

The Rich Waterloo History Hidden in Plain Sight

In the previous two articles the history of the African Palace Neighborhood Youth Center, and the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Education and Vocational Training were shared.

The legacy continues.

Mary Berdell retired from her role as the director, and shortly thereafter in 1981, Martha Nash was named the new Executive Director. Nash was a native of Sedalia, MO, and started her community engagement at an early age. When she was a teenager, she became involved in the youth council of the Black Hawk County chapter of the NAACP. Nash attended East High School and graduated in the top 10 percent of her class. She then went on to Talladega College -- a predominantly black school in Alabama, graduating with honors in 1947. Her passion to assist young people was recognizable; however with a new director of the Center came a new vision.

Nash saw a need and developed a plan. The Center was already offering make-up credit classes to high school students during the school year. Nash extended the same opportunity to sixth through eighth graders during the summer. The summer program provided a level of individual attention for students who needed it. The cost to run a summer program -- operated

by the school district -- was far more expensive than the cost to host the program through the center. The \$25.00 fee per class was affordable for most families and could be paid in installments if needed. Students received referrals by school counselors. In addition to the counselor's referral, the principal and parental permission was needed to enroll.

Gary Wegenke, Superintendent stated, "If the program was not available, the students would repeating that grade in the fall." Nash stated, "It is a more comfortable place for some of them. The atmosphere may be different, but the teachers insist on discipline and we are pretty hard-nosed. We expect them to work. Sometimes kids get it into their heads that they're dumb and need to be prodded to achieve. If someone doesn't light a fire to their imagination or catch their interest they won't keep going."

Her successor, Mary S. Theorith had this to say about Mrs. Nash. "She was a dynamic leader. She was probably one of the most diversified people I've ever met. She was a visionary; she could see into the future."

Therefore, again I leave you with these words. We as a community are obligated to continue the legacy that began long ago by the African Palace Neighborhood

Youth Center, renamed the Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Education and Vocational Training. Please make a commitment to support initiatives and programs that enrich the lives of the young people we serve.

Next month's story will feature Mary S. Theorith and the Center's collaboration with Hawkeye Community College. The final segment will introduce the community to the new business and programs that are currently in full force at the Center.

I am LaTanya Graves, Miss Understood, and I thank you for having SOUL! ☺

LaTanya Graves

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wants the best for those whom she comes into contact with. She believes everyone has the ability to excel by not allowing their past to dictate their future: To live their best life.

Leaving A

Legacy