

Annual event helps foster racial unity

By *Lés Pierres Streater*
Sentinel-Voice

Basking in the heat or seeking shade under the trees, approximately 200 people gathered at the first annual People of Color Unity Celebration and Picnic that was held Sunday at Paradise Park on McLeod Dr. in southeast part of the Las Vegas.

The event took place through collaborative efforts and fundraising. The sponsoring group, the People of Color Coalition, consists of several community-based groups: Interfaith Council, NAACP, Jewish Federation of Las Vegas, Native American Chamber of Commerce, Casa De La Inmigracion, along with other ethnic and religious groups from the Hispanic, Asian-American and Pacific Islanders, African, Jewish, Catholic and Muslim and Islamic communities.

Members of the steering committee included Aslam Abdullah, Miguel Barrientos, Iris Contreras, Jackie Fleekop, W. Dean Ishman, Rozita Lee, Minister Duke Muhammad, Redda Mehari, Wayne Tanaka, Ben Torres, Mike Vaswani and Karen Boyett. One of the main goals of the event coordinators was to celebrate racial diversity and differences in a constructive and positive atmosphere.

People attending the event enjoyed free food served by the Nevada Partners Culinary Training Academy, children's games provided by Dino Jump, swimming at the Paradise Park pool, along

with entertainment by Mariachi dancers, African dancer and singer Hermon Abraha, Filipino dancers, and the African Methodist Episcopal Fountain of Hope Youth Choir.

Ishman, president of the local NAACP chapter, commented about the effort of the group that sponsored this



Sentinel-Voice photo by Lés Pierres Streater

Las Vegas NAACP president W. Dean Ishman addresses crowd at the People of Color Unity Celebration and Picnic.

event: "This is what we are calling a People of Color celebration and picnic. What we are doing is sending out a message stating that it is okay for us to have differences, and that we can come together in unity, share our cultures, and not be afraid of our differences or ethnicities. We come together to say that we can love one another in harmony as we love ourselves."

Boyett, the executive director of the Interfaith Council of Southern Nevada, explained the collaboration. "The People of Color coalition and the Interfaith Council

are joining forces [to pool] our resources together to collectively reach out into the community instead of one group doing one thing and another group something similar," she said.

"Coming together as one that is symbolized by the unified efforts of the various participants, learning to col-

laborate and cooperate with one another, and bringing good people with good ideas together benefits the community as a whole," Boyett added.

During the event, domestic and international conditions affecting various ethnic groups were discussed in addition to cross-cultural education.

A brief presentation about the plight of undocumented Hispanics and their experiences in this country because of immigration reform was highlighted by Attorney Benson Lee.

Cultural similarities between the Jewish community and others were introduced by Jackie Fleekop, staff member with the United Jewish Community/Jewish Federation of Las Vegas.

Another speaker, Gabriel Nuer, associated with the Lost Boys of Darfur, spoke about the tragedy existing in his country of Sudan in Africa. According to Nuer, the Sudanese government is using Arab Janjaweed militia, its air force, and organized starvation to systematically kill the Black Sudanese of Darfur.

Nuer emphasized that over 2 million people have been displaced from their homes and are facing starvation and health disorders, along with murder, rape, and destruction of any means of survival because of burned crops and the poisoned water supplies.

"It is heartbreaking but fortunate for us to be here today. We represent 25 people in Las Vegas and over 3,000 political refugees in the United States. The original war in the Sudan started in 1955, with the second war starting in 1983, and the new



Sentinel-Voice photo by Lés Pierres Streater

Ten paces and draw your water guns: Malcol Smith and Amanda Staten found a way to keep cool despite the heat.

uprising occurring just three years ago," Nuer explained.

"Our country is in deep turmoil and needs a lot of help. Not only do we need the assistance of the United States government, but also from people like yourself... I encourage you to help make a difference for those brothers and sisters suffering from the genocide in Darfur, and the children left homeless from the slaying of their parents," Nuer continued.

"This unity event is about love, and showing love to someone that you don't know or [those who] could be your

enemy is important," he concluded.

Jeannie Bennett, and her family attended the unity celebration and picnic.

"This was a family-oriented event that I felt would be good for my kids. My kids attend the Paradise Recreation Center during the week from 7:00 a.m. until I pick them up from work in the afternoon... On the weekends I like to take my kids to the movies, the park, a restaurant, or do something positive with them. It was a blessing to attend this event today."

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NEW ADDITION

Jacquelyn Shropshire, president of the Las Vegas-Clark County Urban League, and Clark County Commissioner Yvonne Atkinson Gates stand in front of a rendering of the Doc Pearson Community Center, slated for Carey Avenue and Comstock Drive.