

https://www.championnewspapers.com/news/article_b342c056-d05d-11eb-8759-e31ec895aafe.html

FEATURED

Museum is their way of imparting black heritage to youth

By Marianne Napoles

Jun 19, 2021



Khalif and Victoria Rasshan stand near an exhibit at the African American Museum of Beginnings they founded in Pomona. The couple has lived in Chino Hills since 2008. They have four children.

Courtesy of Voice, University of La Verne magazine

During their 45 years of marriage, Chino Hills residents Khalif and Victoria Rasshan have been nurturing the hearts and minds of African American youth by teaching them about black culture and history.

The like-minded couple both taught in the Pomona Unified School District for 36 years, have Master's degrees from the University of La Verne, retired at the same time in 2010, and founded a museum in 2011.

The African American Museum of Beginnings started out as a three-month black history exhibit and turned into a museum located at the Village at Indian Hill at 1460 E. Holt Ave., suite 188, in Pomona.

Mr. Rasshan described the museum as one that inspires and educates the community on the history, culture, and arts of Africans and African-Americans through exhibits, programs, and community engagement.

Mr. Rasshan said he has been trying to make inroads over the years into the schools.

"The more our youth know about their history and culture the better their self-esteem," he said.

He has spoken to students at Chino High and led a tour of the museum with a small group from Ayala High.

He wants to engage African American campus high school clubs to take tours of the museum where each station is explored in-depth.

Mr. Rasshan said ideally, he would like to see the students twice a year to develop their self-respect through the discovery of their true history and culture.

He said there is more awareness of black history in light of the civil unrest of the past year.

One of those times in history was the Tulsa Massacre in Tulsa, Oklahoma that occurred 100 years ago, sparked by a racially charged incident involving a white girl and a black man.

The 1921 catastrophe, in which white residents burned down the affluent Greenwood District known as Black Wall Street, was commemorated two weeks ago by multiple media outlets on its 100th anniversary.

Mr. Rasshan said he was in shock when he learned about the massacre 25 years ago and believes that events such as this have been obfuscated in American history instruction.

"Black people did not come to America empty-headed, but we became empty-handed," he said.

Also, recently capturing the national spotlight is Emancipation Day, known as Juneteenth, which African Americans have been celebrating for the past 156 years to commemorate the end of slavery.

On Thursday, President Biden signed legislation to establish June 19 (beginning today), as a federal holiday called "Juneteenth National Independence Day."

Juneteenth is a mixture of the words June and 19th.

Mr. Rasshan said naming Juneteenth as a federal holiday presents an opportunity for reflection and celebration, but it also calls to mind that there has not been a redress of ills and there is much work to do.

"There is no excuse for not making amends for an injury that keeps on giving in a negative way," he said.

Mr. Rasshan said his way of making amends is by creating a record of African American history and spreading the word to young people through the classes and offerings at the museum.

There, youth will come face to face with an African holocaust exhibit, artifacts, old and new books, a black inventors' display, art, newspapers, periodicals, and paintings.

The museum offers tours, reading circles, chess classes, tutoring, and Saturday school.

Mr. and Mrs. Rasshan are excited that after a long COVID-related closure, the museum will reopen Wednesday, July 7.

Hours will be 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. Tuesdays to Thursdays and on Saturdays.

Appointments can be made for those who want to visit on Fridays, Sundays, and Mondays.

To schedule a tour or learn more about the museum, visit taamb.org or call (951) 415-9207.