

Sunday, February 03, 2013

Black literacy fest: ‘Books can be fun’

By [Helaine Williams](#)

LITTLE ROCK — Although he now lives in Los Angeles, Patrick Oliver hasn’t stopped his quest to promote reading and literacy in his home state.

The literary advocate, activist, radio talk-show host and author is helping to usher in a “black literary renaissance” event in Little Rock. It’s happening “with those involved promoting literature as a tool of empowerment for children, youth and adults in the black community,” he says.

Oliver’s latest project is the Reading and Writing for Success Festival to celebrate Black History Month, which begins at 9 a.m. Saturday in the Old Main Building Auditorium of Arkansas Baptist College, 1621 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Little Rock. Oliver says he’s trying to “create that festival atmosphere that books can be fun.”

The day begins with a 9 a.m. sign-in and author meet-and-greet. At 10, there will be a Black History Month tribute featuring Janis F. Kearney, former White House diarist, founder of Writing Our World Press and best-selling author of *Daisy: Between a Rock and a Hard Place*.

Latanya L. Fanion, educational leader, author (*Why Is Your House Bigger Than Mine*) and former special education teacher and administrator, will discuss the issue of cultural competence in contemporary schools and classrooms.

From 11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m., attendees will again have the opportunity to meet the authors and have their books signed.

Oliver, the founder of the Say It Loud! Readers and Writers literary-arts program, is the host of Literary Nation Talk Radio, which airs at noon Thursdays on KABF-FM, 88.3, and features award-winning authors. He organized local individuals and organizations into the first Reading and Writing for Success event, a Dec. 1 forum that highlighted 15 authors and organizations that use literature as part of their projects. Reading and Writing for Success events will be held each quarter, Oliver says.

“Part of it is to really address an issue that ... had been around for a long time - that if you expose black children to books and material that looks like them, they will more than likely embrace it,” Oliver says. “We want young people to connect reading and writing with success.”

Along with Kearney and Oliver, individuals and organizations involved in Reading and Writing for Success are:

Akasha Hull, retired college professor, nationally noted literary scholar and author of the recently released novel *Neicy*.

Pyramid Art Books & Custom Framing, whose owner, Garbo Hearne, frequently hosts literary events.

Martha Dixon, author of the autobiography *Triumph Beyond Measure* and inaugural-gown designer for former first lady Hillary Rodham Clinton.

Edmond Davis, a Baptist College instructor, author of *Pioneering African American Aviators Featuring Tuskegee Airmen of Arkansas*, and founder of *Aviate Through Knowledge Productions*.

Michele Wright, chief executive officer of The Greater Ozarks - Arkansas Blood Region of the American Red Cross, and author of inspirational book *Dear Success Seeker*.

The Henry L. Dumas Foundation Inc., based in the Sweet Home community in Pulaski County and founded by Minnie Hayes, a cousin of Dumas, a short-story writer and poet.

Arkansas Baptist College and its fundraising football game the Delta Classic 4 Literacy.

Others participating are author and poet Patricia McGraw; the Arkansas Black History Quiz Bowl Association, led by Frank Bateman; Jason Irby, author of *Love Within Life: A Book of Life's Shared Experiences*; Angela Williams, author of *Transformation: For Women of All Walks of Life* and vice president of the Henry L. Dumas Foundation; playwright Kyle Miller; and radio station KABF.

Oliver also is a literary consultant and is publisher and editor of the *Essence* magazine best-selling anthology *Turn the Page and You Don't Stop: Sharing Successful Chapters in Our Lives With Youth*.

Before now, he says, most people knew only of the literary efforts of Kearney and Hearne. "All this stuff was brewing up ... kind of fragmented events, activities that were taking place in our community. And because of that, there began kind of a growing interest in what we all were doing.

"With all that going on around culture and literacy and reading and books ... I said, 'Why not put this under some kind of umbrella?'"

The next Reading and Writing for Success event will be held in April as part of National Poetry Month.

Reading and Writing for Success Festival

9 a.m. Saturday, Old Main Building Auditorium, Arkansas Baptist College, 1621 Martin Luther King Jr. Drive, Little Rock

Admission: free

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