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KOKOMO TRIBUNE

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Section E

Inside

Weddings	E2
Lisa Fipps	E3
Advice	E7

KWANZAA KEEPS CULTURE ALIVE

It's a celebration of family values

By SCOTT SLADE
Tribune assistant Style editor

Naana Banyiwa Horne left Ghana 17 years ago — at age 29 — for America.

But she has never left her culture.

By living the principles of Kwanzaa, a holiday rooted in the belief that black America can achieve social change by disclosing people to their cultural heritage, she hopes to maintain Africa's significance in her life, and promote its import to her children and all Americans of African descent.

"It's basically a celebration of Africa," said Horne, a professor of African-American and Women's studies at Indiana University Kokomo.

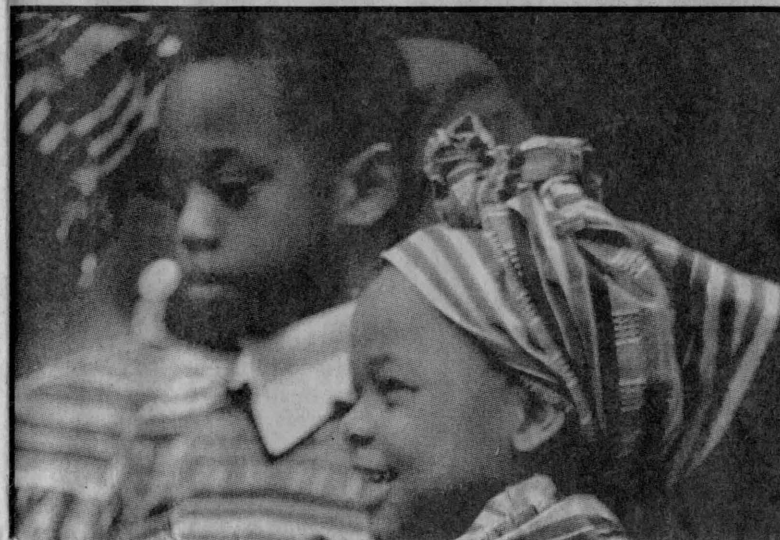
The cultural holiday was created in 1966 and is formally marked by festivities Dec. 26 through New Year's day.

"Every day, some principle that affirms the well being of the community is celebrated. We remind ourselves of things that are important to us and also to celebrate those things that we have accomplished. And also just to have some plain, good fun."

While Horne said her family doesn't always celebrate Kwanzaa "like the book says," she, her



Naana Banyiwa Horne poses behind Kanzaa table with her three children, Ndyanao, left, Maame Miensima and Kofi Amu.



Local woman finds meaning in Kwanzaa

A few years ago, on a chilly December evening, while I was living in Evansville, I took advantage of a public Kwanzaa celebration at the red-brick, inner-city St. John Catholic Church.

I descended the stairs to the basement level of the church to find out what all the excitement was all about.

The basement was set up with several rows of folding chairs with about seven long tables at the front of the room. Tablecloths displayed distinct African designs and the centerpieces were rectangular straw mats covered with apples, oranges, ears of corn and fall gourds representing "First Fruits"—the meaning of the word Kwanzaa.

DOROTHY WORD

GUEST COLUMNIST



The Kinara or seven-branched candle holder or graced the head table and the symbolism of the Kinara and candles was explained by the mistress of ceremony. She and the other participants on the program for the evening wore traditional African garb of bold prints and striking patterns.

People stood around in groups of twos and threes laughing and talking about events of the day, wait-

try to live by the principles everyday.

"We make sure what is embodied in the principles we live by."

The principles are "unity," "self-determination," "collective work and responsibility," "cooperative economics," "purpose," "creativity" and "faith."

"These principles really help focus us on the things that keep us together, and give us self pride, self-determination, community, economic (independence)."

Kwanzaa, she said, was adapted from African celebrations, where communities give thanks for their fortunes.

If a community grows yams, it would have a yam festival, she said.

"These festivals are organized around what keeps the physical community alive," Horne explained. "The essence is to get together to celebrate things that sustain life."

Because these festivals often last a week or longer, she said, the Christmas holidays became a convenient time in the United States for a week-long festival.

"However, Kwanzaa is a celebration that is really for all time, because Kwanzaa is one of those things that keep us going on a daily basis."

She said whenever her friends and family think the occasion is right to get together and have a Kwanzaa celebration, they do.

"Anytime there is need to affirm who we are, and celebrate our successes, we can celebrate Kwanzaa."

Furthermore, she added, Kwanzaa has become an alternative for people who choose not to get involved with the festivities surrounding Christmas.

"For black people in this country who are so marginalized by the mainstream culture, Christmas can be a very alienating period ... because the emphasis is so on material things. It's like if you don't have money, Christmas isn't a time for you."

"So Kwanzaa was a sort of an alternative to the mainstream ...materialist-based celebration of Christmas. And to put the family in the spirit — to put meaning back into Christmas."

"It's not about gifts, it's not about money ... It's community centered. People get together, and just getting together really



Horne leads Kwanzaa celebrations at IUK in 1995.

is its own reward. And most times when gifts are exchanged, they are gifts that are made by the people involved."

