

LIVING



Loretta Howell of Natrona Heights, seen with an African sculpture, is organizer of the Black History Program at Allegheny-Kiski Valley Historical Society Heritage Museum in Tarentum.

PHOTOS BY JUSTIN GIBBO/VALLEY NEWS DISPATCH

Celebrating culture



Black History program at Heritage Museum delves into Underground Railroad, artifacts and crafts

BY MISTY CHYBICKYNSKI
FOR THE VALLEY NEWS DISPATCH

A community-wide event to celebrate Black History Month aims to connect the diverse cultures in the Alle-Kiski Valley.

The Allegheny-Kiski Valley Historical Society will host a Black History Program from 2 to 3:30 p.m. Sunday at its museum in Tarentum in coordination with Bethel African Methodist Episcopal Church.

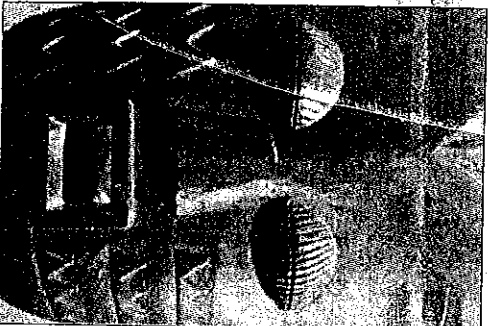
"We are hoping to meet a diverse group of people and let them share the warmth, love, sorrow and everything else that comes with African-American history," says program organizer Loretta Howell of Natrona Heights.

The program will feature three of the museum's exhibitors who have displayed items relevant to black culture, African crafts and the deep roots blacks have in Alle-Kiski Valley history. The exhibits will be on view for the remainder of the month, but during the program Larry Rowe, Midge Patrick and Howard Clemmons will discuss their favorite items with attendees.

The program is dedicated to Ruth Johnson, an active member of the community who was a member of Bethel A.M.E. Church and the executive board of the Historical Society. She died last year in December at age 79, leaving a void for someone who would organize the Black History Month event that she consistently took responsibility for.

"Ruth was very instrumental in organizing the program," Howell says. "She was a mentor, a friend and a wonderful example of the church. We had so much to learn from her — after she passed, people called me to take over, and it has been a great experience."

Doris Carson-Williams, president



A selection of artwork will be exhibited during the Black History program, including a series of sculptures and this African mask.

Black History program

What: A look at black history coordinated by Bethel A.M.E. Church in Tarentum and Allegheny-Kiski Valley Historical Society.

When: 2 p.m. Sunday

Admission: Free

Where: Heritage Museum, 224 E. Seventh Ave., Tarentum
Details: 724-224-7666

and CEO of the African American Chamber of Commerce in Pittsburgh, will be the guest speaker. Now the second-largest minority chamber in the country, it has grown from 28 to

more than 600 members throughout Western Pennsylvania, developed a business institute, produced multiple programs and an array of benefits for its members.

Williams is a guest lecturer on economic development for the private, public, and academic communities. Her list of accolades include being honored in 2003 as one of the 25 Influential Black Women in Business by Business Network Journal Magazine, being recipient of the Carlow College Woman of Spirit Award, and being listed in Prestige International Who's Who of Professionals.

The program is designed to be informative and encouraging. It will include familiar selections sung by Bethel A.M.E. gospel choir and inspirational messages from the Rev. Dr. Helen Burton and the Rev. Chester Howell of Bethel A.M.E.

Rowe, an author, will share research discussing the history of the Underground Railroad as it related to the Tarentum and New Kensington areas, as well as African American books and posters he acquired over time.

Patrick and Clemmons exhibit items from Africa, including masks and a detailed bust.

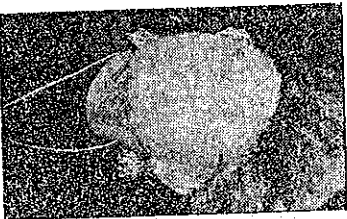
"It really is an opportunity for everyone who's there to see and experience African-American culture and for African-Americans to realize what a gem we have in the Alle-Kiski Historical Society," Howell says. "We need to raise more awareness of this jewel tucked into Tarentum that connects us all."

Mickey Cendrowski says although this is her first year as museum manager, she recalls the past efforts of Ruth Johnson and how instrumental

Black History program delves into artifacts

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she was in organizing the yearly event. In her absence, she and Howell are learning from each other this year how best to take up Johnson's cause.



She is

confident
this year's
program
will be a
success,

and a
tribute to
Johnson.

Black
History
Month
originated
from black
historian

Carter

The Black History
program at Heritage
Museum will be

dedicated to the

late Ruth Johnson,

the event's long-

time organizer.

menting
facts rele-

vant to black culture in

America. He founded and

financed the Association for the
Study of Negro Life and History

in 1915, after becoming a

professor of history at Howard

University.

February became noted as
Black History Month in 1978.

Sunday's event, according to
organizers, is more than cele-

brating black history. Its about

creating a community event
that will, hopefully, enrich and

educate those who attend,

resulting in a broader under-

standing.

"Our goal is to make people
— all people — more aware of

the need for diversity and in

doing so, to learn about each

other before we try to judge

each other," Howell says.