

## MOHAWK VALLEY WEEKEND

A look at some of Saturday's events from across the region

# Community remembers, respects black history

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UTICA — They were whipped, but they still praised God. They were beaten, but they still sang with spirit. They were shackled, but they still had hope.

They were slaves because of the color of their skin, but they must not be forgotten.

Through music, poetry and dialogue, that message resounded through the Mohawk Valley Community College Theater Saturday during the Oneida County NAACP Annual Black History Month program.

"Our ancestors were looking ahead to what we could become," Michael E. Woods said.

He and his wife, Susan M. Woods, served as keynote speakers for the event.

"They had no food, no finance, no freedom, but still they had faith," Susan Woods said. "Each of us is connected to them. We truly have to look back to step forward."

After recounting the ruthless details of slavery in America, the Woods looked at the accomplishments of black men and women.

"The wonder and majesty of it all is that we are here today," Susan Woods said.

Janet Evelyn-Dorsey reminded the audience to remember those not-so-obvious people who helped "America live up to its promise of equality" during the Civil Rights Movement.

She called on the audience of about 100 to remember Linda Brown, one of the children involved in the landmark case *Brown v. Board of*



Michael E. Woods and his wife, Susan M. Woods, perform a skit called "A Look Back, A Step Forward" Saturday during the Oneida County Branch of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People's annual Black History Month program at Mohawk Valley Community College.

Education, which outlawed racial segregation in public schools.

And remember, she said, Jo Ann Robinson, an English professor who helped launch the Montgomery, Ala., bus boycott.

"There are so many people who played a key role in the movement, and somebody has to be their voice," Evelyn-Dorsey said after the event.

Seven-year-old Najhael Bowens heard that voice. As her grandparents spoke of the importance of remembering black history, she quietly listed those who came before her.

"Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks and the little black girl who went to the white school," she said, looking up at her grandfather, John Bowens.

Nodding, he said: "We can't forget. How dare we forget."



Surayya Muhammad, 1, of Utica, looks at African American-themed books for sale in the lobby of Mohawk Valley Community College Saturday.

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Susan Woods

one of the keynote speakers at Saturday's event

Black History



MONTH

### BLACK HISTORY EVENTS

■ The Afro-American Heritage Association will hold its 29th Annual African American History Month program at 3 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 11, in the Lecture Hall of Rome Free Academy, 95 Dart Circle, Rome. The national theme is "From Slavery to Freedom: Africans in the Americas." Guest speaker is Eleanor Collins, Music Director of First United Methodist Church, Rome. The Afro-American Heritage Association will set up a thematic display at Jervis Library and in the lobby of RFA through February.

■ Hugh R. Jones School in Utica will host an African-American Read-In on Monday, joining in the National African American Read-In today and Monday, making literacy a significant part of Black History Month. Classroom teachers will select an appropriate book and share the book with their students.

The Observer-Dispatch is seeking more Black History Month events. Please send details about upcoming events to [infocenter@uticaOD.com](mailto:infocenter@uticaOD.com) or 221 Oriskany Plaza, NY 13501.