



Cumberland County Cultural & Heritage Commission September 2009 Chronicle

Ella Boykin, new Commission member, advocates diversity

She always wanted to be a teacher. And even though it took a while, after working in various non-professional jobs in sewing factories and as a secretary at the Cumberland County Library, Ella M. Boykin, newest member of the Cultural & Heritage Commission, finally took steps to achieve her dream after her first husband died and she enrolled at Cumberland County College. The year was 1973 and she was well past the age of the typical college student. But she proved to be a quick learner and went on to earn her bachelor's degree in English Education at the University of Delaware in 1977.

She was quickly hired by the Vineland school system and spent the next 25 years at Vineland High North, teaching English to ninth and tenth graders. Six of those years were spent teaching honors level courses.

But retirement in 2003 was not the end of her professional life. On the contrary, it was a stepping stone to a new phase that draws on her love of teaching but in a whole new direction—working with African-American youngsters at the Carl Arthur Center

in Vineland, home to the youth services organization “Visions of Hope,” sponsored by the New Bethel A.M.E. Church. Ella is the after-school program director and her husband John Boykin, also a retired Vineland teacher, is camp director during the summer. The Boykins together have eight children, 13 grandchildren and one great-grandchild.

In addition to supervising the after-school program, Ella also “works on funding, writes grant proposals—a part-time job but full-time services,” she says. But she’s not in it to make money or for personal pats on the back. Another driving force is the importance of preserving and advancing one’s culture. Even while she was teaching full time she was volunteering at the Martin Luther King Academy in Vineland and lobbying state legislators in Trenton for equal educational opportunities, a campaign that eventually ended with the Abbott decision of the early nineties mandating equal educational opportunities for at-risk communities.

The Center, in addition to its educational and recreational facilities, is also home to the African-American Museum, a project of the New Jersey Youth

Corps and the City of Vineland. Ella is caretaker of the museum and proud of how the young people at the Center have created displays and shown a



Photo by Prestige Publications

Ella M. Boykin, newest member of the Cultural & Heritage Commission Board of Directors, takes a visitor on a tour of the African-American Museum at the Carl Arthur Center in Vineland.

genuine interest in making it authentic and attractive. (Tours are available by calling 856-563-5374.)

But the African-American community and its youth are not Ella’s only concern. She’s also intensely interested in spreading knowledge and appreciation of the other diverse cultures that make up the fabric of life in Cumberland County.

She marvels that so many different backgrounds are represented —“Russian, Haitian, Mexican, Greek”— in addition to the predominant European nationalities.

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Upcoming Events

September 24

“Swing with the Symphony”

Bay-Atlantic Symphony
Music Box at the Borgata
Hotel Casino, 8 p.m.

Tickets: 1-866-900-4849 or
www.theborgata.com

September 26

East Point Lighthouse Open
House and Artist’s Day,
10 a.m. - 4p.m. (see p. 2)

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East Point Lighthouse beckons artists at annual Open House

With the venerable East Point Lighthouse as their inspiration, artists will come together on Saturday, Sept. 26, to capture their surroundings at the annual “East Point Light” Open House and Artist’s Day at the site on the Delaware Bay at the mouth of the Maurice River.

There will be plenty for the general public to do and see as well. Following is the schedule:

- ◆ **10 a.m.:** Brent Burke of The Nature Conservancy will lead a nature walk.
- ◆ **10 a.m.-3 p.m.:** Steve Eisenhower, Regional Director of Stewardship and Protection for the Natural Lands Trust, will “seine” near the boat ramp (a seine is a net used to catch small aquatic life), with the assistance of staff from The Nature Conservancy.
- ◆ **Noon - 4 p.m.:** Musical performances by The Snake Brothers and

Steve Byrne

◆ **2 p.m.:** Noted local artist Pat Witt of the Barn Studio of Art in Millville will demonstrate her painting techniques at the Barn Studio of Art tent near the lighthouse.

◆ **10 am - 3 p.m.:** The nearby Maurice River Botanical Gardens will be open to the public.

A “Paint the Lighthouse” tent (near the lighthouse) will be available where children can paint with watercolors, hosted by volunteers from Citizens United to Save the Maurice River and Its Tributaries.

The lighthouse will be open for tours to the cupola throughout the day. Built in 1849, East Point is the last remaining lighthouse on the New Jersey side of the Delaware Bay and the second oldest lighthouse in the state. The event is sponsored by the Maurice River Historical Society.

Corey Petit wins Jost art scholarship

Citizens United to Protect the Maurice River and its Tributaries, Inc., has announced that the 2009 Annual Connie Jost Memorial Art Scholarship award winner is Corey Petit, graduate of Vineland High School class of 2009. Corey was selected by a panel of professional artists.

Vineland High School art teacher, Jennie Perez-Marorano, is glowing in her description of Corey’s growth as an artist and his contributions to the school community. She says he volunteers his time and creative skills selflessly to school activities, demonstrates his concern for a high standard of work, puts forth considerable effort in all his endeavors, and goes beyond assignment expectations. She adds that he has a love of nature and the great out-of-doors, which is reflected in his work.

Corey is the son of Rochelle and George Petit of Vineland.

Ella Boykin named to Commission

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And therein lies what she believes will be her contribution to the Cultural & Heritage Commission. “I want young people especially to become involved, to be aware of the many different cultures in Cumberland County,” she says, adding that her very presence will add diversity to the Board. “The circle is broadened,” she points out.

Ella’s long record of community service will be recognized on Oct. 11 by the Vineland Chapter of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, which will present her with its Educational Award. In addition, her portrait hangs in the Guaracini Performing Arts Center of Cumberland County College as one of its “Distinguished Alumni”—“the first class,” she says, in a rare moment of self-congratulation. She regards these tributes from her community as an honor, including her appointment to the C&H Commission. Welcome, Ella!