Letter from the President

Any organization or institution is only as strong as its membership, as it is the base and bedrock upon which that institution is founded. The membership is also the engine that keeps the organization moving forward and, like any engine, it needs fuel to keep it operating and moving forward.

The fuels that keep the membership engine moving at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History are information and involvement. Without a steady flow of information to the members and involvement from them in the Museum's activities, the engine slows down and could eventually come to a halt.

Full Speed Ahead

With that in mind, I'm pleased to report that in this inaugural issue of the membership newsletter there are no shortages of activities to become involved in or information to share. So, for the remainder of this year and for all of 2010, it's full speed ahead.

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Let me start by highlighting our current exhibits and then mentioning a few things that we have planned for the future. No sports fan, or anyone interested in the impact that one man's journey through life has on a nation and the world, can afford to miss the Joe Louis: Hometown Hero exhibit, which runs through May of 2010.

Who Am I

We are equally excited about the two exhibits that are related to the origins of mankind. One, Who Am I? – Lucy, The Story of Human Origins Exhibition, from the International Institute of New York, will give an anthropological peek at the look of early human beings. The other, Who am I? – The Genographic Project, brought to you in conjunction with the National Geographic magazine, will help you – with the aid of a special kit – trace, explore and understand where you came from and, ultimately, who you are. Every member is invited to visit these exhibits and participate in their own personalized trek through history. These exhibitions are explained in detail further in this newsletter.

Hats Off...

Be prepared to have your hats knocked off in January when the exhibit Crowning Glories: Status, Style and Self Expression opens. The goal of this exhibition is to examine the cultural and social significance of headwear adorning black women from the 1850s to the present.

In addition, we recently announced a historic, three-year partnership with Eastern Michigan University that will enhance our educational outreach to more students and teachers. The first project coming from that agreement will be a multifaceted presentation of the history of the Underground Railroad.

To The Community

However, nothing is more important than community participation, so I strongly encourage you to bring your friends to the Museum to “get your Hustle on” in one of our exciting dance classes or have your children or grandchildren learn about their history through games and hands-on displays. And please stop by our wonderful library and scan through our digitized archives.

Finally, we never could have attempted to do any of the things mentioned above without you, the membership—25,000 wonderful persons strong,—or our ambassadors who use every opportunity to talk up the Museum with whomever they meet.

I and the staff thank you for helping make every person's visit to the Museum an uplifting experience at a truly American historical jewel. We appreciate your support and ask you to encourage others to join you as members.
At the suggestion of my daughter (Sylvia), I have been a volunteer at the museum since March of this year. At first I was reluctant. After all, what skills do I have that would promote and enhance the working of the Museum? Though I had been a teacher in the Detroit public schools, I had also been retired since 1985 and I wasn’t sure if I had anything to contribute. I quickly began to discover that I had plenty to contribute.

The Museum has so many opportunities for contribution that there is a way for everyone to be useful. Each volunteer has some skill, strength, attribute, or asset that can be utilized to support the Museum. Some volunteers are very computer literate and use this skill to help the Museum edit, update, and produce membership files, fliers, flyers and other data-entry projects. Other volunteers discover they can help in a variety of different ways.

Each department of the Museum will provide a new experience and opportunity for service. Sometimes the project can be as simple as folding and preparing envelopes for mailing or can include such activities as helping children with art workshops, framing pictures, and other craft activities. The instructors appreciate the extra hands of a volunteer as they seek to educate and entertain the children and help them to experience the joy of accomplishment and celebrating some of the brightest stars of our community.

I have also discovered that the volunteer experience isn’t limited to one’s contribution to the Museum. I have found, to my pleasant surprise, that I’ve gained as much as I’ve given.

In addition to making some new friends (and renewing some long lost friendships), I have been able to participate in a host of activities and events that I’ve completely enjoyed. For example, I have participated in receptions honoring and celebrating some of the brightest stars of our community.

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How exciting (not to mention the great food)! I have also experienced selling raffle tickets at Comerica Park (my first visit), and the Detroit opera (again, my first visit), a trip to Idlewild, an exciting Jazz/R&B concert, and an exciting outdoor festival.

Working with various staff members has increased my knowledge of the overall structure of the Museum and its importance to the community. I feel a special pride in being a part of the committed team that makes the Charles H. Wright Museum of African-American History one of the largest and greatest institutions of its kind in the world.

The Museum has so many facets of history to explore. Walking through the various exhibits whatever opportunity. I’ve also enjoyed bringing friends and family members (particularly those coming for the first time) to visit and learn as well.

On each of these occasions my guests have been amazed and impressed by the experience. Because the Museum is both impressive and “amazing,” I consider this to be a normal reaction. They leave with an even more appreciative understanding of their African heritage.

Not long ago, I had an opportunity to be “amazed” and “impressed” along with my guests. I had the pleasure of bringing a friend, his 10-year-old son, and two nieces (ages 9 and 11), who were visiting from Boston, on a tour of the Museum. This was their first visit to the city of Detroit as well as the Museum. I had been looking forward to this particular visit and would be viewing the Joe Louis exhibit at the same time as my guests.

