



## CHARLES H. WRIGHT MUSEUM OF AFRICAN AMERICAN HISTORY MARKS 40 YEARS WITH A GRAND ANNIVERSARY CELEBRATION

*Museum invites community to join celebration with free admission and special activities*

DETROIT – April 11, 2005 – The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History will observe its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Sunday, April 24 with a community celebration that will include free admission, guided tours, live entertainment, historic character reenactments and a “grand” anniversary cake. The museum also will induct 40 Detroiters into its Ring of Genealogy, which honors those who made historic contributions to improving the lives of African Americans in Detroit and the nation.

The celebration, sponsored by MGM Grand Detroit Casino’s Diversity Committee, includes a waiver of the admission fee for the day for all visitors. The Museum, the world’s largest institution dedicated to the African American experience, will be open from 11:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m.

“The Museum’s 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary is a celebration for the entire metropolitan Detroit community and an opportunity for the public to enjoy all the Museum has to offer,” said Christy Coleman, president and chief executive officer of the MAAH. “We hope thousands of people will join us on this day of celebration.”

Juliette Okotie-Eboh, Vice President Community Affairs, MGM Grand Detroit Casino said that the casino decided to sponsor the celebration because “we wanted to give a gift to the Detroit community that was distinctive to our organization. We celebrate diversity at MGM Grand Detroit Casino every day, so partnering with the Museum to present its 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebration offered the perfect ‘thank you’ vehicle while helping the community to celebrate a major milestone in the life of one of its most important cultural institutions.”

A major highlight of the day will be the unveiling of the "Detroit 40," all deceased members of the community who have excelled in areas of art and entertainment, science and technology, civic and community affairs, and humanities and education. Their legacy will be formally recognized in an installation ceremony where brass plates bearing their names will be displayed in the Museum's Ring of Genealogy, located in the Ford Freedom Rotunda. The 40 individuals were nominated by Museum members and selected by a special Museum committee.

The Ring of Genealogy, designed by local artist Hubert Massey, is located in the Museum's floor upon entering the Ford Freedom Rotunda. Encircling the design in the floor are three rings of brass plates with the names of notable African American men and women who made significant achievements in the history and culture of African Americans. The Ring of Genealogy includes brass plates that bear the names of nationally renowned African Americans such as Dr. Charles Drew, Harriet Tubman, Frederick Douglass, Sammy Davis, Jr., Gen. Daniel "Chappie" James, former Mayor Coleman A. Young and others.

"Induction into the Museum's Ring of Genealogy gives the Museum an opportunity to acknowledge the national contributions and legacy of Detroiters," Coleman said.

Visitors are encouraged to tour the Museum's state-of-the-art, 22,000-square-foot core gallery, *And Still We Rise: Our Journey Through African American History and Culture*. The core exhibit has received rave reviews since its opening last November. 400 years of history is showcased in 22 distinct, multi-leveled, interactive galleries. The exhibit retraces the path of African Americans from ancient Africa to modern-day Detroit.

Coleman said history will come alive during the day through several “first-time” museum experiences and live entertainment:

- Guided tours of the museum’s exciting, new core exhibit, *“And Still We Rise,”* will be offered to all visitors throughout the day.
- For the “first-time” the *“And Still We Rise”* exhibit will include live historic character reenactments and entertainment. Visitors can watch a conversation between live costumed characters portraying Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass.
- The glorious days of Detroit’s legendary Paradise Valley will be reenacted through the sounds of a Black Bottom theatre’s featured blues singer.
- Visitors will enjoy continuing performances on the Cora, a six-stringed instrument played throughout Africa which is the African version of the guitar.
- Performances will be presented by renowned authentic African drummers Kamal and Shashu Amen Ra.

“We’re excited about the opportunity to enrich our visitors’ experiences by offering this wide variety of activities that will complement our core exhibit,” Coleman said.

MGM Grand Detroit Casino chefs will pay tribute to the museum by creating an official 40<sup>th</sup> Anniversary ceremonial cake. Museum and MGM officials will precede over a special cake-cutting ceremony and the MGM Grand Detroit Casino chefs will slice and serve cake and punch to museum visitors throughout the afternoon.

“It’s not often that a casino operations division fits so nicely with a community activity,” said MGM Grand Detroit Casino Vice President of Food and Beverage and Diversity Committee chair Norm Dillard. “When you invite an entire city to your birthday celebration you need a lot more cake than the local bakery can deliver, and our chefs are delighted to meet this need.”

### Museum offers Special Programs for Children

Other programs, especially for children, will include:

- **The Art of Adornment**, an African jewelry-making workshop. Children can tap their creative talents and design a custom bracelet or necklace at the make-and-take African jewelry workshop.
- **“The Storytellers”** a Detroit husband and wife team who tell stories through music and song.
- **“A is for Africa!”** Children will also enjoy a three-dimensional “dictionary” designed for children in pre-school through fourth grade. This hands-on exhibition features 26 interactive stations with digitized images or artifacts from the Museum’s collections of puzzles, maps, flip books, games and audio video components.

These programs are all located on the lower level corridor. All programs are offered at no charge to visitors.

The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History began its existence in 1965 in a building on West Grand Boulevard. It was founded by Dr. Charles Wright, who believed that Black Americans needed a resource center to document, preserve and educate the public on their history, life and culture. It moved to a new facility at John R and Brush in 1985, and then moved to its current facility in 1997.

The Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History, located at 315 E. Warren Avenue in Detroit’s Cultural Center is open Tuesday, 9:30 a.m. - 8:00 p.m., Wednesday through Saturday, 9:30 a.m. – 5 p.m. and Sunday, 1:00 – 5:00 p.m. Admission is \$8.00 for adults (ages 13-61) and \$5.00 for seniors (ages 62+) and children (ages 3-12). Museum members and children under 3 are admitted free. Visit us on the web at [www.maah-detroit.org](http://www.maah-detroit.org).

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