

NEWS > EDUCATION

# Rasshan wins Bethune Legacy Award for educational efforts



Khalif Rasshan, co-founder of the African-American Museum of Beginnings, will receive the Bethune Legacy Award from the National Council of Negro Women's Pomona Valley Section on Saturday at the Ontario Airport Hotel. Rasshan and the Rev. Gary Lett, a professional multimedia artist, will both receive the NCNW's highest honor and be recognized for advancing cultural and artistic awareness, stressing education and mentoring youth. (Photo by Frank Perez for the Daily Bulletin)



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"To educate and enlighten," said Khalif Rasshan of Chino Hills, "are my two primary goals in my interactions with community children and adults."

Rasshan, a retired Pomona Unified School District teacher, receives the Bethune Legacy Award from the National Council of Negro Women's Pomona Valley Section for his extra educational efforts and cultural consistency for four decades.

Born in Los Angeles and raised in Compton until moving to Pomona as a Garey High School sophomore, Rasshan has devoted his energies to increasing African-American children's cultural self-awareness and sharing black cultural contributions with others.

"Everyone in our pluralistic America has dual cultures," said Rasshan, co-founder of the African-American Museum of Beginnings in Pomona with his wife, Victoria.

"We all commonly experience the American culture, but we also have a personal heritage based on our culture of origin. That original culture celebrates the traditions of each ethnic group. Each culture becomes a guidepost for our moral, educational and cultural development."

Self-awareness increases one's ability to succeed in any arena, Rasshan said.

~~It's a message he hammered into the heads and hearts of not only his own~~

"You've got to understand your own self and heritage before you can truly connect with other cultures and heritages," he said. "You can embrace others while not forgetting your own roots and responsibilities to those roots. It's a delicate, but necessary, balance."

Rasshan decided on a teaching career to avoid trouble with his father.

"One day my dad asked me what I wanted to be and I had to come up with something in order to not appear a fool," he recalled, laughing.

"My father didn't like you not having a vision or choosing a path that would be rewarding for you and the people you'd encounter through work and community. My choice was reinforced at La Verne College because I met so many professors who inspired me and who were excellent examples of what educators should be."

Rasshan graduated from Garey High and earned a bachelor's in sociology at the La Verne College and a master's in education from Azusa Pacific University. He taught one year at Santa Ana's Willard Intermediate School before returning to Pomona in 1975. He taught at North San Antonio, now Barfield, and Lexington elementary schools. Then he shifted to secondary education and returned to his alma mater in 1979 as a Garey football coach and opportunity class teacher. The latter involved working with students having difficulties adjusting to the comprehensive school setting.

He remained at Garey for 25 years, teaching English, reading, government and world and U.S. history, before opting to address the needs of at-risk students in the Pomona Alternative School. He retired from PUSD in 2009, finishing his career as an Emerson Middle School history teacher.

But once a teacher, always a teacher, Rasshan said, admitting it's tough to give up a task he considers still unfinished.

"Kids, and adults, too, still need education and enlightenment," said the co-founder of the museum filled with artifacts, art, historical data and mementos of African and African-American culture.

The museum is not his first attempt at establishing a regional cultural spot. In the early 1990s, he, Victoria and Sam Tharpe, a good friend and now-retired Pomona principal, opened The Nile Garden, an Africentric book and gift store.

Dr. Rodney Davis, an ULV professor visiting the shop, “planted the seed about opening an African-American museum to create a shared cultural exchange between blacks and other ethnic people,” Rasshan said. “Victoria and I agreed because we feel we have a cultural responsibility to resurrect the historical memories of African people and share their contributions with others.”



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2013 > October > 23