



African American
AAMAA
Museum of the Arts

June Newsletter
In Memory of
Irene Dixon Johnson





The Dream that Became a Reality...



...with God all things are possible: Matthew 19:26

In 1989, Reverend Maxwell Johnson and Irene Dixon Johnson retired to the Sunny state of Florida and beautiful city of Deltona, Florida.

Their plans for retirement was short lived ... God gave Irene Dixon Johnson the vision to create a museum of arts. In her research Mrs. Johnson discovered that, in the County Seat of Volusia County, there were no museum in the area devoted to African American and Caribbean Art and Culture. In September 22, 1994, Mrs. Irene Dixon Johnson and Reverend Maxwell Johnson founded the first and only African American Museum of the Arts, at 325 South Clara Avenue, Deland, Florida. The City of DeLand was founded in 1876 and it was not until 1994 when the people of color would have the opportunity to visit a museum which displays African and Caribbean American Art. The purpose of the museum was to collect, preserve, exhibit, and promote African and Caribbean Art. Artists could display their artwork and shape the thinking of young African Americans Artist in a positive and self-affirming manner. The African American Museum is the home that host the permanent collection of more than two hundred and fifty (250) artifacts including sculptures, and masks from countries of Africa and the Caribbean Islands. In addition to an array of visual arts, in 1999, Maxwell and Irene founded the Little Theatre of Deland. The Little Theatre of Deland provides children and adults the opportunity to develop their dramatic skills and talents. The hard and endless work along with Irene Dixon Johnson's commitment to showcase the rich heritage and culture of the African Americans is unforgettable. In fact, her commitment led to the founding of the "Thin Man" Watts Amphitheatre as well as the Maxwell and Irene Johnson Cultural Park. There are many tremendous accomplishments of the Johnson's. Their accomplishments will allow the future generations the opportunity to learn and appreciate the contribution of African Americans from around the world, our county, our state and our city. The city of DeLand is very fortunate to have community leaders such as Rev. Maxwell Johnson and Irene Dixon Johnson. They were a jewel in our community that left an everlasting effect on our community!

We can only image.... Irene Dixon Johnson saying ... *I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me: Philippians 4:13*

You will be truly miss!!





Family Reflections



You Can Only Have One Mother,

*You can only have one mother
Patient, kind and true;
No other friend in all the world,
Will be the same to you.
When other friends forsake you,
To mother you will return,
For all her loving kindness,
She asks nothing in return.
As I look upon her picture,
Sweet memories I recall,
Of a face so full of sunshine,
And a smile for one and all.
Sweet Jesus, take this message,
To my dear mother up above;
Tell her how I miss her,
And give her all my love.*

Grandma

*Grandma, your life was full of loving deeds,
forever thoughtful of our special needs.
Today and tomorrow, my whole life through,
I will always love and cherish you.
There was magic in grandmother's touch,
and sunshine in her smile.
There was love in everything she did
to make our lives worthwhile.
We found both hope and courage
just by looking in her eyes.
Her laughter was a source of joy;
Her words warm and wise.
There was a kindness and compassion
found in her embrace,
and shining down from Heaven above
we see the glow of Grandma's face.

From Your Loving Granddaughter,
Cynthia Irene Johnson*





Remembering

Irene Dixon Johnson

When I came to Stetson University in 1998 to serve as Dean of the College of Arts and Sciences, Irene and Maxwell were among the first community leaders I met. They were great friends of our President, Doug Lee, and faithful supporters of our lecture series on the Civil Rights era and its lessons for our own time. That program, led by the Rev. Dr. Jefferson Rogers, hosted a remarkable set of speakers—from, to name only a few, Kwame Ture and Angela Davis to John Lewis, C.T. Vivian, and Taylor Branch, the author of a three-volume study of America during King’s life. These lectures always began with a community dinner, and Irene and Maxwell always held an honored place at the table. Rev. Johnson began each dinner with one of his quiet, but powerful invocations. When asked to speak, Irene always reminded us of the importance of bringing the history of her people to life for the current generation. Of course, she always ended by inviting everyone to the African American Museum of the Arts in DeLand, the treasure-house of Black and African history and culture that she so lovingly established for the community. Visiting the Museum over the years and seeing Irene’s pride in what she had created for the community are experiences I’ll never forget. I have been especially moved by seeing children encounter with awe the rich cultural heritage the Museum offers the public. Under its director, Mary Allen, the Museum continues to offer education, pride, and creative joy to everyone in our community, Black, Brown, or White.

I’m honored now to serve on the Museum’s Board of Directors, and through that service, I hope to honor Irene and Maxwell and their gift for friendship and their commitment to community and cultural pride. It’s hard always to say farewell to a great person, but with Irene, I think we can instead say “fare forward.” Through the Museum, she has given us a way to continue bringing cultural pride to people who need it here in Florida. I will think of her whenever I enter the Museum and see her portrait, with Maxwell, as our founders. I will think of her whenever I see the joy in the eyes of children in encountering, perhaps for the first time, the art of Africa and of Black artists, people just like them. Irene Johnson has made a difference in our world. She has inspired us to be fully human and to pay attention to the power of wisdom, creativity, and kindness. Her legacy here is great, and we will continue to honor her memory and the lessons of her life.

Sincerely, Grady Ballenger, Emeritus Professor of English, Stetson University, and Member of the Board of Directors at the African American Museum of the Arts, DeLand Florida





Vivian Campbell

“A joy to meet. Every time I met her, I learned something new. I really appreciated what she was doing in the community. “

Dr. Primrose Cameron

“Irene helped enlighten me about the difference between being prideful and being proud.”

Diane Schmidt, “Every time I visit the museum, I learn something more. At times, I have tears of sadness when I realize the depth of hurt that some brothers and sister have endured. I am blessed to be a part of this ongoing dream to be kind to one another.”

Dr. Felicia Benzo, “Strong, determine and knew what she wanted and got it. A force to be reckoned with and because of her, we stand as the African American Museum of the Arts. “



Founders

**Rev. Maxwell and Irene
Dixon Johnson**



AMPHITHEATER



- Ground Breaking -



- Completion -



- Ribbon Cutting -

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