

Organizers Plan Unity Parade for May 12

BY MICHAELLE RAPHAEL

On Sunday, May 12, the second annual Unity Day Parade for the Haitian community in Boston will take place in Mattapan and Dorchester. The Unity parade was launched last year, mainly because many Haitians felt there was a lack of an accurate representation of the Haitian culture. Many came together on Mother's day last year for the first-ever unity parade in celebration of Haitian heritage month.

This year, thousands are expected to march down Blue Hill Avenue to demonstrate their ethnic pride. Organizers say that the Haitian-American Unity Parade will one day become the Haitian community's most exuberant annual celebration.

The parade will step off at 1:30 p.m. from Mattapan Square and follow a route up Blue Hill Avenue to Franklin Field at Talbot Avenue.

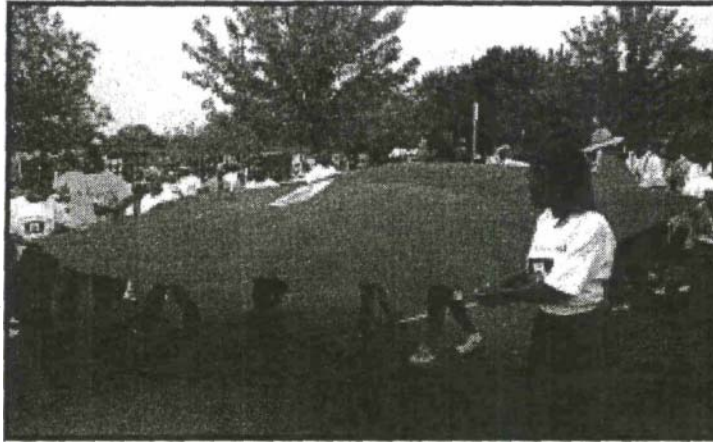
Four years ago, Wilner Auguste, producer of *Tele Creole*, Orsete Joseph, host of *iele Kreyol*, and Chariot Lucien, host of "Tet a Tet" of *Tele Kreyol* collaborated to celebrate Haitian heritage month on their shows. Auguste was the first to come up with the idea when he recalled his days working at the Center Club in Boston. Cultural diversity and awareness was never an issue. It seemed to be that a different culture was celebrated almost every month, from Chinese, Irish, Dominican, and Jewish, but never Haitian.

Wilner brought the issue to Joseph's and Lucien's attention, and from then on, the three set out to reflect Haitian history and heritage on the show, and to especially celebrate it in the month of May. Many interviews were conducted, dance groups were invited, and they also urged others from Haitian radio and television programs to do the same. The three remained committed until they realized that it wasn't enough. Others needed to learn about the culture.

"There was a need to show our Haitian heritage here in Boston", says Wilner Auguste. "We haven't done enough to dispel the negative portrayals of us from the media."

Auguste was convinced the best and only way Haitians could give a positive cultural representation was to have a parade.

When asked why call it the "Unity" parade, Auguste retells the story of how the Haitian war of independence began in 1791. Despite the disparity among the black and mulatto soldiers in Haiti, they came together in 1803 to fight against the French. This decision was made in three days and at the end of the congress in the city of Arcahaie, the first flag of Haiti was created. Due to this unity, in 1804, Haiti



became the first Black Independent Republic in the Western Hemisphere.

"You see", says Auguste. "In the beginning, the blacks and the mulattos were enemies, but when they realized they shared a common enemy, they collaborated and won. The same can happen today if we come together to fight for what we believe in. We can overcome all barriers."

The idea of a parade was shared with many within the community, and they were all elated, however, there were some obstacles to overcome. At the time, no one knew that obtaining the license would be a difficult task. State Representative Marie St. Fleur played a key role in getting the approval. After last year's success, many have come forth to share their expertise and give a helping hand in forming a committee, and volunteering their services to raise funds and organize this year's event.

Although many representatives from various Haitian organizations and businesses such as Citizens Bank/Fleet Bank, Uni Transfer, and Caribbean

LOCAL NEWS

Air Mail are helping financially, much more is needed. The floats costs hundreds of dollars and the price tag for the sound system and uniforms can run into the thousands. Fortunately, Mayor Thomas Menino and the city of Boston will provide police officers, the sound system and reviewing stand. However, there are still other items that carry heavy price tags.

There are many more young adults participating this year, which means more uniforms to buy. The uniforms are the most costly for the parade. Color guards are needed to celebrate Flag Day. Market flags, public bathrooms, music generators, t-shirts and banners have to be paid for.

Many in the committee are going the extra mile to get donations by getting different organizations and businesses involved like churches, schools, restaurant owners, etc. Transportation is also needed which means raising money for buses. Requests must be submitted to get free parking in certain areas from Mattapan to Talbot Ave, where the parade will end.

"Much effort is needed to ensure the success of this year's parade", says Eno Mondesir, one of the key organizers of the event. Ronald ("Roro") Nelson, well known journalist and commentator for *Tele Diaspora*, is a member of the committee. He's been urging many in the community to get involved. He is also head of security for the parade and has been involved since the idea of the parade was addressed to him years ago.

Being so passionate for the Haitian community, Nelson felt enthusiastic about supporting anything Wilner Auguste believed in.

"Wilner has always been for union and the parade brings unity, and so I have no choice but to be involved, states Nelson.

"Our group meets more than 52 times a year", says Nelson when he talks about the commitment many are giving.

Anyone who is interested in more information please contact Mr. Wilner Auguste at (617) 371-3051 or Mr. Eno Mondesir at (617) 534-4559 at x2694. More information is also available online at www.hauinc.org.