

Organization Profile

History & Overview

The YMI Cultural Center, listed on the National Register of Historic Places, has served Asheville's minority citizens since it was established in 1893 as the Young Men's Institute. During its first 75 years the YMI housed Asheville's segregated library, a swimming pool and gymnasium, a medical office, and other cultural and community amenities for African-Americans. Since 1981, the YMICC has developed a variety of cultural and educational programs and presented exhibits of art and artifacts from Africa and the African-American heritage. The mission of the YMI is to enhance the cultural and economic lives of residents of Western North Carolina, particularly minority and low-income people by focusing on Cultural Arts, Economic Development, and Community Education.

The YMICC provides educational, art, and cultural programs in public schools and community centers. In addition to its own programming, the YMICC houses, sponsors, or cosponsors collaborative programs with other non-profit organizations, artists, private galleries, and the public. Examples of such programs are Watercolor 2001, presented in collaboration with Asheville City Schools and the Watercolor Society of NC, Western Division; Goombay! festival, produced in cooperation with Asheville Parks & Recreation Department; and Chuck Davis & the African American Dance Ensemble Project, presented under the aegis of the NC Arts Council and produced in collaboration with UNC-Asheville, Asheville City and Buncombe County Schools, and other sponsors.

The YMICC serves the entire Asheville area, including Buncombe and surrounding counties, with a special focus on programs of interest to African-Americans, Native Americans, and other minority groups. Asheville's population is approximately 11% African-American, that of Buncombe County less than 5%, and Hispanics and Native Americans, primarily Cherokee, comprise a small percentage (2-4%) in both demographic areas.

NOTE: During the construction required for the installation of the YMICC's elevator (May – October 2001), the upstairs galleries and offices were closed. The upstairs galleries reopened in November, but the auditorium did not reopen until December, when the elevator began operation.

Board & Staff Composition

The YMICC is governed by a 15-member Board of Directors made up of business and community representatives. Seven (47%) are men, eight (53%) are women; eight (53%) are African-American, six (40%) are white, one (7%) is Hispanic. The Board includes an artist, a singer, three college-level academics, two school educators, one current and one former member of Asheville City Council, and six active or retired professionals and business owners, including the chancellor of UNC-Asheville and the Publisher & President of the Asheville Citizen-Times daily newspaper. The Board determines policy and strategic planning for the YMICC through committees on Visual Arts, Programming, Personnel & Policies, and Fundraising. Board accomplishments have included development of fundraising plans, organizational restructuring, oversight of the installation of an elevator, and the development of the YMICC/Vanderbilt exhibit. The Board meets monthly.

The staff includes Executive Director Oralene Simmons, former Interim Director. Ms. Simmons supervised the YMICC for two years under the aegis of Asheville Parks & Recreation Department, for which she was Cultural Arts Supervisor for more than 25 years; after her retirement, she joined the YMICC as full-time Executive Director. Margaret Fuller is facilities manager and arts in education supervisor, Connie Jefferson, administrative assistant, and Terenia Autrey, exhibit coordinator. Part-time staff member Andrew Reed is responsible for all marketing and publicity.

Financial Condition

The YMICC faced a deficit during 2001-2 as a result of unanticipated loss of revenue due to the elevator installation. While planned to go into operation in late August, the elevator's operation was delayed until the end of December as a result of structural quirks in the YMI building that had not been anticipated by the engineers. The 108-year-old structure's blueprints, while accurate, did not detail some structural elements that needed adjustment before the elevator could operate. The delay kept the three upstairs galleries and the auditorium unavailable from September through December and necessitated using the Historical Drugstore and the Africa Room galleries for both exhibition and office space. This loss of space led to loss of rental and visitor revenues of approximately \$5,000.

Festivals & EventsFolkmoot 2002 (July 2002)

The annual festival celebrating international dance, through which dance troupes from as many as two dozen nations visit Western North Carolina for performances and audience participation exhibits, will return in 2002. Dance troupes from three nations (to be assigned by producers) will give two performances each at the YMICC Auditorium for audiences of 60 – 120 school children and adults.

Goombay! 2002 (August 23-25)

The YMICC will present the 19th annual Goombay! festival to present arts, crafts, dance, cuisine, and styles of the Afro-Caribbean heritage. The three-day festival will attract more than 35,000 people and include performances by a headliner mainstream band, gospel, soul, hip-hop and other styles of music, stilt-walking and dance by an African-American dance troupe, African drumming presentations including public participation, and a variety of other activities aimed at children, seniors, and the general public. Attendance at the festival is free throughout the five-block area; space rental fees from more than 100 vendors, along with refreshment sales, cover all costs including artists' fees.

