

March 22, 2012 at 8:22 am

Forum pitches role of wedlock

Program to show how marriage helps black community

- By Oralandar Brand-Williams
- The Detroit News



Bernadine and Thomas Horne will share their secrets to 45 years of wedded bliss. (Robin Buckson / The Detroit News)

Detroit — Like so many longtime married couples, Thomas and Bernadine Horne say communication is key to a successful marriage.

The Hornes have been married for 45 years and have been completing each other's sentences for years now.

Last month, they were among 53 other couples who renewed their vows at an event sponsored by their church.

This weekend, the Detroit couple will share secrets to a lasting marriage at the second annual Black Marriage Day Weekend at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History. The event kicks off at 6 p.m. Friday and continues from 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Saturday. The cost is \$55 per couple and \$35 for singles at the door.

The program, part of a national event, will bring together local married couples and experts to give tips on keeping marriages alive and to discuss the importance of such unions in the black community.

"If there were more married couples, we would not have so many single-parent homes and the problems we have," said 70-year-old Thomas Horne.

While the national divorce rate hovers around 50 percent, it is believed the divorce rate of black marriages ranges from 54-66 percent, according to various recent studies.

According to 2000 U.S. Census figures, black men and women had the lowest marriage rates.

Organizers of the event want to emphasize the link between solid marriages and relationships and healthy families and individuals.

"We're in a crisis, and marriage is becoming extinct in American society and unfortunately the African-American community is leading the way," said Christina Dixon, vice chairwoman of the board of the Marriage Resource Center in Detroit, which is co-sponsoring the event.

"Over 70 percent of our children are being born into families where there are not both parents," Dixon said. "Studies have shown those who have both parents are less likely to drop out of school, end up committing crimes and are less likely to be incarcerated."

The Hornes say they work at their marriage by doing a lot of things together such as camping and attending marriage programs at their church.

"Being married is something you continuously are working on," said Thomas Horne.

For Bernadine Horne, 71, it's about not letting spats mushroom into larger disputes.

"We have disagreements, but we come together on it," she said.

Melvindale residents Steven and Ariss Pierce, both in their mid-20s, will be part of a workshop on making marriage work at the conference.

The couple was married last June and said many in their generation view marriage as "overrated" and want to avoid it because they fear divorce.

Steven Pierce said he hopes the couple's participation will show other young people that "marriage is still happening."

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