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African heritage program set Saturday



Roland Barksdale-Hall is pictured dressed in traditional African costume. Hall will visit the Eufaula Carnegie Library Saturday to share traditional African stories, textiles and artwork.

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By [ANASTASIA HARBUCK](#)

Published: July 21, 2008

Pennsylvanian Roland Barksdale-Hall can remember coming to Eufaula as a small child in his father's Oldsmobile.

He will return to Eufaula Saturday, July 26, when he comes to the Eufaula Carnegie Library for a special program entitled "The Cousins Coming Together." During the program, Hall, as well as other guest speakers, will make storytelling presentations, present seminars on tracing family trees and give tips on planning family reunions.

Hall says the program will celebrate and salute the strong extended African American family.

"July and August are traditional times for family reunions," said Hall, adding that presenting a program on African American genealogy during the late summer makes sense.

Hall is president of JAH-Kente International, a non-profit organization based in Washington D.C. JAH-

Kente works to promote African culture in modern American society through presentations of African textiles, artwork and storytelling as well as poetry and literature from the Harlem renaissance of the 1920s. The organization also aids African-American families in tracing slave genealogy.

Hall himself can trace his roots back to the Eufaula area. He recalls family trips to Eufaula to visit his grandparents. Hall's father, a Eufaula native, and his cousin, a Eufaula resident, first got Hall interested in discovering his ancestry. Hall's quest for his family line took him all the way to Ghana, West Africa and to Mali, where JAH-Kente has established a health center.

Other guest speakers at the program will include Dr. Pamela Payne Foster, who will give a presentation on health history and preventative health care. Foster is an expert in the fields of preventative medicine and public health at the University of Alabama. During the program, Foster will discuss topics like prostate and breast cancer and diabetes.

Emily Davis, former president of the Afro-American Historical and Genealogical Society in Pittsburgh, William Foster, president of the African Atlantic Genealogical Society in Montgomery, and Sharon Simpson, president of the Barbour County Genealogy and Local History Society, will also be guest speakers during the program.

Hall travels throughout the United States, sharing African folktales in traditional African costume.

During the program, Hall will be in costume, sharing African artwork, textiles, instruments and traditional stories with his audience.

"I take stories of the past and make them digestible to elders and children," said Hall. He calls his storytelling presentations "edutainment", "to educate children and inform adults through entertainment." The program is free and open to the public. It will take place 10 a.m. - 1 p.m. in the library auditorium.