

com-mu-ni-ty  
A group of people living in  
the same locality, under the  
same government, and  
having common interests.  
September 18, 2005



Disaster  
Feeding  
Frenzy

Editorial



# SOUTH SHORE COMMUNITY

## A CONVERSATION WITH



Julieanna Richardson

BY JEFF KELLY LOWENSTEIN

*Julieanna Richardson is founder and executive director of The History Makers, a non-profit organization that is in the process of creating the nation's largest audio/video archives of African-Americans. Here she talks about her childhood knowledge of black history, her inspiration for the project, and the challenges she has encountered during the past six years.*

**Q: What did you know about black history as a child?**

**A:** I was born in Pittsburgh, but I grew up in a small town outside of Columbus, Ohio and I remember one day the teacher told us to tell our ethnic. I was the only black girl in the class. Everyone's going around and [saying], "I'm half-Irish, I'm half-French." All we had really studied at that point was slavery and George Washington Carver. My father had been stationed in France and I said I was part-Indian, which most African-Americans have some Indian blood in them, and African or black or whatever, and French. The teacher looked like [Gestures surprise] ... but I didn't want to be missing from [the group]. When you studied slavery, you knew it wasn't good to be a slave. The only other thing we studied was George Washington Carver. I've often said it was hard to imagine that people were talking about him in a positive light and that he did all these things with peanuts. It was hard to believe that people were touting him because slavery you didn't want to associate with.

**Q: What prompted you to create The History Makers?**

**A:** I was approaching my mid 40s and I didn't have children and I wanted to leave a legacy. ... As I was sitting, trying to figure out, at a crossroad, what I was going to do... My mother had given me as a birthday present a trip to Memphis to see my youngest sister and also there was the National Bar Association... There was this one session and Rev. Billy Kyles and Judge Constance Baker

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## Community garden creates multi-cultural haven

BY JEFF KELLY LOWENSTEIN

Monarch butterflies fluttered by Vertlon "Lynn" Everette's straw hat covering the thick braided hair that cascaded down her back as she strolled through the Rainbow Beach Community Gardens Monday.

"It's just like walking in the woods, cool and shady," said Everette, who retired in February after teaching for nearly 30 years at Adam Clayton Powell, Jr. Paideia Community Academy.

Drawing on skills she developed on a St. Louis farm during childhood summers, Everette harvests cucumbers, collards, kale and tomatillos on her plot, one of nearly 70 close to the intersection of 78<sup>th</sup> Street and South Shore Drive.

"I love it," said Everette, estimating that she spends four hours per day during the week and all day during the weekend in her garden.

Her fellow gardeners share that love.

For the past 75 years a multi-racial group

See **GARDEN** on page 6



THE ENTRA

## Open Roads takes South

By JEFF KELLY LOWENSTEIN

Mike Hill had never traveled outside of Illinois before this summer, but now he's done that and a whole lot more.

The School of Entrepreneurship High School sophomore was one of 16 youth ages 15 to 19 years old from across the country who participated in a five-week leadership training and documentary immersion trip in Washington State. Sponsored by non-profit organization Open Roads, the trip saw Hill and his

## Health challenges explained

By JEFF KELLY LOWENSTEIN

Laura Harrell invoked a tube of toothpaste Tuesday to explain the connection between a fiber-rich diet and a healthy colon.

"When a tube of toothpaste is full, it's easier to squeeze," said Harrell, instructor of Gastroenterology at the University of Chicago Hospitals. "It's important to add fiber to bulk up the stool in the colon so it's easier to push out the stool."

Many people in the crowd of 60 people laughed at the graphic analogy.

Harrell's presentation drew to a close the first day of "Leading Our Communities to Better Health ... A Health Series Offered to Our Surrounding Communities." Held at Biological Sciences Learning Center at the University of Chicago, 924 E. 57<sup>th</sup> St., the two-day event was attended by area residents, professionals and a group of



Dr. Laura Harrell  
cancer



Motley were on in it with a few others. At that time I was, like, "People know Martin Luther King, but they don't know these names. The public doesn't, on average, know these names." They were very important. Without support there would be no Martin Luther King. And then they have that lovely museum there in Memphis. And I went through and was particularly attracted to it. The name actually came to me during that period when I was listening to Rev. Billy Kyles and Constance Baker Motley, the name The History Makers came.

And I came running back to Chicago and I'm, like, "I know what I want to do." And my friends squarely said, "That makes no sense." (Laughs heartily.)

**Q: Why have you chosen 5,000 interviews as a figure to reach?**

**A:** It's double the number of the slave narratives from the WPA. There were 2,300 former slaves interviewed between the years 1936 and 1938. ... And then it's 10 percent of the Shoah Foundation. I figured we could do 52,000 interviews, but 5,000 would represent a very significant collection and something that had not really been done before. ... There is a non-slave part of the history. We know little about it, but there is a non-slave part. I'm particularly fascinated myself with the 1700s in this country, before the entrenchment of the antebellum South and interesting things are started to be uncovered.

**Q: What has surprised you?**

**A:** First of all, the holdings of the Library of Congress

and the Smithsonian [are] pretty sparse. I'm not saying they're not a significant collection, but music – blues, jazz and gospel, they have those. They have the slave narratives. There's an important art collection at the Smithsonian, but not that much. Out of the 200 black newspapers, three of them have archives and none of them archived. That's the Chicago Defender, the Afro-American and The Philadelphia Tribune. There was a very important paper, The Pittsburgh Courier, but they disappeared some kind of way and maybe they're in somebody's basement. I believe things in some cases are around but we are faced with the problem that we are dealing with a community that has been time over centuries been told that it has no value and I think New Orleans is an example of that. ... I became more and more convinced the more I got into it, the more there was a need, what I had envisioned was not in existence in the way I had envisioned it.

The other thing I want to comment on and I've been talking about this more is that it all really goes back to slavery. Our issues of why this wonderfully rich history has been so covered up has to do with ... shame on the black people's side or guilt or not wanting to feel guilty on the white side. Those two communities have literally acted in unintended complicity to cover up this wonderfully rich history, which, when you open it, it's not a Pandora's Box of problems, but a Pandora's Box of wonderfully rich stories.

**Q: What have been some of the challenges or bumps and bruises along the way?**

**A:** One, people understanding what we are, we still suffer from an identity crisis, or the value of it and also the fundraising. The foundation community has been supportive, but we don't fit any funding criteria, so we've done a lot of events because we have to make money, not because we want to do them.

**Q: What happens after the 5,000 interviews are finished?**

**A:** The vision is that we'll be encased in a national institution, but I want the institution to be able to guarantee the collection's safekeeping in perpetuity. I always see that we will do interviews, but not maybe at the pace we're trying to build up to. That's where the regions come in. ... We're trying to build up so we can get to 1,000 done in one year. Right now we're at 350.

**Q: What haven't I asked?**

**A:** We've done interviews in over 80 U.S. cities. We're big on collaborations. We've collaborated here with the Art Institute, Museum of Science and Industry, DuSable, Defender, Tribune, so we're big on collaborations. We're actually going to be creating one of the most extensive African-American thesauruses because our interviews go over all these different disciplines. You can go from interviewing a race car driver to a neurosurgeon to a Tuskegee Airman to an educator. We didn't understand this when we began because we were looking for different thesauruses to hang our hat on, but that's one of the by-products we did not envision at the beginning.