world, a world where some young soldier lives to be a man. I dream a world, a world where there's no homeless sleeping in the streets. I dream a world, a world where there's no hunger and every child can eat."

Personnel Director Starie Grissett will sing the theme song solo at Friday's performance, the first for the Performing Arts Players, which has been practicing during lunch breaks and after work since organizing last month.

When employees met to organize the choral ensemble two years ago, they began to realize the talents of their fellow workers. For the group, singing together became a release from job stress and a way to help brighten the lives of others. The group has sung Christmas carols at local nursing homes and hospitals and many of them are members of their church choirs.

"Our goal is to promote a positive image for Brunswick County and the

Brunswick County employees," said Ms. Alexander. "So many people think that we don't care about other people, that we're just here to draw a paycheck. That's just not true. We do other things."

Invitations were sent to all county employees to rehearse for the Black History Month program. The employees also plan to cook dishes that are native to African nations so those who attend can get a taste of African culture at Friday's matinee.

"We'll also be singing some of the work songs that slaves sang back in slavery times," Ms. Grissett said, "and other songs that they would sing that would give signals to the other slaves."

The larger ensemble was called into action recently during a candlelight vigil and march to honor Brunswick County soldiers now stationed in the Persian Gulf. Ms. Alexander said the employees were honored to be called upon to perform at the ceremony.

The Performing Arts Players met recently to practice for the Black History Month show with plans to practice an hour after work. They got so involved in their singing that worried husbands and wives drove to the complex to look for their spouses. The Players had lost all sense of the passing of time.

"We have interests that are so varied," Ms. Alexander said. "But one thing we all

have in common is that all of us believe in a supreme being. It just seems like we are all of one accord."

For Black History Month, the employees decorated the walls of the public assembly building, which also serves as the cafeteria. Other performances during the month have included a visual arts display by local free-lance photographer Chuck Jones and art by county high school students; singing by Marva Robinson, a special education teacher at North Brunswick High School; and singing and dancing by Pamela Reid, visiting artist at Southeastern Community College.

"A number of employees have told me that it was nice just to see some decorations on the walls in the cafeteria," Ms. Grissett said. "It can be kind of drab over there. It's just a nice change to see some color on the walls."

The Players are hoping to locate a piano that can be kept in the public assembly building at all times so the chorus can continue to grow.

"We think the programs have been going very well," Ms. Alexander said. "But it's just so hard to be organized and structured during a lunch break. It's just a group of people that love to sing."

Ms. Grissett added, "It's not like we do it on county time either. We sacrifice our own time. It takes devotion."

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