

HOHAYE turns 7; still clings to bringing hope home and abroad

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In less than a decade, hundreds of Haitians from Chicago and its suburbs have become accustomed with a traditional event that takes place in June, through which they celebrate the works of Hope for Haitian American Youth and Elderly (HOHAYE) both locally and abroad. This year, HOHAYE reaches its seven years of existence.

The latest celebration brought forth a joyful spirit between the executive as well as the regular members of the non-profit organization. They witness an organization making strides on several fronts – membership growth, family driven programs and more experience in its areas of concern.

Over the years HOHAYE has reached out to a number of individuals mostly in the area of education. Furthermore, on the day of its seventh anniversary, the organization has published a spiral bound booklet that provides more details on its services. That resource covers a wide range of information other than services such as preventive care, sponsorship of orphans and bible training for pastors and lay leaders.

In the midst of joy and fellowship, Céliane Obruch surprised HOHAYE's President, Pastor Franco Valdémarr. She awarded to him a plaque of appreciation for his leadership, his hard work, and his commitment to the institution. Mrs. Obruch's action followed the presentation of the person and the co-person of the year whose names are respectively Dr. Maryse Nazon, Ph.D. and Antonine "Toto" Lainé.

These two personalities had no prior knowledge that they have been selected as such. By the same token, Carole Valdémarr, the president's wife and several other insiders were recognized for their support in the overall success of the organization.

The idea of hope that HOHAYE embraced from the beginning continues to characterize the organization primarily through its educational sponsorship efforts. Over the years, those efforts include such elements as tuition-related funds, school supplies and financial support for school personnel.

At least 300 people attended the seventh year gathering that took place on Saturday, June 21 at the Levy Center in Evanston. The majority of the audience anticipated hearing the well-admired voice of Léon Dimanche. Usually his presence and his musical talents draw a sizable crowd whenever he comes to town for a performance. He entertained the audience big time that night. His songs compelled many to sing along and dance to tunes such as *Va t-en*, *Nostalgie*, and several other great hits of the past.

In addition to Léon Dimanche and the respected musicians who accompanied him, the concert featured a lineup of other gifted vocalists.

Patricia Désir paved the way for Léon Dimanche and the Heavenly Brothers as she started things off with Haiti's national anthem, *La Dessalinienne*. Later on, she joined her voice with that of Léon more than once. Patricia is a local voice who made a brief appearance in the Alabanza concert in May.

A group that's relatively new to the Chicago area gave a phenomenal a cappella performance. The six young men of the Heavenly Brothers used their natural vocal instrument in such an original manner. The soulful sound of their voice resounded as though each voice was doubled up. The one voice that provided the bass sound of the group was outstanding.

The performance of the Children of Bethel kept quite a few attendees on the edge of their seats, especially on their second praise dance. The dance coach, Magalie Dieujuste, showed off once again the gifts that she and the young girls possess.

A five-minute video in the middle of the program highlighted an example of how HOHAYE reaches out to those it serves. It featured Ixner Severain, a student from *Séminaire Théologique Evangélique de Port-au-Prince* (STEP) Evangelical Theological Seminary of Port-au-Prince, who received a grant of \$600 (U.S dollar) from the organization this year. The grant helped him "to liquidate a tuition debt" of that very amount.

Since 2006 a Haitian medical student in Russia has been receiving annually up to \$1000 (U.S. dollar) from HOHAYE as a way of supporting her with her studies.

HOHAYE has had more accomplishments not mentioned in this story. Those success stories depended a great deal on the generosity of concerned members. The same efforts will continue to sustain the organization in the foreseeable and the unforeseeable future.