

News Update

New director brings new beginnings

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Museum hires executive director

The Plano African American Museum, located in the Thornton House at 900 E. 13th St., is in its infancy stage but is growing rapidly.

The hiring committee from the museum made their final decision on candidates for the director position and believe they found someone who will be a perfect match for the budding attraction.

PAAM Executive Director Robert L. Haynes ♦ museum experience begins at the Dallas Museum of Art, serving on the education committee. He also worked in Greensboro, N.C. at the International Civil Rights Center and Museum and in Oakland, Calif. at the African American Museum and Library.

♦I came to the museum because I learned of a group of dedicated people who were trying to save a part of their heritage, and they looked to sharing the experience through creating a museum and a cultural oasis right here in downtown Plano, ♦ Haynes said. ♦I am bringing my experience from a national and, perhaps, world perspective to join the group and the project to work together and give Plano an institution that it can be proud of. ♦

Most recently, he has worked with the Plano Interurban Railway Museum; the Smithsonian Institution ♦s National Museum of American History; the Old Red Museum in Dallas; and the city of Irving history center that supports the last remaining North Texas independent African American Freedom Settlement in Bear Creek.

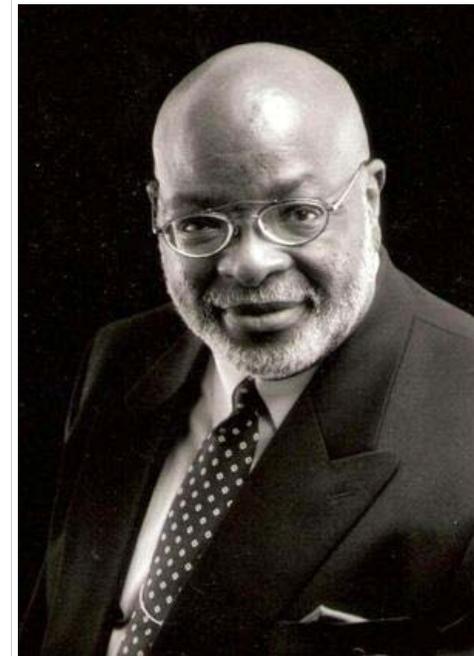
Haynes ♦ goals for the museum include completing the Thornton House exhibit and combining it with the National Underground Railroad Network.

♦[We want to] exhibit and tell those stories that very few know about here in North Texas, continue to gather oral histories of those who were witness to the life and times of African-Americans in Plano and others who were present in the experience, ♦ Haynes said. ♦This is an American story, and all Americans are a part of it. We want to tell that story to all who have ears to hear. ♦

Ronald Jones II, PAAM board member who headed up the executive director search, believes the basic foundation has been laid for a debt-free property and restoring the historic structure.

♦Mr. Haynes can use those accomplishments and valuable assets to build on as he helps complete existing programs and implements new programs for the community at large, ♦ Jones said. ♦His administrative abilities, extensive curatorial experience and contacts across the country will help the Plano African American Museum become one of the most respected museums of its type in this country, which provides a valuable resource to the educational and cultural

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Kim Williams / Staff Photo - Robert L. Haynes, executive director of the Plano African American Museum, was hired in August. He worked and trained at the Smithsonian Institution ♦s National Museum of American History and worked with Dr. Lonnie Bunch, director of the new and soon-to-open National African American Museum on the mall in Washington, D.C.

community at large and further reinforces the description of Plano, Texas, as an All American City.

The PAAM has recently established relationships with the Department of Interior National Park Service Underground Railroad Program and the Cincinnati Underground Railroad Museum Freedom Station Program.

Mr. Haynes is the perfect person to help parlay those relationships and current program plans into more programs and exhibits unique to this part of the country, Jones said.

Haynes wants to continue expanding the material collection the museum has started and stabilize the items and prevent further loss through deterioration and neglect.

Our museum, like many other cultural organizations in the region, has indeed been impacted by reduced funding; however, our board, having foreseen these events, focused on the main project, which was the completion of the Thornton House restoration, and in that regard, we can now look forward to an early opening, Haynes said.

Requesting \$245,857 in this year's budget, the museum was granted \$76,000, which was a 47.6 percent decrease from last year's \$145,000.

Most nonprofit and museum entities are facing the challenge of having to fulfill their mission and goals with less resources during these tough economic times, Jones said. Through strategic foresight, PAAM planned for this by targeting past available program funds mostly towards the city-approved Thornton House restoration program, because that was the most expensive program and the major program project that local officials and members of the community emphasized in past communications.

The Thornton House project is a long-term restoration program that had to be done in several phases. Now that Haynes is in place as director, the museum plans to focus on completing the overall goals.

PAAM can take its debt-free assets and fulfill its mission with the budget currently allocated and expected for the next fiscal year, Jones said. We are blessed to have volunteers primed to assist on current and future programs and projects. We are also poised to successfully pursue other available funding sources.

Haynes knows personally the value of education, as he holds two master's degrees a Master of Arts in Museum Studies from San Francisco State University and a Master of Arts in Anthropology from the University of California at Berkeley.

The museum plans to create educational programs that are synchronized with state of Texas educational goals and those of the Plano school district.

We are developing programs for home-school and preschoolers as well, Haynes said. The people of Plano can best help in the development of the museum by giving the museum support first of all with cash donations, but also simply by coming to visit and learn by touring the house and offering donations of material artifacts of the period. That is the kind of help that we need. And of course skilled volunteers; no museum can operate without its volunteers.

As part of PAAM's leadership, Haynes wants to be the sounding board for the museum.

Most of all, [I want to] help get the message out that there is a cultural gem right here in Plano, in the Douglass Community, Haynes said. We want to share it with all of North Texas and join with our cultural partners in promoting Plano to all comers.

For information about the Plano African American Museum, visit www.aamplano.com.

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