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Annual Martin Luther King Jr. Breakfast held at the Druid Hill Y

By C. Lisa Johnson

The Y of Central Maryland hosted the 36th Annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Memorial Breakfast at the Druid Hill Family Center Y in Baltimore City on Saturday, January 29, 2011. The breakfast was dedicated to raising awareness and funds as well as to recruit volunteers for the revitalization of the Druid Hill Family Center Y. The breakfast was an opportunity to celebrate the completion of Phase 1 of the revitalization project.

Mel Brennan who is the executive director of both the Druid Hill Family Center Y and the Harry and Jeanette Weinberg Family Center Y, in his remarks spoke about the renovations, which were part of Phase 1 of the revitalization project. A playroom was completed last year as well as a newly renovated lobby, dayroom, gymnasium, computer lab and two rooms on the second floor. Brennan said the revitalization is an ongoing project. He also spoke of one of the many programs offered at the "Y," The Youth Achievers Program which is an after school program designed for homeless teens. He spoke with excitement about the many programs that are offered at the Y. Brennan estimates that the Druid Hill Family Center Y helps several hundred children each day.

Brennan called on African American males to get involved in the "Building Futures Mentoring Program" which calls for them to volunteer two hours a week at the "Y" because more men are needed to keep this successful program going.

A quilt was designed and sewn together by children who participate in programs at the "Y." It is currently on



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Photo by Lawrence Kimble

display in the gymnasium where the breakfast was held. A display of origami paper cranes made by the children are hanging from the ceiling of the entryway. Paper cranes are a Japanese symbol of peace and were hung as a tribute to Dr. King who was a strong believer in non-violence. The paper cranes will be donated to St. Jude's Children's Hospital.

The festivities began when David Diongue and Michael Gary—students from the Baltimore School of Performing Arts—performed musical selections of light jazz. The program included remarks from the Lieutenant Governor of Maryland Anthony G. Brown and Dr. Camell Cooper, associate professor of surgery at the University of Maryland Medical Cen-

ter delivered the keynote address. Cooper founded the Baltimore City Violence Protection Program (VPP) in 1998 with the goal to reduce the severity and frequency of violent injury among people in Baltimore City.

Lt. Governor Anthony Brown remarked that he likes it when a community comes

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together to celebrate Dr. King and when the community works as a whole to get the job done and continues to build on the dream that Dr. King stood for. He also encouraged those who are willing and able to serve to consider volunteering in their communities.

Perry Savoy, chair of the "Y" Baltimore City Community Advisory Board spoke about "Success Academy," an innovative partnership between the "Y" and Baltimore City Public Schools for at risk youth. Kenny Franklin, a participant in the program spoke about how much the "Y" has helped him to stay focused and stay off the streets. He told the audience that on Halloween he really wanted to hang out with friends but he decided to spend the evening at the "Y" instead. When he returned home that night he heard the story of one of his friends who was shot earlier that night. Franklin said he thought to himself that he was glad to have the "Y" to go to instead of hanging out on the streets because it could have easily been him. He thanked all the people who donate and volunteer at the "Y." He wanted everyone to know how much the support of the community means to kids who attend the Druid Hill Y and other family centers of the Y of Central Maryland in the city. He received a standing ovation at the end of his story.

Dr. Carnell Cooper, who was the keynote speaker, told the story of his first visit to the Druid Hill Y location. When he arrived he was deeply moved

