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NEWS

The Mann launches Family Fascination Series

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Cultural workshops and mask and jewelry making are just some of the things parents and children will be doing together in a new pilot program at the Mann.

The Mann recently launched the family oriented program called Family Fascination Series for the parents and children of the Salvation Army's Red Shield Residence. The after-school program will be facilitated by teaching artists on behalf of the Mann at the emergency housing facility through the end of November. The Family Fascination Series is funded through the generosity of The Gitlin Family Foundation.

"We are thrilled to partner with the Salvation Army's Red Shield Residence to launch this new series," said vice president of education and community engagement at the Mann Rhoda Blount. "The idea is to use art and music as the platform for parents and children to connect in a creative, relaxed way."

This new Mann residency features teaching artists from Universal African Dance and Drum Ensemble and visual artist Jihan Thomas, who will facilitate after-school programs twice a week for six weeks for a total of 12 workshops.

The Universal African Dance and Drum Ensemble was founded by Robert and Wanda Dickerson in 1984. The program consists of African dance, drumming, and masquerade, creative, aerobic, modern, line and praise dance. The ensemble is based in Camden, N.J. and is comprised of members from Camden and Philadelphia.

Since its inception, the ensemble has grown to be one of the largest professional African Dance and Drum Ensembles in the U.S. The 35-member

ensemble presents an electrifying performance of stilt walkers, drummers, ground masquerades and dancers.

The ensemble has performed at many prominent and prestigious events throughout the country, including performing for and honoring leaders of countries, celebrities and politicians, as well as religious, business and community leaders. The teachers and officials of the ensemble have been taught by many great teachers from many countries in Africa. They are known for their West African presentations of Guinea, Senegal, Mali, Ghana, Ivory Coast, Nigeria, The Gambia, Liberia and Sierra Leone.

"One of the things that makes this program so unique is that it gives parents and their children an opportunity to bond," Blount said. "A lot of these families are going through tough times. This gives everyone a chance to have fun, learn new things and engage with their children. We are thankful to the Universal African Dance and Drum Ensemble and visual artist Jihan Thomas for being a part of this wonderful program. They are not only making a difference in the community, but also in the lives of these families."

During the workshops, families will explore the culture of West Africa through activities, such as celebratory songs, dancing and drumming, and mask and jewelry making.

"All of the masks that the families make will be going into a shadow box that will be displayed as an exhibit in the Salvation Army," Blount said. "The families will eventually take the masks that they made off of the wall, keep it for themselves, and put it in their home. All of the activities and workshops we are having will help the families keep their mind off of where they are and



The Universal African Dance and Drum Ensemble, along with visual artist Jihan Thomas, will be conducting workshops for the Mann's new program: Family Fascination Series at the Salvation Army. PHOTOS BY THE MANN CENTER

the current problems that they may be dealing with."

Blount is hoping the experience the families will have at the Salvation Army will help mold a lifetime bond between the parents and their children.

"The most beautiful thing a parent and child can do together is to bond over something they both enjoy," Blount said. "That theme is at the forefront of this program. I wanted the parents to have an opportunity to work with their children on projects. I want them to laugh, talk and share memories with one another. Because no matter what any circumstance may be in ones life, love always conquers all."

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The Universal African Dance and Drum Ensemble in a performance.