



For Immediate Release

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Westchester Rockland African American Book Festival Inaugural event in Mount Vernon

April 23, 2009 - Through a joint effort of the African American Chamber of Commerce of Westchester and Rockland Counties, Inc. and the QBR/The Black Book Review, sponsor of the Harlem Book Fair, the City of Mount Vernon, NY will host The West/Rock Book Fair, May 15 and 16, 2009 at City Hall Plaza, One Roosevelt Square.

Max Rodriguez, publisher and creative founder of the Harlem Book Fair has partnered with Robin L. Douglas, founder and Executive Director of the Chamber, to bring writers, publishers and other exhibitors together to celebrate their crafts and to share them with the community. This Book Fair is designed to feature the works of the African American, Caribbean and the African Diaspora experience.

One of the most important events of the Harlem Book Fair is the HBF Wheatley Award, named for Phyllis Wheatley who was born a slave and grew up to become a famous poet. This year's award will honor the poets, the people who have long told their story in poetic form – Nikki Giovanni and The Last Poets. Among the awardees this year are The Last Poets who, along with Gil Scott-Heron, are credited as being major influences on the development of hip hop and performance poetry and John Franklin Hope, author and historian, who will be honored posthumously.

In honoring these people the HBF seeks to reinvent a 21st Century Black Culture, in honor of Barack Obama and the Black community. It is expected that the West/Rock Book Fair will follow the same theme. The W/RBF will make the community aware of local writers. It will impress upon the children that this is something they can do. The Book Fair masks a lot of education in an entertaining way – edutainment.

Some of the benefits of a Book Fair in the community are that books are available at discounted prices, people become aware of and can interact with the writers of the community, it becomes a hands-on learning experience, especially for young people. There will be workshops for young people to explore many of the facets of writing and publishing. The Book Fair will feature readings by authors of their works and panel discussions by authors, as well as entertainment.

It is a fun event that children and parents can enjoy. Young adults can learn about the various employment opportunities in the world of publishing and writing.

The Book Fair gives one the option of buying books at a discounted price, which may help it to be recession-proof or at least only mildly affected. Writing is done in a solitary environment, so a book fair is an opportunity for authors to meet and interact with one

another and provide “edutainment” for their readers. There are panel discussions, readings by authors, Mr. Rodriguez states that aside from the fun, the educational value, the creative community empowerment; there is an economic value to the local community.

A *New York Times* Arts and Cultural editor noted that of all the areas of publishing, the African American publishing is the most profitable. Still, it is expected that the economic condition of the country may have some effect on the Book Fair. There may be fewer exhibitors due to the cost of traveling and staying in a host city.

The Harlem Book Fair, in its 11th year, started on West 125th St. at the State Office Bldg. with 43 exhibitors and has grown to need a 3-block area near the Schomburg Library. There were no African American Book Fairs in the United States prior to the Harlem Book Fair. There are now Book Fairs hosted by a number of cities across the country, such as Boston, Los Angeles, Long Island and other cities. It is hoped that these book fairs reflect the culture of the host city.

The Harlem Book Fair is managed by a very small paid staff and about one hundred and fifty volunteers. The book fairs are primarily sponsored by the large traditional publishers such as Simon & Shuster, Random House, etc. There are also corporate sponsors such as Starbucks, Commerce/TD Bank, who want to brand into the African American reader.

Although Mr. Rodriguez is a published author, he says he has many more books in him and hopes someday to get them down on paper and published. His interest in the writings of Black authors was raised in college.

Mr. Rodriguez says that all of us should explore the writing experience, even if it is just to tell our family story which is important to pass on. One of the key functions of a Book Fair is to reach teens, to create a bridge to inform them, to create a viable and accessible community for the future. He has been successful in introducing a course in teen writing and publishing throughout the Dallas Public Library system and hopes to be able to do this for the Westchester/Rockland communities.

The 2009 West/Rock Book Festival will be Co-Chaired by Ms. Dawna Michelle Fields National Program Manager for Colgate, Mrs. Clinton I. Young Sr. & Mrs. Ann Young Berkeley.

Music for the 2009 Westchester Rockland African American Book Festival will be provided by Woody Woods Workin Music.com.

For full detail about the 2009 West/Rock Book Festival visit us at www.aaccnys.org or www.qbr.com.

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