

## Multifarious Celebrations of Black History Month @ Our Library

by Anne Coleman

On February 3, 2009, the Mary Livermore Library kicked off its celebration of Black History Month with a presentation by **Mama Dip (Mildred Council)**, the owner of a well-known restaurant in Chapel Hill that specializes in what Mama Dip calls “country cooking.”



Mama Dip (Mildred Council) and Spring Council

Mama Dip, in a low-key, intimate conversation with her audience, shared her recollections of starting the restaurant with very little money, but with lots of support from her family and business colleagues. In fact, the very first meal she served at the restaurant was actually food she had purchased to cook lunch for her children whom she had brought to the restaurant with her. However, when customers showed up wanting to purchase meals, she sold them her family’s home-cooked food and then bought more meat and vegetables to cook for her family and other customers. At the end of the day, she was astonished at the amount of money her simple, country food had brought in. Her restaurant continued to grow from this impromptu, hurriedly prepared meal to being a landmark establishment in Chapel Hill.

Mama Dip was accompanied by her daughter, **Spring Council**, who shared her memories of a loving mother who still

managed to give her children lots of attention, in spite of her demanding schedule at the restaurant. Several of Mama Dip’s children now work at the restaurant with her.

The only thing missing from this presentation was that Mama Dip did not get an opportunity to prepare one of her signature dishes for the audience.

On February 11, the Library continued its celebration of Black History Month by cosponsoring a series of events commemorating the 20<sup>th</sup> National African American Read-In (AARI). The annual Read-In activities are designed to promote literacy among African Americans. The UNCP African American Read-In events this year were cosponsored by the Friends of the Library, the Office of Multicultural and Minority Affairs, the School of Education, the Office of Academic Affairs, and FirstBook.

The first AARI event, held on February 11, featured an African storyteller, **Obakunle Akinlana**. Mr. Akinlana, accompanied by a talented dancer, shared traditional African folktales and history, using drums, shakers, and other traditional African musical instruments. The audience particularly enjoyed the parts of the program that allowed them to participate. At one point, Mr. Akinlana robed two audience members in traditional African garments as he taught the audience Yoruba, a Nigerian language, words for each piece of clothing. Later in the program, some members of the audience formed an African band while the remaining audience members became African dancers. The music and the dancing may not have been the best, but the enthusiasm and enjoyment were at the top of the chart.



Obakunle Akinlana dresses audience member Tiffany Taylor

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The second AARI program, held on February 13, was a Children's Hour. During this event, African American children's stories were read to a group of youngsters from the Shining Stars Preschool and Daycare of Pembroke and two groups of youngsters from the Greengrove Headstart Program in Fairmont. The readers for the event were UNCP students from **Dr. Swanee Dickson's** elementary education class.

The third event in the AARI series, held in the Library on February 17, was an oral readings program. Participants in this program included **Katy Locklear**, Miss UNCP 2009; **Nefertiti Byrd**, Miss Black North Carolina USA 2009; **Amanda McCoy**, Miss Teen Essence USA of Wake County; UNCP students and faculty; and **Sherwin Rice**, the Vice President of the North Carolina Library Association. They all read favorite poems, passages, and excerpts from African-American-authored literature.

The fourth, and final, event of the African American Read-In series was a book discussion of **Cornel West's** latest book, *Hope on a Tightrope: Words and Wisdom*. The discussion was led by **Dr. Scott Hicks**, an associate professor in the UNCP English Department. Dr. Hicks was joined by five UNCP panelists: **Sally Vallabha**, a faculty member in the Chemistry Department; **Dr. Frankie Powell**, an associate professor in the School of Education; **Jamel Porter**, Vice President of the Student Government Association; **Quinn Davis**, President of the African American Student Organization; and **Carine Francois**, President of the UNCP Chapter of The National Council of Negro Women. After a lively and insightful discussion of various aspects of the book, **Trin-A-Thoughts (Petrina Bryant)**, a NAACP House Poet, ended the program with one of her original poems, *The Village*.

All of the Black History Month activities were well attended; many community supporters and students came to the events and enjoyed themselves. Audience participation this year was phenomenal, particularly at the African storyteller event. The presenters and topics at the Library's Black History Month activities just keep getting better; the cosponsors are already looking forward to planning even more exciting and thought-provoking events for next year.



Top Left to Right: James Hampton, Nefertiti Byrd, Amanda McCoy, Katy Locklear, Gwen McKiver, Anne Coleman and Robert Canida

Bottom Left to Right: Jamel Porter, Sherwin Rice, Vivette Jeffries-Logan, Dr. Frankie Powell, and Dr. Betty Brown