

# An International Celebration

BY JULIA TILFORD

The ZORA! Festival observes a milestone.



ROBERTO GONZALEZ

Orlando Science Center's mobile planetarium returns as part of ZORA!'s Education Day at Orlando Technical College on Feb. 1.

The Association to Preserve the Eatonville Community (PEC) is thrilled to kick off its 30th ZORA! Festival. The festival begins on Jan. 26 and runs through Feb. 3. According to N.Y. Nathiri, executive director of PEC, the festival has always worked to support three important goals: “celebrating the life and work of Zora Neale Hurston, the preeminent female voice of the Harlem Renaissance; the historic significance of her hometown, Eatonville,” which is the first African-American municipality in the United States; “and the contributions that people of African ancestry have made to culture.”

With such a milestone ahead of them, PEC themed this year's festival as a global conversation.

“We've got several international events coming to Orlando specifically for the festival,” says Nathiri.

One of these events is the World Conference of Mayors, which takes place Jan. 30 through Feb. 2. Another is the Collegium for African American Research (CAAR) Conference, which also occurs Jan. 30 through Feb. 2. ZORA! hosts the conference on Feb. 1, and some of the most respected American

Hurston scholars will be in attendance.

But the international partnerships aren't the only exciting collaborations associated with the ZORA! Festival this year. Local partnerships are more important than ever, especially those of Central Florida schools. As stated by Lyman Brodie, executive associate dean of the College of Arts and Humanities at University of Central Florida (UCF), “The relationship between UCF and PEC remains very dynamic with a focus on academic excellence, diversity and partnership.”

“UCF has been an outstanding collaborative partner and sponsor,” says Nathiri. “Its contribution is so pivotal, and the institution deserves the highest recognition. For the Collegium to come, we had to be able to offer donated facilities, and UCF has given us the ability to do that.”

Rollins College, which has collaborated the past two years with PEC on the Community Conference, hosts the Global Conversation Round Tables this year, Jan. 29-30. The two-day event focuses on global issues, per the festival's theme. Matt Nichter, coordinator of African-American studies at Rollins, explains that the



Rollins College brings back Community Conversations.

COURTESY ROLLINS COLLEGE



The CAAR is the result of UCF's collaboration with PEC.

COURTESY UCF

event “brings together scholars and civic leaders from across the United States to discuss the opportunities and challenges facing African-Americans in general and historically black towns in particular.”

Art & History Museums – Maitland (A&H) is contributing this year as co-host of the festival's opening program with the opening reception and museum talks held at Zora Neale Hurston National Museum of Fine Arts and A&H.

“These communities are historically connected,” says Nathiri. “Eatonville evolved from the Maitland community back in 1887.”

Additionally, A&H's Director of Advancement Bret E. Fendt says A&H's spring exhibition will work in conjunction with the festival. “We've been in collaboration with the ZORA! Festival for years, but this is the first time we've had a formal exhibition. It's called *Maitland and African-American Experiences*, and runs from January to May.”

Another important collaboration is with Orlando Science Center. The institution is taking part in Education Day on Feb. 1 at Orlando Technical



COURTESY ZORA! FESTIVAL

## FESTIVAL HIGHLIGHTS

**30th ZORA! Festival:** Saturday, Jan. 26 through Sunday, Feb. 3

**Global Conversations Round Table at Rollins College:** Tuesday, Jan. 29, and Wednesday, Jan. 30

**Outdoor Festival of the Arts:** Friday-Sunday, Feb. 1-3

**Companion Exhibitions: The Hurston Museum and Art & History Museums - Maitland:** Saturday, Jan. 26, 6-8:45 p.m.

**Education Day:** Friday, Feb. 1

**6th Annual ZORA! STEM Conference for Middle School Students:** Friday, Feb. 1, 8 a.m.-3 p.m.

**Collegium for African American Research (CAAR) Conferees in Historic Eatonville:** Friday, Feb. 1, 8 a.m.-5:30 p.m.

College, providing students and other attendees with the chance to explore the mobile planetarium, as well as other STEM-focused, interactive activities.

The Outdoor Festival of the Arts is free to kids on Feb. 1-3, and adults can attend Education Day for free.

“It's in keeping with the legacy of Zora Neale Hurston to provide the masses of people with the finest of cultural offerings,” Nathiri says.

Guests, students and Central Florida residents who have attended the festival in previous years should expect an event the likes of which they have never seen before. In addition, those who are planning to make their first visit to the festival this year couldn't have chosen a better time to start.

“Since this is our 30<sup>th</sup> year, we're looking to share a very fine story from a variety of angles,” says Nathiri.

To learn more about the events, register for the conference and find information on ticket prices, visit [zorafestival.org](http://zorafestival.org). **OAM**

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