

Kwanzaa holiday embraces African concepts

By John T. Stephens III
Sentinel-Voice

Kwanzaa, an African-American holiday celebrating the venerable family and community traditions of Africa, begins Dec. 26

The 7-day holiday, ending Jan. 1, allows African Americans to reconnect to their roots, according to Dr. Al Gourrier.

"We must make a concerted effort to recapture our culture, our history and contributions that African Americans and Africans on this continent have made to this country and to this world," said Gourrier, coordinator for the Clark County School District's resource center.

"What Kwanzaa does is it provides for us as African Americans a sound base of moral principles on which to gear our life," he said.



The symbolic Kwanzaa table has spiritual meaning to the African-American holiday celebration.

The seven days of Kwanzaa are called the NGUZO SABA (n-GOO-zzoh SAH-Ba), the seven principles or rules of the holiday.

Amid a world of chaos, Gourrier said, "The principles of Kwanzaa present principles by which to live."

Dr. Maulana Karenga founded Kwanzaa and began celebrating it Dec. 26, 1966. It was based on African harvest celebrations which took place near the end and start of each calendar year.

The first day of Kwanzaa is UMOJA (oo-Moe-ja), meaning unity. The second day is Kujichagulia (Coo-gee-cha-

goo-Lee-ah), self-determination or thinking for yourself. UJIMA (oo-Gee-mah), the third day, means collective work and responsibility. The fourth day, UJAMMA (oo-JAH-mah), means cooperative economics. Nia (Nee-ah), the fifth day, stands for purpose. Creativity is KUUMBA (coo-OOM-bah) which is the sixth day. Lastly, there is IMANI (ee-MAH-nee), or faith.

Kwanzaa is not a religious holiday like Christmas, but it does have its symbols and the offering of gifts.

Zawadi (za-WAH-dee) means gifts. The presents are

usually given to children to encourage them to keep promises to themselves as well as their community. To give Zawadi during kwanzaa is optional and should be cultural and/or educational.

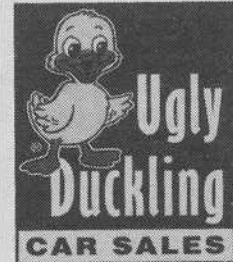
The names for the symbols of kwanzaa come from the Swahili language. For example: Mazao (mah-Zow-of) or crops are the rewards received for working. Mkeka (mmm-KAY-kah) is a mat made of straw which signifies the foundation for knowledge. Kinara (kee-NAH-rah) is the candle holder which represents African ancestors.

"Kwanzaa is probably the


most significant contemporary event in African American society," said Gourrier who has been celebrating it for 27 years. "It plays a significant role in my life because if you don't stand for something... you'll fall for anything."

Gourrier will participate in the 5 p.m. Dec. 16, Kwanzaa celebration at the Reed Whipple Cultural Center. The celebration is free for those who are pre-registered.

For more information or to sign up call 229-6211.



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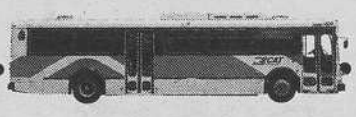
Kwanzaa means "first fruit"

Colors of Kwanzaa:
 Red, for the struggle of Black People
 Black, for the beauty of Black People
 Green, representing growth, and the start of new life

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