

The loud, bumping music, the mouth-watering aroma of shish kebab, cheesesteaks and international dishes, and the sounds of laughter set the tone for the hundreds who attended the fifth annual Black Family Reunion Celebration over the weekend.

Organized by the National Council of Negro Women, the three-day event drew more than 200,000 to Fairmount Park.

"I think it's wonderful and great that we can unite this way," said Joyce Jackson-Williams of West Philadelphia.

Yesterday, which concluded this year's festivities, Isaac Maefield, of North Philadelphia, conducted a woodcarving workshop. People gathered around his pavilion to carve and chisel their own African masterpieces.

Maefield's workshop was one of many represented by the West Philadelphia Cultural Alliance.

Maefield, who has done work for Nelson Mandela and the Smithsonian Institution, described the non-profit organization as one that "promotes art and culture throughout Philadelphia."

"We give a lot of exhibitions of African-American artists, creative-writing workshops, etc."

The self-taught artist and creative-writing teacher at Community College of Philadelphia explained the significance of woodcarving in Africa.

"In Africa, woodcarving was used to record history and it served as several functions, like eating utensils."

Speaking of eating, Nyota Ting provided the crowd with a taste of international vegetarian fare.

"Nyota Ting features international cuisine . . . from places such as Africa and the Caribbean," said the owner.

Spinach chick-pea curry, peas and rice with coconut milk, and broccoli black beans and garlic stew were some of the exotic dishes served.

Ting, a New Yorker, said the most popular dishes over the weekend were the cajun chicken, peas and rice, roast duck and West African stew, which is made of vegetables, kidney beans, okra, cabbage and hot peppers.

On the entertainment front, the Scope Open Mike Talent Show featured rapper Tyraine Ragsdale.

President of **Grand Hank** Productions Inc., Ragsdale told through raps how important it is for children to stay in school and for parents to encourage their children to go to school.

Directed by North Philadelphia resident Gladys Meade, the 29th Street Community Service Center presented a dance and fashion show.

There also were numerous vendors selling everything from bootleg movies and cassettes to T-shirts and African clothing.

But some in attendance were concerned that the vendors gave the event too much of a commercial atmosphere.

"The vendors make it seem like a market place," said Kenny Blackey of West Philadelphia.

Blackey also said he didn't think the reunion had been getting enough support.

"There hasn't been as much advertising as in the past years. There should be more people out here."

Despite his gripes, Blackey said he would be back next year.

Said Gladys Meade: "The Black Family Reunion is a good opportunity for not only the black family but for everyone to come together and get away from the killing scene and drugs."

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