The Ties That Bind (October 2002)

The history of African-American involvement with the railway system is presented in this project under development. From the earliest years of the railways, when both slave and prison labor cleared land and laid tracks, to the present, when many descendants of Southern Railway porters and staff engineers continue to live in WNC, African-Americans have worked for, with, or near the trains. Black-owned restaurants and even hotels served the railway men who were prohibited from patronizing segregated white businesses, and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters was an important force for strengthening the workmen's job security and enhancing their dignity.

This is a shared history of blacks and whites together: one can't be told without the other. It is also a history program that focuses on the workman, the laborer, and the passengers rather than the tycoons and builders who financed and profited from the railways. The exhibit is being developed under the leadership of Board member and retired educator Pat Berkley along with three retired teachers from area schools. The committee includes two sociologists from UNCA and a special collections curator of the UNCA Library and local newspaper folkways columnist. Resources include the National Railway Historical Society, Asheville and Buncombe County School Systems, Asheville Citizen-Times.

Forums scheduled:

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| October 19, '02 | Dr. Scott Nelson, College of William & Mary (author of <i>Iron Confederacies</i>);
Mary Julian, Owen High School teacher, and students
The Building of WNC Rail System and Reconstruction |
| Nov. 16 | D. Linwood Davis, historian
Segregation, Civil Rights, & the Railroads |
| Dec. 14 | Robert Hayden, historian, & Dr. Jim Pitts, UNC-A Sociology Dept.
Labor Union and the Brotherhood of Sleeping Car Porters |
| February 2003 | Jeffrey Cantrell, columnist, John Mulkey, Sam Morgan, current train engineers
Modernization of the Railway System and Civil Rights |
| March | Dr. Karin Peterson, UNCA Sociology Dept., and oral history interviewees
The Impact of the Railway System on Families |
| April | Educators, professors of education, and YMICC staff |

Infusing Railway History into the Curriculum through the Internet and the Arts
 Fall, 2003 Curriculum workshop
 Fall, 2004 Major exhibit on railways, civil rights

Bull Durham Blues Festival

In conjunction with the Heritage Center of Durham, a special photographic documentary history of the Bull Durham Blues Festival, now in its 15th year, will be presented for six to eight weeks in the YMI Galleries. Included with the photo exhibit is a teacher's booklet offering information on the history and development of blues in North Carolina, particularly the Piedmont region, for use in public school music and history classes as an Arts in Education supplementary program.

Chucho Valdez Drum Workshop (October 5, 2002)

This one-day drumming workshop is in the planning stages at UNC-Asheville.

Center for Diversity Education (October 2002)

A special exhibit on Islam is in development by the Center for Diversity Education of Asheville to be installed in Galleries I & II during October. CDE, which created the educational Unmarked Trails exhibit on slavery, will create the entire exhibit and program for installation.

Ebony Fashion Fair (November 6, 2002)

This annual event presents African-American fashion and is sponsored by Ebony Magazine. The fashion show is held at Diana Wortham Theatre at Pack Place and draws an average audience of 300-350.

Chuck Davis & the African American Dance Ensemble (Nov. 11-15, 2002 and Feb. 3-7, 2003)

The AADE will return in November for the second year of its residency with a week of workshops in the city and county schools and at UNC-Asheville. In February the company will return to work with the schools and corps community dancers and present a public concert at Diana Wortham Theatre at Pack Place on February 8.

Black History Month Readers Theatre (Jan. 31-Feb. 2, 2003)

The YMICC is in negotiations with author Willard Simms to present three staged readings of his play *Wright From America*, a powerful drama featuring different stages and episodes from the life of writer Richard Wright. The production will be performed as a follow-up to Asheville's 22nd annual Martin Luther King, Jr. Birthday celebrations and as the kick-off to Black History month events. The project is coordinated and developed by, and the play will be directed by, WNC theater artist Andrew Reed. Cosponsorships are being pursued with Asheville Community Theatre, Diana Wortham Theatre, and other area companies.

Annual Soul Food Dinner & Show (February 2003)

The annual fundraising event will be scheduled as part of Black History Month. The costs of the event include entertainer fees, food, and publicity.

Arts in Education Programs

C.A.T.C.H. Cultural Arts Teaches Cultural Heritage

The primary component of most YMICC programs is education. Arts in Education programs offer school children throughout Asheville, Buncombe County, and surrounding counties opportunities to study music, dance, painting, sculpture, and other traditional and contemporary arts and traditional African crafts. YMICC Arts in Education programs cost \$4.00 per student. The YMICC's Black Heritage Package includes:

Sharing the Culture, Sharing the Art	pre-kindergarten
African-American Culture: An Ancestral Legacy Tour	K-12
An Introduction to the YMI Cultural Center	K-12
Where We Were, Where We Are – African-American dance	K-12
The Oral Experience: Storytelling, Poetry, and Drama	K-12
African-American Art: Past & Present	K-12
Arts of West Africa	K-12

Visiting Artists 2002-2003

Fa Da Chillun

The Hallelujah Singers, led by Marlena Smalls, will hold a three-day residency with area middle schools and high schools. The program focuses on educating students about African history with

Gullah presentations through musical theatre and entertainment. By sharing the heritage of the SC coastal islands' Gullah people, educators can foster a greater sense of understanding, respect, pride, and citizenship.

