

Juneteenth Celebration honors Julia C. Collins

The Juneteenth Celebration Association of North Central Pa is hosting its 11th annual event on June 19th at Brandon Park in Williamsport. The event will take place from 1:00 until 5:00. For inclement weather, the event will move to Curtin Middle School at 85 Eldred St.

The association will host as speaker, Mitch Kachun, PhD, a Black Studies and history professor from Western Michigan University, who spoke at the 2005 and 2007 events. Dr. Kachun co-edited a book containing essays and, what many believe is, the first novel written by an African-American female in the United States. Kachun will speak about Julia C.

Collins, who had segments of her novel and essays published in 1865 by the African Methodist Episcopal Church's, The Christian Recorder newspaper. The fact that Mrs. Collins lived in Williamsport motivates Dr. Kachun to come here and speak about the importance of her contribution to our area. A state historical marker, honoring Mrs. Collins, will be unveiled prior to the event by the Lycoming County Historical Society at the Heritage Trail on the Susquehanna River Walk which Dr. Kachun and his wife will attend. Following the dedication, guests are invited to come to Brandon Park where Kachun will speak at the Juneteenth Celebration event. A reenactment of the historical marker's unveiling will augment his Juneteenth presentation.

Musical guests for the event include Heaven Sent, recording artist's Johnny J. Blair – "Singer-At-Large" and Kevin D. Watson, licentiate at Mt. Zion AME Church, Norristown. Evangelist Dawn Filchner-White and WRLC 91.7 FM radio personality, Marcelene Brown will also perform. There will be dance performances by Katie Benson's School of Dance and Valorie Taylor's Expressions.

Other speakers include, State Representative Rick Mirabito, reading General Order No. 3, Rev. Kenneth A. Burnett, reading the Emancipation Proclamation, and a representative from Congressman Christopher Carney's office. In appreciation for her contribution of local black history to our community, Dr. Mamie Sweeting-Diggs will be honored with a plaque presented by Wegman's Food

and Pharmacy –Store 078 and the Juneteenth Celebration Association. Kevin D. Watson and Marcelene H. Brown will emcee.

There will also be a children's carnival, CC (lady) Clowns, pony rides and petting zoo courtesy of Russ and Marie Reitz' Gracious Meadows Farms, Dr. Diggs' Underground Railroad exhibit, genealogical advice, vendors and more.

The second Gifted Youth Art Exhibit will be presented as a result of 5 art workshops preceding the event. The workshops involved a mentoring program and art instruction provided by area professionals, Jackie Thomas, fibers artist; Seth Goodman, Associate Art Professor at Lycoming College; Eve Archer, retired art instructor and Way's Garden Art Show Founder; and Rev. Marwin Reeves, Treatment Specialist for USP Lewisburg. Six art students from Lycoming College also volunteered their time. "Without the mentoring aspect in the art workshops, teaching skills to the children could very well be a waste of time if they get sidetracked by illicit temptations and don't commit to what they've learned", says association administrator, Conni Robinson. There are plans to provide several fine arts' oriented field trips this year, as well.

The term "Juneteenth" was first introduced to Williamsport by Dr. Mamie Sweeting-Diggs at the Wegman's Food and Pharmacy's black history program in 1997. Dr. Sweeting-Diggs also presented her newly created local, Underground Railroad Exhibit at that event. "Juneteenth Celebration" was introduced to the area as a public event in 2000 by Bethel AME Church in Williamsport. The coordinators were church officials, Kevin D. Watson and Constance Robinson. The celebration has been an annual event since then. Having expanded its education and mentoring program throughout the year, the church committee evolved into an independent charitable 501 (c) (3) non-profit organization in 2008. The programs sponsored by the Juneteenth Celebration Association promote education, diversity and public service. "We have new board members that still include Robinson, but the local AME Church will always be the "Bethel rock" foundation of the

association", say organization members.

"Juneteenth" began on June 19, 1865 when General Gordon Granger rode into Galveston, Texas, with 1200 troops at the ready, to read General Order No. 3. The order stated that slaves were free. This was 2 _ years after the Emancipation Proclamation was written by President Abraham Lincoln. Some states had sent their slaves to Texas to wait for the outcome of the Civil war and Texas considered seceding from the Union prior to 1865. June 19th became a day for celebrating freedom, and represents the actual ending of slavery in the United States. The troops that accompanied Granger were not needed and jubilation by slaves all over Texas followed this reading. .

There is a push from other Juneteenth organizations to make Juneteenth a national holiday. National Juneteenth Holiday Campaign Chair, Ronald V. Myers, Sr. M.D., is encouraging others to convince Pennsylvania's senate to submit legislation that would make "Juneteenth, Emancipation Day" a state holiday as it is in Texas and 35 other states.

For more information about Juneteenth Celebration, please call 570 419-2502 or visit the website: www.JuneteenthCelebration.org.

What: 11th annual Juneteenth Celebration
Where: Brandon Park, (Rural Ave. & Hepburn) Williamsport, PA
When: June 19th, 1:00 until 5:00
Rain: Curtin Middle School, 85 Eldred St.
Contact: 570 419-2502 or
www.JuneteenthCelebration.org



Julia C. Collins' historical marker will be on the Susquehanna Riverwalk.