



February 16, 2009

## Community members honored

*BY SHERI TRUSTY*  
*News-Messenger correspondent*

### **Ebenezer Church of God in Christ gives 'Black History Banquet'**

The idea that a single individual can greatly impact a community was proven true over and over Saturday night at the Ebenezer Church of God in Christ "Black History Banquet" held at Pontifex in Fremont.

Seven honorees and one Hattie Shepard Award recipient were recognized for the influence they have had on the Fremont community.

Community members and dignitaries gathered together to honor and thank eight individuals who have fulfilled the creed of "People that are making a difference, helping people along the way." Fremont Mayor Terry Overmyer presented the awards to the seven honorees: Violetta Rhea, John Lewis Jr., John Lewis III, Joyce Huntley, George Mullins, John Kelly, and Phil Lloyd.

Friends and family shared memories of the kind deeds and unselfish acts displayed throughout their professional and personal lives. Some of them had the distinction of making a mark in the advancement of African Americans, such as Rhea, who was the first African American social worker in Sandusky County, and Lloyd, who owned the first Ford/Mercury Dealership in the area.

While all of the honorees have made a professional impact on the community, it was their works behind the scenes that were most remarkable. Lewis Jr. and Lewis III have gained unprecedented reputations for their athletic achievements at Ross High School, but to them, those accomplishments pale in light of what they can do to make a difference in the world. "I am the least of my Lord's servants," Lewis Jr. said.

Lorna McKinstry, sister of Lewis III, shared that the first Friday of every month he opens his home to his less fortunate neighbors for a free meal. "The elderly come, the handicapped come," she said.

Huntley, a former newsroom staffer of The News-Messenger, worked diligently to bring her family from her native home of Guyana, and assist them in becoming educated. All of them are now successful professionals in the United States.

Kelly, Sandusky County Veterans Services Officer, has aided and befriended veterans from all of the wars since the first World War. Mullens recently retired after 38 years of service as an employee of the Sandusky County Board of MRDD. He was described as "an inspiration to individuals with disabilities, and their families." To the students of the School of Hope, he is most loved for singing "Happy Birthday" to each one of them on their special day.

Both Kelly and Mullens have influenced the community so generously that Overmyer declared special days in their honor.

Pat McKinstry was awarded the Hattie Shepard Award. The award is given each year to an individual who reflects the giving spirit of Hattie Shepard, mother of Dorothy Atkins.

"We choose people that remind me of my mother and how faithful she was in her church. She really believed in prayer," said Atkins, explaining how much Shepard enjoyed helping others. "That was the kind of person she was. Everyone loved her."

Ebenezer Church continued its Black History month celebration with a presentation on Sunday morning by Gary Durden of San Antonio, Texas. As a thirteen year old in 1964, Durden joined six other students in integrating the Cook County, Georgia schools.

It was a frightening and difficult time for Durden and his family. But his mother was determined he would have better educational opportunities, even after his father received veiled threats that he would lose his job if his son enrolled at the all-white school.

"It was right after Kennedy was killed in '63," he said. "On the first day, there was a lot of chanting, a lot of disgruntled people. My mother was off in the distance. It was quite a challenge for us all."

"The first year wasn't all that comfortable," he said. The African American students were not permitted to join in sports or choir. But that changed by the second year, and tolerance was beginning to grow.

By 1968, things were looking even more hopeful. But that hope was shaken by the April 4 assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. "It was a very sad day for me," he said. "I was confused. I wondered what the future was going to be."

Ironically, the present seemed more sure and clear than ever. He said that as he sat in his high school English class after hearing of King's death, both blacks and whites mourned the loss. "It seemed like at that moment, nobody was any different color. We were all just Georgians at that time."

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