

All About Community

BY JULIA TILFORD

Eatonville's ZORA! Festival 2018 celebrates pride in neighborhood and in heritage.

Eatonville's annual ZORA! Festival is celebrating its 29th year in January, and N.Y. Nathiri, the executive director of The Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community, Inc. (P.E.C.), is absolutely thrilled to continue sharing the event — and its teachings — with the surrounding communities.

"The ZORA! Festival is a multidisciplinary, inter-generational event that provides programing for everyone from the very young to the very old," says Nathiri. "Our theme this year is Community Arts and Community Action."

The P.E.C. started its advocacy organization in 1987 as an objection to a proposed road expansion that would have severely impacted Eatonville. One of the reasons they gave for protecting the historical status of the community was that, in addition to being the first African-American municipality in the United States, the town is the birthplace of author Zora Neale Hurston.

"The decision makers hadn't heard of Eatonville, and mostly only academics knew about Hurston at the time," explains Nathiri, "and we determined that we needed to start a special event to help people understand the importance of this place. Now, we would call this kind of event edutainment."

The first ZORA! Festival in 1990 had such guests as Alice Walker and Ruby Dee and attracted more than 10,000 people, and 28 years later, it is still going strong, bringing in visitors from all over the world. From Jan.



Festival crowds gather in the Eatonville community.

20 through Jan. 28, the visitor experience will include exhibitions, conferences, lectures and concerts, as well as interactions with artists, vendors, educators and advocates. The ZORA! Festival seeks to both educate and entertain with a "strong secondary school program," a Taste of Eatonville luncheon and a number of special guests. At the time of this writing, festival headliners include a conversation with American rapper David Banner and NPR *1A* host Joshua Johnson, and music performance by American funk band The Zapp Band.

According to Terri Vismale-Morris, director of public relations for the festival, "It's one of the most comprehensive events of its kind, focusing on history, heritage and pride in the Central Florida area."

"The festival is special," says Nathiri. "We've been doing it so long that we see generations of people continuing to come back and visit."

To get a full list of the events, including registration information for the conference and ticket information, visit zorafestival.org. **OAM**

Julia Tilford is an author, freelancer and regular contributor to Orlando Arts Magazine.



Center stage at the ZORA! Festival.

COURTESY ZORA! FESTIVAL (2)