

Lifestyle

BLACK HISTORY BEE TO VISIT STAGG HIGH

By **Lori Gilbert**

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Record Staff Writer

Terry a. O'Neal was so involved in the Black Student Union when she attended Franklin High School that Black History Month was merely an extension of the organization's year-long work.

"(School counselor Mabel 'Jimi' Choice) had us involved and excited about our culture, proud to be African-Americans," O'Neal said. "We did all kinds of events."

Now 34, the mother of three and an accomplished poet and author who regularly visits schools in hopes of inspiring young people to follow their dreams and passions, O'Neal doesn't see that same level of interest.

"I know we're in a depression, and motivation is very low, morale is low with kids. Parents are working their butts off to keep a roof over their heads and I'm sure black history is probably one of the furthest things from their minds," O'Neal said. "I feel like we're losing it, that kids are losing out ... on our culture, our history."

Through her nonprofit organization, Lend Your Hand, O'Neal is hoping to correct that, launching a Black History Bee, which debuts Feb. 11 at Stagg High School. Her dream is to spend the entire month of February visiting a different school each day to conduct the spelling bee-like event, but this year she only had three confirmed dates, and one Sacramento school canceled.

O'Neal is undeterred, though. She's passionate about motivating young people, whether encouraging them to reach for their dreams, or offering them incentive to learn about black history.

When she brings her Black History Bee to Stagg, she extends her tradition of visiting her hometown on an annual basis.

"It's inspirational to know I was where they are right now," O'Neal said. "It was at a different time, but I've still been to the same places. I grew up there, spent 18 years there."

She left after graduation, married fellow Stocktonian Michael O'Neal, started her family and began writing. O'Neal has published three volumes of poetry, two children's books and a fictional family novel that she's turned into a screenplay and is currently transforming into a stage play. In between shuttling her three children to their numerous activities, cheering on the two who are athletes and volunteering in their schools, she's working on a documentary about a 16-year-old boy who disappeared in Florida in 1983. She also does regular appearances at schools.

She'll spend Feb. 11 visiting Stagg High classrooms, telling her story of growing up in Stockton and becoming a nationally recognized published author, but the lunch hour will be turned over to the competitive Black History Bee, complete with prizes for the winners.

O'Neal has distributed study guides to the school for any student interested in preparing for the competition.

"It's not just for African-American students," O'Neal said. "It's for all students, so they can learn about our history."

She wants kids to know that African-Americans were behind the invention of the stoplight and peanut butter. She wants them to understand the scope of the contributions African-Americans have made.

O'Neal is following in the footsteps of Carter Woodson, the black educator who organized the first Negro History Week in 1926 to celebrate the achievements of blacks. That idea evolved into Black History Month in 1976.

The year's Black History Month takes on new meaning with the election and inauguration of the country's first black president, Barack Obama.

"It will provide for a much stronger sense of pride," said Bobby Bivens, president of the local chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People. "We have to remind everybody that we still have to do our part. The president can only do so much without American citizens pushing for true equality of life for everybody. Jobs, economic conditions, education, the agenda he's promoting at this time, that he's trying to get funds into, is the agenda the NAACP has pushed for since 1909."

Teaching the young and reminding those who are older about that long struggle, and of the heroes in the struggle, or people who accomplished great things while overcoming many obstacles, remains the purpose of Black History Month.

O'Neal understands that.

So do educators from University of the Pacific, who have a variety of activities planned, from Danny Glover's reading of Langston Hughes' and Martin Luther King Jr.'s words to co-sponsoring Gospel Fest at Progressive Missionary Baptist Church.

Local schools get it, too: Commodore Stockton Skills School is having an oratorical contest, and winning students will perform their speeches and poems for their parents beginning at 6:30 p.m. Feb. 19. The Technology Academy has an annual Black History Month Poster Contest, and Fremont Elementary School is having a Black History Laser Tribute Assembly, which includes a musical retrospective featuring songs from legendary musicians and tributes to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. and the Tuskegee Airmen.

Edison High graduate Michael Warren also understands, and for the first time will stage his three-day Black Expo in his hometown.

"It's the most important Black History Month of our generation as African Americans around the world are starting to understand the culture and impact it can have on other cultures," Warren said.

They've all been important, said Tommie Muhammad, who taught African-American history and is a local minister of the Nation of Islam.

"Every black, every white, every Latino, every Asian, everyone needs to know black history," Muhammad said. "We need to teach it every day, every month, every year until we all know the history. There's so much about black history and African history to teach. Our children need to know it adds to the greatness of our nation, the good and the bad. Look at the son of a slave or grandson of a slave; the creation that came from that person adds to the fabric of a strong nation called the United States of America. We should want to highlight that. We all should want to feel proud of that."

