

Annual celebration to honor African-American leaders

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- Rev. Michael Page

By Alexis Allston
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Beautiful music, elegant poetry, expressive dance and a delicious soul food feast — that's what attendees can expect at Antioch Baptist Church's annual African-American History Month celebration on February 26 at 4:00 p.m.

The event is at their building at 1415 Holloway Street in Durham and is open to everyone, according to Antioch pastor Rev. Michael D. Page.

He said the celebration is meant to show reverence for the advancements of African-Americans.

"It's a time to reflect, a time to appreciate our culture and a time to give thanks for where we are right now in this modern-day society," Page said.

He said the celebration's music will include both old slave songs and contemporary music to show the transition from historical times to the new generation. North Carolina Central University's Worship and Praise Inspirational Mass Choir (WPI) will perform.

Ebenezer Baptist Church's Hymn Choir from Charlotte will also perform as part of the celebration.

"They sing from the depths of their souls according to the old historical slave songs," Rev. Page said.

The music will be accompanied by an expressive dance group made up of youth from the church.

"They really bring to the table a new wave of music," Page said. "They help people connect with this newer generation."

Those who attend Antioch's celebration will surely not go hungry as it comes with a nice community meal, says Rev. Page.



Louise Weeks (left) with Pastor Michael Page at last year's Antioch Baptist Church African-American History Month celebration. (Photo Courtesy of Michael Page)

"The soul food dinner ranges from every kind of dish we could possibly think of that we shared as a family growing up," Rev. Page said. "We want to make people feel at home and part of a community. It's a joyful feast."

Louise Weeks, a member of Antioch's congregation, said she's been attending the celebration practically every year since Rev. Page started it.

"It's just wonderful!" Weeks said. "They started the celebration to honor African-Americans in our community, some of whom never had any public recognition. I think it's a blessing, and it's been well-attended, and I commend him and his church for doing it every year."

Weeks said her favorite part of the celebration is the acknowledgement of the honorees, African-Americans who are notable



Pastor Michael Page pins honoree Ervin Hester, the first African-American news anchor in Durham, during the 2016 African-American History Month celebration. (Photo courtesy of Pastor Michael Page)

for their contributions to Durham and throughout North Carolina, and seeing how grateful they are to be recognized. "For me, just seeing them honored is a blessing because I've been active in this community for over 50 years," Weeks said. "Just to be a part of that and celebrate with them is a blessing for me, and I'm so happy for them."

Rev. Page said the honorees are pioneers who have worked hard to make a difference and have their voices heard.

"They made significant contributions to society and they should be noted for that," he said. "A lot of them had to be daredevils."

Among the honorees this February are Cerelyn "CJ" Davis, the first African-American female police chief in Durham, and H.M. "Mickey" Michaux, Jr., the longest serving African-American member of the North Carolina General Assembly who represents Durham County. Gazing toward photos on his office wall of Martin Luther King Jr., Barack Obama, Nelson Mandela and other black leaders, Rev. Page said the purpose of African-American History Month is to identify with yourself, recognize who you are and realize why you should have pride in yourself.

"When you take pride in your heritage, you take pride in yourself and your environment and everything that you do is being done with quality," Page said. "We want to help people move to a different place in their lives."