African Tales of Wisdom (February 21, 2003)

Akbar Imhotep, an African-American puppeteer/storyteller, tells his stories to the beat of a drum using brightly crafted puppets. His program is comprised of four wisdom tales from the African tradition: *The Princess Who Lost Her hair*, *Zomo Seeks Wisdom*, *The Sky God's Daughter*, and *The First Lesson*. YMICC will feature Akbar in the YMICC Auditorium celebrating Black History month and as part of the Arts in Education program. His informative and playful tales highlight the culture and wisdom of our African ancestors. The program will be cosponsored by Asheville Puppetry Alliance.

YMI Jazz Band (year-round)

The YMI Jazz Band trains young people drawn from City and County schools and community centers interested in learning to play and appreciate traditional and contemporary jazz forms.

Audience Participation

YMICC programs fall into three categories: Events, Exhibits & Performances, and Arts in Education. Many exhibits and some performances have educational aspects as well. Participation by audiences ranges from the most active, such as dancing with Folkmoot troupes and performing with guest artists in jazz workshops, to non-participatory involvement as audience members for major shows, such as headliners at the Goombay festival. With most YMICC programs, there are frequent opportunities for interaction with artists through workshops, lecture/demonstrations, classes, or question & answer sessions.

During the past year, 25 students were actively involved each week in YMICC youth band and piano classes. More than 300 adults and children attended the four performances of Folkmoot, and 500 area students attended (and more than two dozen participated in) the Martin Luther King Jr. Youth Celebration. The Chuck Davis/AADE workshops in city and county schools and at UNC-Asheville drew more than 2,000 student participants, two dozen core participants (dancers from the community), and more than 500 audience members for the public performance at the Diana Wortham Theatre. Twenty-five 7th and 8th- graders and 96 adult artists exhibited their artwork in the Watercolor 2001 exhibit, which drew total audiences of approximately 300 to the YMICC galleries. An estimated 200 students and 100 adults visited the Historical Drugstore gallery for the Unmarked Trails exhibit, and Goombay! 2001 had attendance of more than 35,000 citizens drawn from all over the southeast (Virginia to Florida).

Over 200 volunteers help organize and present Goombay!, while a dozen "regular" and many more occasional volunteers provide more than 300 hours of time during the year to ensure successful presentation of YMICC programs.

Programs are announced in *The Cornerstone*, YMICC's quarterly newsletter sent to its membership and sponsor mailing list of 250 and distributed at community centers and other nonprofit offices and galleries. Additional publicity is generated through newspaper feature stories, reviews, and calendar listings, the YMICC website, Internet community calendars, radio public service announcements and on-air "art chats," and, when appropriate, through flyers, posters, church bulletins, and direct mail invitations. When budgeted, newspaper advertisements are also used for major events.

The YMI Cultural Center is housed in a 10,000 square foot building centrally located in downtown Asheville in the heart of the historic African-American business district known as The Block. It is adjacent to the city-sponsored Pack Place Education, Arts, & Science Center, of which YMICC is a partner organization (along with Asheville Art Museum, Colburn Gem & Mineral Museum, the Health Adventure, and Diana Wortham Theatre). Built in 1893 as a community center and counterpart to the segregated YMCA, the building was completely renovated in the early 1980s. The main office is on the ground floor with other staff offices on the 2nd and 3rd floors. Art exhibits are held in its six gallery spaces, three of which are upstairs galleries (Gallery I & II and the Board Room Gallery) and three of which open to the street (the Historical Drugstore, the Africa Room, and the Big AI Gallery). Music and other performances are held variously in the 300-seat Ray Auditorium or in the Historical Drugstore, and jazz band and piano lessons are offered in the Auditorium. Arts in Education programs, mostly offered off-site at schools and

community centers, are also held in the Big AI Gallery, the Drugstore, and the Africa Room. Major events are also held off-site: Goombay takes place in the four-block area surrounding the YMI building; the King Youth Celebration, Ebony Fashion Fair, and Chuck Davis/AADE performances are at the Diana Wortham Theatre at Pack Place next door.

