

Star honor pioneering casino owner

By Pete Allman
Special to Sentinel-Voice

Celebrities joined Don Barden, the first African-American to own a major hotel-casino in Las Vegas, at his Fitzgerald's resort last week to celebrate Black History Month and his third anniversary as owner of the gaming property located downtown at the corner of Fremont Street and Fourth.

The three day, weekend festival named "The Tastes and Sounds of Soul" from Friday to Sunday was filled with parties, performances, powerful presentations, a premier movie — and plenty plates of soul food and more.

Joining Barden were actors, singers, writers and other celebrities from across the country. Guests included Smokey Robinson, Eddie Levert, Judge Mablean Ephriam, Denise Nicholas, Cynda Williams, Clifton Davis, Allyson Williams and others. Friday's functions included a star studded Education Celebration for Booker Elementary School students at the Don H. Barden Achievement Awards honoring local Las Vegas. Honorees in the area of education, community and business were awarded, along with the student winners of an essay contest.

During the weekend celebration there was the premiere of the movie "The Diary of a Mad Black Woman" featuring author-actor Tyler Perry.

There was also a special performance by Tito Jackson



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

The crowd was excited to see Motown recording legend Smokey Robinson appear on Sunday during the Taste & Sounds of Soul Festival on Fremont Street Experience.

and The Brothers Blues Band, which was introduced by legendary singer Robinson.

Many local and visiting notables spoke with the children and guests presenting motivational words of encouragement and sharing tips for success. In addition, several of the visiting celebrities spoke about the opportunities for growth in the historically Black Westside area and other expanding parts of Las Vegas.

Barden, in speaking about success, referred to his own humble beginnings and feels anyone regardless of their nationality can succeed, just as he did.

"Divorce Court" Judge Ephriam said she also came from humble beginnings and

shared her views on success:

"I had to sacrifice when I was getting my degree in law. That meant when everyone had time to go out to a party, I was at home studying. At the time my husband had his [degree and career]... while he was visiting friends, going to meetings and social functions I had to forgo those things in order to accomplish my goals. You must sacrifice certain things in order to reap the benefits," Ephriam insisted.

Recording artist Levert of O'Jays fame performed for the festival and said he credits his "relationship with God" for his success.

Most of the celebrities agreed that Vegas has grown into a mature community and

expressed their encouragement for Barden and others to take part in the growth.

Levert spoke about the community of Las Vegas, including the historic West Las Vegas.

"I've been performing in Las Vegas for a long time. I love the city. I see a lot of improvement in what Don has done with Fitzgerald's and the community. Years ago there wasn't too much on the west side, except a club called Loves. Now there are a lot of new businesses... So, the [historic] Westside is coming into its own."

Barden became owner of Fitzgerald's in 2002 and traditionally celebrates the date, in part, with an African-American history theme.



Sentinel-Voice photo by Ramon Savoy

Jacqueline Newton takes the time to study the art and essay entries on display in the Moyer Student Union Ballroom at University of Nevada, Las Vegas on Saturday. Students from the local school district participated in the Black History program sponsored by the UNLV Black Graduate Student Association.

Contest immerses students in history

By Tasha Pope
Special to Sentinel-Voice

What if we were able to tip-toe into the past? Not just our own, but further back, trotting toward the days of our grandparents or great-grandparents. The time when the battles were won — and some were lost. If we witnessed their struggles, their pain, would we appreciate our luxuries? Would we praise God for their victories, and thank Him for our own?

We need an understanding of where and what we've come from. Knowing our history accentuates who we are now and makes room for our future to be luminous.

"We have to capture our past so we don't repeat our mistakes," said Claytee White, director of oral history research center at UNLV.

White was one of the speakers at the "All Aboard: Destination Freedom!" ceremony that took place Saturday on UNLV's campus in the Moyer Student Union Ballroom. The event was dedicated to educating children about the importance of knowing their history.

The Underground Railroad was the focal point, and students from the Clark County School District were given prizes for participating in an art and essay contest.

Theodore Ransaw, the coordinator of the event felt it was important to get the children involved.

"We went through the partnership office to get the schools involved," Ransaw said.

Announcer, Baby Girl Tina Marie from KCEP Power 88.1 FM, was the mistress of ceremonies. She feels it's very important to be active in the community.

"We're a public service station. We're (Power 88.1) the voice of the community." She is also pursuing acting and performed Sojourner Truth's most recognized and famous speech, "Ain't I A Woman." She captured the intensity of Truth's struggle and provided everyone with a window into the past. There were also performances by the First African Methodist Episcopal Church (F.A.M.E) choir, among other presentations, to magnify Black History.

"We don't talk anymore (family members); maybe we never did," White continued. She suggested everyone in attendance learn their family history by creating some sort of family tree. White recommended talking with the oldest family member at reunions.

"All Aboard: Destination Freedom" was the beginning of many events to come.

"We will definitely have this program next year," Ransaw said.

It's because of events like this that the important struggles and triumphs that preceded our own get recognized.

"How can we know where we're going, if we don't know where we've been?" This is something we have all heard several times before, but are we taking action toward educating ourselves?

What we don't know can hurt us! So, by having the knowledge of our family history may allow our "destination" to be "freedom."

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