The moment we stepped through the doors we were transported through time. The visuals are stunning, beautifully presented and an incredible job of highlighting not only the details of the life of this great man, but how his life and accomplishments are integrated with that of the city of Detroit and the Museum’s African-American community.

In other words, his story is our story.

With each step we took deeper into the exhibit a lively discussion began to develop about Joe Louis’ journey into history and why Detroiters identify with him and feel such immense pride. I was able to share with my young visitors the stories told to me by my parents and grandparents of his great victories and point to those moments on the timelines in the displays.

The material and information are presented in such a manner that it makes it easy to share and discuss. Ultimately, we discovered that we had spent almost as much time in the Joe Louis exhibit as we had in the rest of the Museum. I was particularly pleased by the response of the 10-year-old young man. He had never heard of Joe Louis before this visit and the place in his eyes was a reminder to me how necessary it is for our children to have heroes.

As he closely examined a photograph of Joe Louis, gloved fist raised in victory, he turned to me, smiled and said, “Cool, Black Power!”

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But my membership means much more than that to me. It’s an investment in the knowledge and understanding of my cultural history. We can list the many benefits of being a member; unlimited visits, discounts in the Museum store, discounts on special events, and members only preview invites. The list goes on and on, but the experience you have when you walk through the And Still We Rise exhibit is something that touches the soul.

The Museum has so many facets of history to explore. Walking through the Women of a New Tribe exhibit with my teenage daughter; seeing the faces of the many black women; reading about their accomplishments and how we’ve come such a long way offered priceless moments. This exhibit has portraits of women that she may meet in her lifetime. The day gave her a lesson in living history and portrayed the courage that she could relate to in a comfortable, non-intimidating atmosphere. I was excited to be able to share that with her through the benefit of being a member.

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Charles H. Wright Museum, EMU Form Cooperative Underground Railroad Educational Partnership

Federal Grant to Provide Teachers, Students with Online Access to African American History

History students around the world will soon be able to go online to retrieve almost all of the information available on the Underground Railroad’s unique contribution to U.S. pre-Civil War-era history thanks to a government grant and a cooperative venture between Eastern Michigan University and Detroit’s Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History.

The Ypsilanti, MI-based university and the world’s largest African American history museum, along with the Qualla Watkins Heritage Project, launched the Cooperative Underground Railroad Education Partnership, which over a three-year period, will create online materials and activities to help students learn about Africa and African American history in general and the Underground Railroad in particular. The project will also generate a state-of-the-art touch screen and multimedia gallery on Underground Railroad history, an academic game for high school competition based on that history, and an online course for K through 12 teachers.

According to Dr. Vernon Polite, Dean, College of Education, Office of Urban Education and Education Equity at EMU, “The Partnership aims to develop an online portal for students, teachers and researchers to access information about these histories, offer professional development for instructors, and create electronic materials for the Pan African Nurturing and Development Association (PANDA) Games, which is sponsored in the Detroit metropolitan area by Eastern Michigan University.”

The Underground Railroad Educational Partnership is the first of several cooperative projects agreed upon earlier this year between EMU and the Museum.

The Underground Railroad Educational Partnership is the first year between EMU and the Museum.

Juanita Moore, President and CEO of the Charles H. Wright Museum, notes that it was appropriate for the Museum to be an integral member of the Partnership because, “It’s located in Detroit, one of the five major cities that were ‘gateways to freedom’ for tens of thousands of runaway slaves seeking refuge in nearby Canada, thus giving this area one of the richest and most compelling Underground Railroad histories.”

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Discover YOUR deep ancestry by purchasing a kit from the Charles H. Wright Museum and tracking your genetic lineage on-line with National Geographic’s Genographic Project. It makes a unique gift, too. Purchase your kit at the Museum Store or by calling 313-494-5807.

The Charles H. Wright Museum’s Participation Kit costs (Museum Members: U.S. $109.95 or Non-members U.S. $134.95 (plus shipping and handling and tax if applicable)). The kit includes:

1. DVD with a Genographic Project overview hosted by Dr. Spencer Wells, visual instructions on how to collect a DNA sample using a cheek scraper, and a bonus feature program: the National Geographic Channel/PBS production The Journey of Man.
2. Exclusive National Geographic map illustrating human migratory history and created especially for the launch of the Genographic Project.
3. Buccal swab kit, instructions, and a self-addressed envelope in which to return your cheek swab sample. (You can download a pdf of instructions or the order and consent form. You will need Acrobat Reader.)
4. Detailed brochure about the Genographic Project, featuring stunning National Geographic photography
5. Confidential Genographic Project ID # (GPID) to anonymously access your results at this Web site

The purchase price also includes the cost of the testing and analysis — an expensive process — that will take place once your sample is sent in.

An Exhibition of National Geographic & IBM’s Genographic Project with Lucy, The Story of Human Origins Exhibition, from the International Museum Institute of New York.

DNA TEST KITS!

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Get the last of the signed Annie Lee collectables either online through our eBay store (go to CharlesHWrightMuseum.org and look for the eBay link on the home page) or come into our store and check them out. These collectables are hot and won’t last long! Call 313-494-5873 for more information.

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(313)494-5828  (313)494-5831  (313)494-5893

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