

MCC honors four during Black History Month event

By David Huck
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MANCHESTER — While attending college in Durham, N.C., in 1965, local resident Dotti Cannon stepped on a city bus one day only to have someone grab her by the neck and tell her to move to the back.

"I remember going into one of the department stores and being followed around," she said. "For someone coming from the North, it was unnerving and like a totally different lifestyle."

Now a successful local business owner, Cannon wasn't sidetracked by the negative events.

"I was brought up not knowing color," Cannon said Tuesday after being honored at Manchester Community College with a leadership award. "It made me want to fight so that there was equality for everybody."

Cannon, the owner of Brown Sugar Catering, was one of four women recognized by MCC during an opening ceremony for the college's month-long series of programs being held in recognition of Black History month.

After losing her job at an insurance company over a decade ago, Cannon pursued her passion for the culinary arts by starting her own business. One of the first things she asks customers, she says, is if they are willing to donate any leftover food from the event to local charities.

Over the years, Cannon has provided countless meals to those in need from the food pantry in Manchester to My Sister's Place in Hartford, a homeless shelter for women.

She has also volunteered at Manchester High School, offering her expertise in the food business to culinary arts students there.

"It makes me feel good," said Cannon, a cancer survivor. "I'm the type of person who can't say 'no' when a person has a need."

Other honorees included student leader Ebony Campbell, an 11th-Grader at Great Path Academy, and Toni Coble, an MCC student, mother of two, and president of the Black Student Union.

Jennifer Wilder-Jackson, a coordinator at the Youth Services Bureau, was also honored for her contributions. She helps youth with summer and year-round work programs, life skills, community service, tutoring programs, and employment support.

Wilder-Jackson said she joined the Youth Services Bureau in 2004 with the goal of wanting to "change the perception of youth in this community."

"We have come a long way but there is still much to do," she said.

Also during the event, MCC music professor Deborah Simmons, a former resident of Greensboro, N.C., spoke to students and community members about the song, "Lift Every Voice and Sing." Penned by James Weldon Johnson in the early part of the 20th-century, Simmons said the song was a way for blacks to demonstrate their patriotism and hope for the future.

Simmons said the song had touched her "very deeply," especially as a young girl when she was not allowed to sit at the front of the bus in her hometown.

On Feb. 1, 1960 at a Woolworth's store there, four students from a local college sat down at a lunch counter, challenging the store's policy on segregation and marking a major milestone in the civil rights movement.

Weldon wrote the song 60 years earlier, during an era of lynchings and mobs, yet Simmons said the anthem was one that was one of

"celebration," not one that fuels "the fires of racial hatred."

Kendrick Roundtree, a coordinator at MCC for the minority student and mentoring programs, said celebrating the contributions of blacks is something that should continue throughout the year, not just in February.

"African American history is American history," Roundtree said.

The tradition of honoring advancements made by blacks began with "Negro History Week" in 1926 started by Carter Woodson, the son of a former slave who went on to earn a doctorate degree from Harvard University. He designated the week after finding blacks largely ignored in history books during his studies.

In 1986, Congress passed a law marking February Black History Month. President Ronald Reagan issued a proclamation then stating that the "annual public and private salute" to Black History was to "make all Americans aware of this struggle for freedom and opportunity."

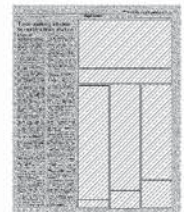
Duncan Harris, MCC's Dean of Student Affairs, said officials are working to better connect their program offerings with the college's learning goals.

"MCC has a proud heritage of celebrating various heritage months as a part of our commitment in word and in deed to the diversity of our college," Harris said. "It is truly one of MCC's greatest assets."

Other events MCC is holding during the month of February:

- On Friday, Feb. 7, at 7 p.m. in the SBM Charitable Foundation Auditorium, there will be a showing and brief discussion of the film "The Help."

- On Wednesday, Feb. 15, at 12:30 p.m. there will be a workshop in the Learning Resource Center,



room 108, presented by the non-profit Inroads Group that aims to place minority youth in business and industry.

Also, in the Hans Weiss Newspace Gallery, there is an art exhibit featuring the works of Chotsani Dean and Howard el-Yasin. And MCC Students are also sponsoring a winter coat drive during the month. Clean coats can be dropped off in the Lowe Student Services Center in room 154.



Dotti Cannon, Toni Coble, Ebony Campbell, and Jennifer Wilder-Jackson are honored at Manchester Community College on Wednesday for their leadership contributions in the community. The awards were given as part of the college's celebration of Black History month.

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