



**GROUPS WORK TOGETHER TO
REVIVE ROOTS CULTURAL FESTIVAL
IN DELRAY BEACH
CRA helps sponsor the event and donates land**

MEDIA RELEASE

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DELRAY BEACH, Fla.—Delray Beach is known for its festivals celebrating art, music, and food. But there's one local festival with a tradition of reaching beyond the celebration of arts, food and drink to include academic enrichment, sports competitions, and local business development. It's the Roots Cultural Festival, now in its 35th year.

Founded by a group of African American homeowners in 1978, the Roots Festival's mission was to expand the "cultural awareness of our rich heritage" through a mixture of educational, artistic, and sporting events. In its heyday, the festival grew to include elaborate parades, the crowning of a King and Queen, theater performances, professional dance presentations, local business workshops, spelling bees, math contests, fashion shows, and sports tournaments. In recent years, however, the festival had fallen on hard times.

This year the Delray Beach Marketing Cooperative (DBMC) is organizing a reunion-style revival of the festival in collaboration with Roots Cultural Festival, Inc., a local nonprofit organization. The Roots Cultural Festival "Family Reunion" is scheduled for Saturday, August 11 from 4 to 10 p.m. It will be held on vacant land owned by Delray Beach Community Redevelopment Agency (CRA) along West Atlantic Avenue at SW 9th Avenue.

"We're bringing this classic event back into the neighborhood where it originated," said Jamie Salen, PR and Events Manager for the DBMC. "And thanks to the CRA and their generous donation of the land, we've been able to do that."

Celebrating Unity and Culture

The "Family Reunion" event is open to all, and will feature live entertainment on two stages, a Gospel music competition, storytelling, a barbeque contest, children's activities, and a special multicultural market. Associated activities scheduled before and after the August 11th event include a youth basketball camp, basketball tournaments for kids and adults, and the Roots Academic Olympics.

A host of public and private sponsors are lending support, including the CRA, the City of Delray Beach, the West Atlantic Redevelopment Coalition, Spady Cultural Heritage Museum, and the Knights of Pythagoras.

Salen said the event is will honor all those who've worked hard to put the Roots Festival together through the years—people like Elizabeth “Libby” Wesley, an accomplished educator, community activist and philanthropist who was part of the festival’s founding group and became its matriarch. Now 77, Wesley remembers all the different components that were folded into the Roots Festival in the early days.

“We had math and spelling contests to keep students’ minds sharp over the summer. We had a seminar for small businesses. We had a program called Roots Classical Series, exposing children to classical music,” Wesley said. “These were all ideas that came from the community and benefitted the community.”

Recognizing a Leader’s Dedication

Wesley’s involvement with the Roots Festival and her numerous other contributions to Delray Beach were recognized on July 17 when the City Commission adopted a resolution, submitted by the CRA, to name a public plaza in her honor. The resolution to officially rename the plaza at the corner of West Atlantic and SW 5th Avenues “The Elizabeth ‘Libby’ Jackson Wesley Plaza” will be read during the Roots Festival.

“I would be lying if I said I’m not pleased,” Wesley said of the honor. “But I want everybody to know that I was just part of the vision. We saw a need and just had fun trying to meet the need.”

Former Delray Beach city commissioner Alberta McCarthy became chair of the Roots Cultural Festival a few years ago, after Wesley stepped down due to health issues.

“One of the first things I did was add the slogan ‘Everybody’s Got Roots’ to demonstrate that the Roots Festival is meant for all people,” McCarthy said. “Ms. Wesley believed there’s a richness to this culture that everyone can enjoy.”

For more information about the Roots Cultural Festival, visit www.delrayrootsfestival.org. For more information about the Delray Beach CRA, visit www.delraycra.org or contact the CRA office at (561) 276-8640.