

The Gainesville Sun | Gainesville.com

NEWS

‘Celebrate Kwanzaa’ this Friday

AIDA MALLARD Special to the Guardian

Published 2:24 p.m. ET Dec 23, 2013

The community is invited to come together in unity to "Celebrate Kwanzaa" with principles, dancing, music, a film on the late Nelson Mandela, speakers and food.

Celebrate Kwanzaa will be held from 2-5 p.m. Friday at the Alachua County Library Headquarters at 401 E. University Ave. Mandela (1918-2013) became the first black president of South Africa in 1994, serving until 1999. He is a symbol of global peacemaking and the winner in 1993 of the Nobel Peace Prize.

The celebration will include dancing by members of the K-Arts Dance Theater, with artistic director Kevin Anderson; praise dancing by local youth; drumming by Nii Sowa-La; African dancing and storytelling by Dr. Naana Banyiwa Horne, a professor at Santa Fe College; and the screening of the film, "Celebrating Nelson Mandela."

There also will be a meal of turkey, rice and peas, salad, vegetarian dishes, fruit, water and juice. Some of the food will be catered by Caribbean Queen, a restaurant on NW 5th Avenue.

Local children will present the seven principles — unity, self-determination, work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith.

Featured speakers will be Dr. Sherry Dupree, director of United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, or UNESCO Educational Tours; Gladys Perkins, a Porters community historian; Philoron Wright, assistant to the superintendent of community and schools for Alachua County Public Schools; and others.

"We want folks to come and participate in the celebration," said Ayoka Sowa-La, co-founder with her husband, Nii Sowa-La, of AyokaGifts International African Cultural Center Inc., a non-profit organization with a purpose to provide youth with ancient authentic African-centered cultural information. "Kwanzaa is a community celebration

for being thankful and its seven principles are the foundation for community life," said Ayoka Sowa-La.

Cassandra Morrison, owner of Circle of Love Tutoring Services in the Porters community, said Kwanzaa is a celebration that brings people together. She said celebrating Kwanzaa with family and friends has enriched her life because it has helped her to reach out.

"We're celebrating Kwanzaa and the life and accomplishments of Nelson Mandela, who embodied the seven principles (of Kwanzaa)," said Morrison, one of the celebration sponsors, along with Dupree, K-Arts Dance Theater and Faye Williams, a community organizer in the Porters community.

Williams, who is originally from Porters, is back home after living for 30 years in Washington, D.C, where she owned a bookstore.

Morrison hopes many people will come to "Celebrate Kwanzaa." "Kwanzaa is not about buying gifts and commercialism," Morrison said. "Kwanzaa is about living life and being spiritual."

Ayoka Sowa-La said she hopes those who attend the celebration gain principles they will live with each and every day of the 365 days of the year. "The principles are a foundation for living," said Ayoka Sowa-La. "If all our young people were encouraged to live the principles every day of their lives, what a difference it would make in the community and the world."

* What: "Celebrate Kwanzaa," with music, food and a film. * When: 2-5 p.m. Friday.

* Where: Alachua County Library Headquarters, 401 E. University Ave. *

Information: Call 352-485-2079.

KWANZAA CELEBRATION