

Cunningham in high spirit for Unity Day

By Parker Philpot
Sentinel-Voice

The Thomas and Mack Center on the UNLV campus is the site for Unity Day 2005. The event is free to the public, starts at 9:00 am and runs until mid-afternoon. Live entertainment will feature a variety of musicians, groups and performers in styles including hip-hop, step teams, contemporary Christian and more. There will be games and activities for small children and adults, along with "over one-hundred thousand dollars" in contest prizes, gifts, cash awards, and new car giveaway, according to event founders Pastor Randall Cunningham and wife Felicity.

In its fourth year, the youth- and family-oriented event has increased in turnout every year, Unity promoters said. Cunningham is expecting this year's attendance to measure in the thousands and said it will be "an awesome event."

"The reason we do Unity Day is because we love people," said Cunningham, 42, who was an All American football player from UNLV before advancing and spending over 10 years in the NFL with the Philadelphia Eagles and later the Minnesota Vikings. He was voted Most Valuable player, earning the MVP distinction three times in 13 years. He married Felicity de Jager of Johannesburg, South Africa, and they live here with their three children.

The Cunningham's demonstrate that they are devoted to their family and community by their efforts to continue this event each year.

Cunningham said they are excited about his year's giveaways and line-up of games, guests and events.

"We will have groups like Deitrick Haddon and the Katinas and Natalie Grant — people who have traveled all over the world," Cunningham said.

"We were packed last year," Cunningham said. This year he expects anywhere from "2,500 to 10,000" to attend. "We are going to have fun...come on out and get blessed," said Cunningham, who speaks about the event enthusiastically.

Cunningham said it is important that he and his wife offer the event to the community for free, and they serve as major financial donors

themselves in conjunction with local corporations who contribute prizes and provide other support for the event.

"Some people can't afford to pay," he explained. "Some people can't even get on the bus; so we've given bus tokens to people in certain areas to get to the event."

Cunningham said that many events charge and "that cuts out a whole bracket of

people" who would like to attend events like this.

"Our concept is to just give people a day of being in a great atmosphere where people understand that it's not about what somebody wants from you but, basically, what they can try to bless you with."

"We love doing this," he said, but added, "We will have to take on sponsors"

because of the growing size of the event." Cunningham said they have not had to solicit sponsors, and they are often approached by companies that want to help out with the event.

This year's grand prize — a brand new Toyota Camry — is provided by sponsor Findlay Toyota.

He said that some of the winners of gifts last year pre-

ferred cash over other gifts — even two cars were turned in — in order to take care of basic family needs and to pay for education.

Cunningham said this year's focus is to give lots of cash prizes more so than large prizes like cars and bicycles as they did in previous years.

"This year, not only do people have a chance to win a car, but we going to give

away \$50, \$75 and \$100..." One of the contests is a twist on a basketball toss where contenders will use a football to try for cash prizes and the car giveaway.

Cunningham said that "everyone is invited," regardless of their age, ethnicity or faith. He said they outreach to various ethnic communities and put out
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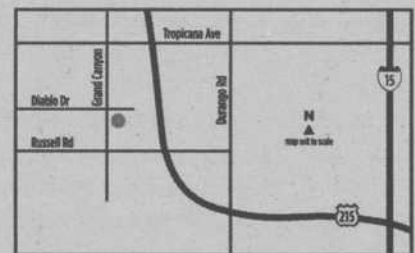
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