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Infobox Headline

- "An Evening with Langston and Martin," 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, Faye Spanos Concert Hall, free.

Actors Danny Glover and Felix Justice read the words of Langston Hughes and Martin Luther King Jr.

- Delta Sigma Theta Scholarship Dinner, 4 p.m. Sunday, Grace Covell Hall.

The local chapter of the largest African-American Greek-lettered sorority in the world holds a fundraising dinner.

Information: (209) 946-7707 or (209) 946-7745.

- Black Family Heritage Day,

9 a.m. Feb. 14, De Rosa University Center, free.

The all-day event includes a business fair that will allow attendees to support local black-owned businesses, dance and musical performances, poetry readings, and face painting and crafts for children.

Information: (209) 946-7707 or (209) 946-7745.

- Big Valley Black Expo, 11 a.m-

5 p.m. Feb. 14-16, San Joaquin Fairgrounds, \$2.

The 20th annual event, previously held in Sacramento, features live entertainment and a variety of booths and activities, including a career fair, homeownership/foreclosure workshop, education summit and black business owners round-table discussion.

An African wedding, Stockton's Got Talent contest, fashion show and hair styling contest are among the planned programs.

Two awards programs "" for outstanding women in the community and for Stockton icons "" are planned, along with a 1,000 Black Women March, a parade for anyone wanting to join the walk from San Joaquin Street and Martin Luther King Boulevard (Charter Way) to the fairgrounds, to call attention to issues facing African-American households, many of which are led by single women.

Information: (209) 423-9761.

- "Most Valuable Player," 1 and

3 p.m. Feb. 15, Gallo Center for the Arts, Modesto, \$8-\$12.

The play celebrates the life of Jackie Robinson, who broke Major League Baseball's color barrier.

Information: (209) 338-2100 or www.galloarts.org.

- Sylvia Alden Roberts lecture, 7 p.m. Feb. 18, Dogwood Forum theater, Columbia College, free.

Local author and historian Sylvia Alden Roberts discusses her recently published book, "Mining for Freedom: Black History Meets the California Gold Rush," which explores the stories of the 5,000 African-American men and women who arrived in the state and were part of the fierce pre-Civil War racial controversy.

Information: (209) 588-5111.

- Poetry Reading by Wanda Coleman, 7-9 p.m. Feb. 19, University of the Pacific's Wendell Phillips Center, Room 140, free.

Poet and author Wanda Coleman, a finalist for California poet laureate in 2005, shares her work.

- Gospel Fest, 7 p.m. Feb. 20, Progressive Missionary Baptist Church, 2820 South B St., Stockton.

A few tickets remain for the concert featuring Marvin Sapp, one of the biggest names in gospel music, and rising gospel star Deon Kipping.

Ticket information: (209) 946-2474 or www.tix.com.

- "Color Struck," 7:30 p.m. Feb. 25, Faye Spanos Concert Hall, free.

Comedian Donald E. Lacy examines institutionalized racism with humor.

Information: (209) 946-7707 or (209) 946-7745.

Celebration of Black History Month can begin in your own living room

Celebrating Black History Month doesn't have to mean venturing out to planned events, whose numbers seem smaller than in years past, perhaps a nod to the current economy, local activists say.

There are other ways to embrace the spirit of Black History Month, no matter your age, income or racial makeup.

"One thing every family can do is have the younger generation interview and record older generations for family history purposes," suggested retired educator Mary Flenoy-Kelley. "You can do it at home, and it doesn't cost a lot, but it would be rich in terms of dividends. With all the technology kids have available to them, imagine what they could put together that would be sophisticated and a beneficial family history."

Tony Washington, public relations manager for the Family Resource & Referral Center and organizer of the local Apollo Night talent show, suggests researching history from library books, or, he said, "They could rent a movie and sit down as a family and watch it then discuss it. 'The Autobiography of Miss Jane Pitman' or 'Roots,' movies like that, generate a lot of discussion. They give parents an opportunity to talk to young people about where they were in history and where we are now with President Obama."

Local Nation of Islam minister Tommie Muhammad had a similar notion about exploring history.

"They could take a ride down to Allensworth, one of the first black settlements in the San Joaquin Valley," Muhammad said. "They can see the legacy of Allensworth, and what those people tried to do after slavery. They'd learn something new about the San Joaquin Valley, about an area that would have survived without racism in the valley. Then they can rent 'Buck and the Preacher' and feel good."

Or, Muhammad said, to get an understanding of today's black community, "I would say go and visit a black religious service."

"" Lori Gilbert