



CITY COUNCIL AGENDA ITEM

Date: February 17, 2012
To: Mayor and City Council Members
From: John Szerlag, City Manager
Subject: Article from Michigan Humanities Council

The attached article that appeared in Michigan Stories of the Michigan Humanities Council highlights what a great job Mrs. Loraine Campbell and the Historic Village are doing relative to cultural awareness.

c: Loraine Campbell
Troy Historical Society
Mark Miller, Director of Economic and Community Development



Troy Historic Village Tackles Cultural Awareness

A booming city since the 1960s, Troy represents a variety of cultures from around the world. With a population of 81,000, more than 80 languages are spoken in the area and represent countries such as India, Pakistan, China, Japan, the Philippines and more. With its diverse culture, one organization is making it their mission to raise cultural awareness in the community.

With help from a Michigan Humanities Council major grant award, Troy Historical Society has launched a 10-month project that will engage southeast Michigan residents and visitors with stories of diverse cultures that combine to make the region so unique. In the end, the society hopes the community will learn that Troy Historic Village can serve as a catalyst for understanding each other.



Community members gather in the church at Troy Historic Village for an evening discussion. Photo by Loraine Campbell

“Our premise is that the best way to build bridges is through real people,” said Loraine Campbell, Historical Society director. “You drill down to where you could introduce individuals of varying backgrounds through their own stories. That’s where you find commonality and build relationships.”

Creating Community Dialogue

A portion of this project includes a monthly lecture series, which began in January and will stretch to May 16th. On Jan. 18, Janice Freij, curator of education at the Arab American National Museum, shared the personal story of her family’s immigration from Lebanon. Following the lecture, several attendees expressed interest in visiting the Arab American Museum, something Campbell plans to make happen.

“By next month, we hope to have a series of field trips to the Arab American Museum, the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, (and) to the Holocaust Museum,” she

said. “We don’t have a Japanese museum, but we can talk about that whole era ... and the repercussions we’re still feeling from that.”

On Feb. 15, anthropologist and historian Dr. Willie McKether, University of Toledo, will share the oral histories he has collected of African Americans who migrated from the South to find jobs and homes in Detroit, Flint and Saginaw.

All lectures are held in the old church at Troy Historic Village, and begin at 7:30 p.m. Admission is free for Troy Historical Society members, and \$5 for non-members. Additional lecture dates include:

March 21: Padma Kuppā – her story of 20th century immigration and balancing identities as Indo-Hindu-American

April 18: Mary Kamidōi (Japanese American Citizens League in Michigan) – her family’s story of being placed in a Japanese Internment Camp

May 16: Marius Sidau – his story of growing up in northwest Romania

Although the topics themselves are important for the region, it’s also the discussion for participants that gets Campbell excited.

“What’s equally important for me is the conversation that occurs before and after each lecture,” she said. “And if I’m standing there at 10 o’clock and people are still engaged in conversation, ... then I know we’ve succeeded.”

In addition, the society will host two workshops to assist participants in telling their own stories. These hands-on workshops are important to ensure a family’s story is never lost with one member of the family, whether it’s through an oral story or videos.

One workshop will explain how to preserve family photographs, movies and other media that share personal heritage. The second workshop will teach guests how to conduct an oral history.

“You have people saying, ‘we really have to tape record grandma, or grandpa, because they’re getting really old,’” Campbell said. “When they pass away, they take those (family) stories with them. It’s gone unless you preserve them.”

While the lectures and workshops may be geared toward an older crowd, the young ones are not losing out.

“We also looked at the very, very young children and said, ‘how do we stop barriers from being built up?’” Campbell said. “We can’t talk about multiculturalism to pre-schoolers. But when you look at fairy tales and folklore, and look at it cross-culturally, its telling the same stories. There is a Cinderella story in just about every culture you look at.”

The society has worked to package six different stories, with follow-up activities and crafts, that can be used in outreach for pre-school programs in the area. Once summer arrives, those children can come to Troy Historic Village for story time.

Over the holidays, Troy held an event called “Christmas 1863,” which looked at Christmas in that year and traditions that were celebrated. More than 200 people turned out to hear traditions behind the Christmas tree and foods used to celebrate the holiday, while enjoying sights of historical re-enactors such as Abraham Lincoln.

For more information on this grant project and the many events hosted by Troy Historical Society, please visit www.troyhistory.org or call (248) 524-3570. For more information on how your organization can apply for a major grant from the Michigan Humanities Council, call the Council office at (517) 372-7770. The next major grant deadline is March 15!