With the installation of the YMICC's elevator between April and December of 2001, the downstairs galleries, Auditorium, and Board Room Gallery are completely handicap accessible. Access to Galleries I & II has been made easier for the partially handicapped, with a rise of only eight steps between the elevator landing and the gallery level (previously more than 30 steps from the ground floor).

Office hours are Monday-Friday from 10:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Galleries are open from 10:00 a.m. -5:00 p.m. Tuesday-Saturday.

Financial Condition

The YMI Cultural Center continues in a phase of financial development. One year after its contract with Asheville Parks & Recreation Department was revised and renewed, the YMI has embarked on a long-term strategic plan (Attachment B) that will bring greater financial stability to the organization. It has added new board members with solid fund-raising track records, including the publisher of the Asheville Citizen-Times, the Chancellor of UNC-Asheville, a leading community activist, a former Asheville city councilwoman, and the incumbent Vice-Mayor of Asheville.

During 2001, as a result of the installation of an elevator, the YMI galleries, auditorium, and archive facilities were closed for a total of nine months, severely impacting operating income. The benefits of the elevator, which make one upstairs gallery and the auditorium completely handicap-accessible and the two other upstairs galleries more easily accessible, have begun to be felt since January. The negative impact of the construction and installation process were more severe than anticipated, as the installation continued for four months beyond those originally planned due to hidden structural eccentricities of the 108-year-old building.

Planning

The YMI Board has been restructured with a new focus on board leadership in program, staff, and financial development. The Board has overseen the fundraising for and installation of the YMICC's elevator, which required special permits as a National Register of Historic Places building and highly technical engineering and structural work. The *YMI & Biltmore House* exhibit was instigated and developed by a board member working closely with the Biltmore Estate's curators and archivists, and *The Ties That Bind* is being developed under the leadership of a Board member.

During 2001 the Board analyzed staffing needs and organizational structure and implemented a personnel policy that led to staff reorganization and personnel manual. In addition, the Board has developed a Strategic Plan for the YMICC. Committees chaired by Board members now include: Visual Arts, Program Planning, Personnel & Policy, and Major Fundraising. During 2001 the YMICC received its first estate gift of African art and reference materials: the Charles White collection from the estate of Edele Holtz, donated by Greta Rikard and Inga Hoffman, includes thirteen pen & ink drawings by White and more than a dozen reference books, biographies, and studies on Black literature, history, dance, and music. The Charles White collection will be housed in the YMI archives, and the artworks have been framed and mounted to become part of the YMICC's permanent installation.

Shared Resources

The YMICC has developed strong relationships and working partnerships with a number of area organizations, both those involved in arts programming and those concerned with other aspects of community life. Major government partners are Asheville City Parks & Recreation Department, which cosponsors the King Youth Celebration and Goombay! and provides staff support; Buncombe County After-school programs, Asheville-Buncombe County Library System, and Asheville and Buncombe County School systems. Also, the YMICC is a site for First Night celebrations, sponsored by Asheville Parks & Recreation, and for monthly Gallery Walks sponsored by Asheville Area Arts Council on behalf of a consortium of member art galleries. In

addition, the University of North Carolina-Asheville is a major partner in the Chuck Davis/AADE initiative for which the YMICC is the lead community partner, and is active in the YMICC Archives Project, a four-organizations collaborative program also sponsored by the Asheville Art Museum and Asheville Buncombe Library.

Major health care providers interested in community health and diversity issues are also partners or supporters of YMICC initiatives. Mission St. Joseph's Hospital System and its Diversity Committee joined with Thoms Rehabilitation and Community Care Partners of Asheville to host a conference on end-of-life issues in 2001; as part of the conference the YMICC presented *Last Miles of the Way* and a special evening with Dr. Annette Dula. The exhibit itself was curated by the South Carolina State Museum.

The Biltmore Estate, whose founder George Vanderbilt also built the YMI Cultural Center, cooperated with YMI board member and artist Lorraine Tipaldi to develop the joint photographic exhibit, *The YMI & Biltmore*, and Asheville Community Theatre has an ongoing exchange program through which the YMI provides rehearsal space and support for theater programming and ACT shares revenues from special Black History Month productions. The Watercolor Society of NC/Western Division developed *Watercolor 2001* in conjunction with the YMICC, which organized the Arts in Education program for City and County schools and after-school programs while the Society recruited teachers and artists for the exhibition.

The YMICC is the Asheville lead partner for the Chuck Davis/AADE Statewide Initiative. Executive Director Oralene Simmons is chairwoman of the Martin Luther King Association of NC, which coordinates with the Martin Luther King Association of Asheville-Buncombe County and other regional MLK Associations to develop programs celebrating Dr. King's life and legacy.

Plans to Spend Funds

The YMICC anticipates spending funds received through this grant for general administrative expenses, primarily salaries and marketing costs.