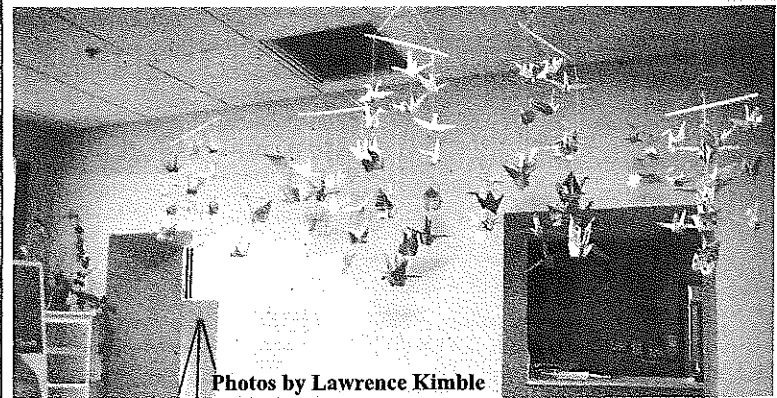
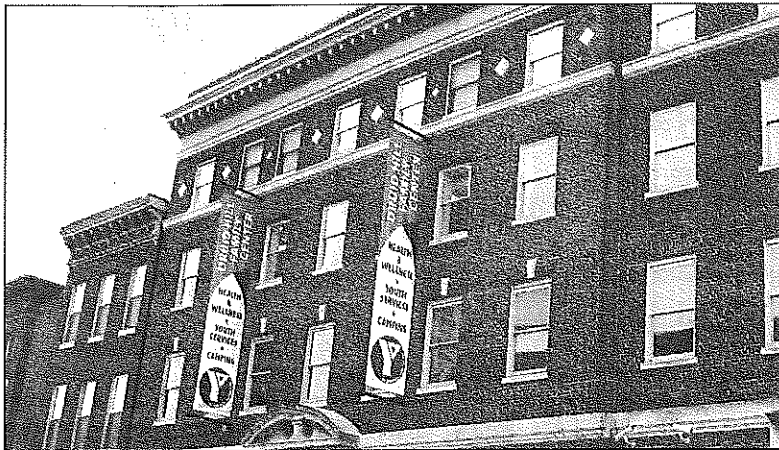
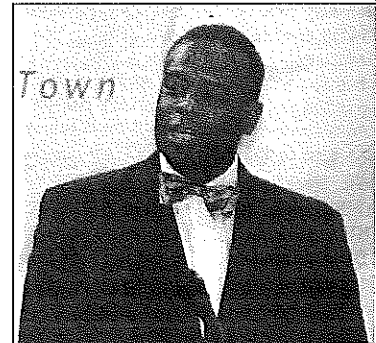
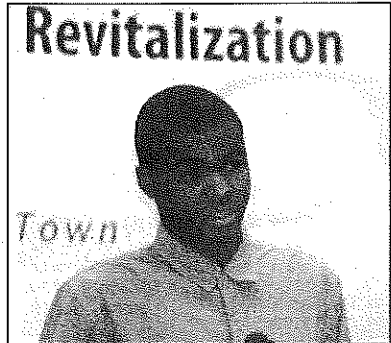
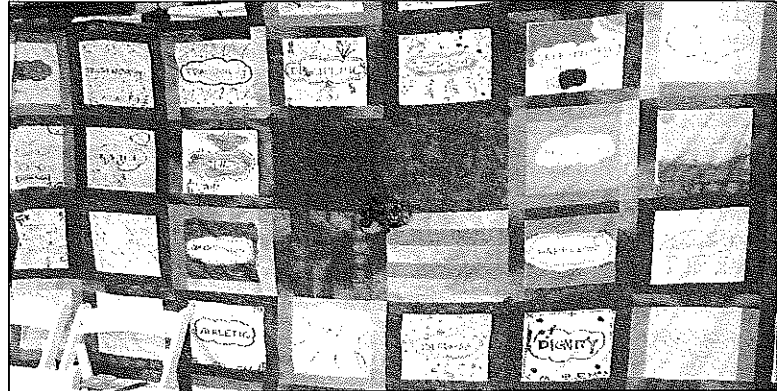
by the spirit of the people at the "Y." He became involved in the center. He said he is there to help the community learn about health issues and diseases that affect so many people in the African American community such as diabetes, obesity and high blood pressure. He also spoke of the P.H.A.T. Project; an after school initiative that is a subsidiary of the Violence Prevention Program (VPP).

Greg Phillips the Director of the "Y" in Druid Hill said the "Y" not only focuses on activities for the kids but; they teach them about leadership, nutrition, and health issues.

The program came to a close when Rev. Dr. William Calhoun, Sr. of Trinity Baptist Church delivered the benediction. Dr. Calhoun announced that his church, which is right next-door to the Druid Hill Y has also formed a partnership with the "Y" and he hopes that they continue to have great success. Morgan State University Gospel Choir performed a few selections at the close of the breakfast program. The entire audience stood and held hands while singing "We Shall Overcome."

The breakfast was a great success with catering provided by Santoni's Marketplace & catering. The corporate sponsors of the breakfast include Johns Hopkins University, BB&T bank, CareFirst, IWIF, Aegon and PNC bank.

For more information about the programs or if you wish to make a donation or to volunteer at the Druid Hill Family Center Y, visit www.ymaryland.org.



Photos by Lawrence Kimble