In her home, Kwanzaa symbols are arranged on a short table that sits about a foot out from the wall: There's a customary straw mat draped over the table which symbolizes tradition; as tradition is the basis for Kwanzaa, so this mat will support all other symbols.

There's a Kinara, a candlestick holder with seven candles, one for each day and principle of Kwanzaa.

There will be an ear of corn that will represent offspring, the continuance of life and culture.

There will also be other food, ultimately to be eaten.

"The things that are used for celebrating — the food, the vegetables, the food items that symbolize the harvest — these are things people can actually take home and cook and eat. So, it gives meaning to sharing."

Since moving to Kokomo three years ago, Horne has worked at IUK with the Umoja, the IUK black students organization, to hold Kwanzaa celebrations.

That first year, roughly 50 people attended the celebration. That number has grown with each year, and more individuals have begun pitching in.

"Last year's celebration was community centered, because members of the community contributed by participating. Last year ... we brought dancing and performed Kwanzaa rather than

just getting together to talk about it."

"The kind of thing we do is involved. You don't sit. We don't do the kind of thing where you sit and someone else does, and you watch and at the end of it you politely clap and go home."

As a mother and educator, Horne said she can use Kwanzaa to instill a sense of pride and



Ndyanao Horne and her brother Kofi Amu do Kwanzaa in full dress.

confidence in new generations.

"Personally, because of my community involvement, I work a lot with children, and I do what I do to keep them off the street, one, and also to give them something concrete they can be proud of ... also, to teach them knowledge of themselves, of Africa and of their heritage."

"It's important in a place like

this to find actual ways in which you can make Africa meaningful in the lives of African Americans. Otherwise, it's Tarzan, it's so far removed ... it's the land of disease. All these negatives that have no real (meaning) in any positive way for the people."

(Editor's note: IUK Kwanzaa celebrations take place beginning Jan. 15. For more information, call 455-9359.

HOLIDAY IS CELEBRATED HERE

By SCOTT SLADE

Tribune assistant Style editor

Poetry, singing and African music are helping mark Kwanzaa each night during the holiday at the Fountain of Life Worship Center, 611 E. Jackson St.

"I wanted to do something locally," said event organizer Sister Betty Fletcher, who credited the Fountain of Life Worship Center's Pastor Charles Glen with the idea to organize the church's first Kwanzaa celebrations.

Celebrations, which began Thursday, run daily at 6 p.m. through Wednesday.

Each night's festivities include symbolic ceremonies and educational lectures.

Of the seven principles of Kwanzaa, the first three have been discussed: they include "unity," "self-determination" and "collective work and responsibility."

Tonight, Pastor Emma Glenn of the Fountain of Life Worship Cen-

ter in Marion will talk about "cooperative economics," which Fletcher says means "we must build and take care of our communities and that we must work together to solve our problems."

The remaining scheduled speakers are:

Larry Wilson, community activist, who will discuss "purpose"

Pastor Jack Woodard, Strait Gate Total Needs Ministry, who will speak on "creativity"

Pastor Charles Glen, who will talk about "faith"

"We're going to salute the future," Fletcher said, describing the tone she hopes the talks take. "We're going to talk about people that done something in the past that has made a difference for our future."

She said through the principles of Kwanzaa, she aims to equip young people with the cultural knowledge to pass on to their children.

"It's to educate our young peo-



Charles Glen

ple so they know what's going on, so they can take over for the future."

Kwanzaa, however, won't stop Jan. 1.

"It's an education thing where everyone

is learning what Kwanzaa is and then we're going out into the community and practice what we learn," Fletcher said, explaining how the spirit will last.

She said using Kwanzaa's message, children will decorate small pieces of fabric which adults will then sew together into lap quilts for distribution at all nursing homes in Kokomo.

"We're going to try to get all of them," Fletcher said.

For more information, call the Fountain of Life Worship Center at 457-6952.

ing for the official start of the celebration.

The mistress of ceremony was busily checking on last minute details: Were all the speakers present? Had the dancers arrived? Was the priest satisfied that everything was in order?

Having exhausted her list of "things to check on," the mistress of ceremonies was ready. People settled into their chair and the program began.

Seven speakers sat at the tables up front ready to discuss the Seven Principles of Kwanzaa.

Before rising to speak, each needed to address the oldest person present in the room for permission to speak.

Since the oldest person was a woman, each speaker asked "Mother, may I speak?"

This was keeping with the African tradition of honoring and showing respect to one's elders.

"You may speak," she responded. This meant permission was granted to the person waiting to talk about a Kwanzaa Principle.

The most festive part of the program featured the NIA Dancers — boys and girls, pre-school and middle school age, in attractive African outfits, energetically dancing traditional African dances to contagious African rhythms.

My introduction to Kwanzaa that night at St. John's made clear to me that this holiday of Dec. 26-Jan. 1 in no way conflicts with Christmas festivities, as I had erroneously believed.

The undisturbed spirit of Unity, or UMOJA, that I witnessed at that gathering — the people in African dress and people in mainstream wear, some people fluent in Swahili and we who stumble over the words — reassured me that indeed, It Takes a Village. A village of celebration. A village of which I am a contributing member, duty-bound by KUJICHAGULIA — self-determination and KUUMBA — creativity — to make a positive difference in my life and in the lives of others.

■ Related Story: Kwanzaa recipes.

Page E3

KT photos by Clint Keller

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