

# Unity gathering

Umoja Group hopes the sun shines on its heritage celebration.

By Rodger Mullen  
Staff writer

About six years ago, the Umoja Group moved its annual festival from early August to later in the month.

It turned out to be a good move. Rain has not interfered with the outdoor celebration since then.

Organizers are hoping the sun continues to shine on the event when the 15th annual Umoja Festival is held Saturday from noon to 7 p.m. at Seabrook Park.

"People should bring their chairs and blankets and plan on staying the whole day," said Yawa Tuprah, one of the organizers.

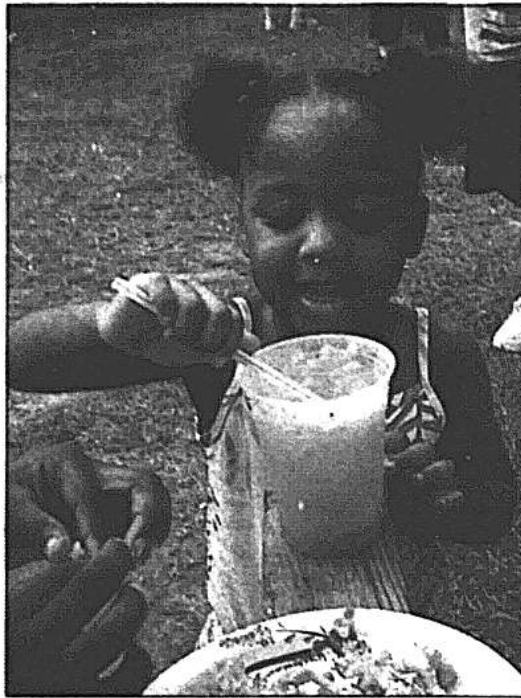
The celebration of African-American culture

and heritage features music, dance, storytelling, food and more.

Members of the N.C. African-American Storytellers Association will be there. Storytellers Baba Jama Koram and Gran'daddy Jumbeg will also be on hand to spin yarns.

The Zawadi Dancers, led by Wanda Wesley, will perform African and other dances. The Kickers for Christ will demonstrate martial arts moves, and the members of the Swing Dance Heritage Club will show off their techniques.

Dan Speller and his Blue-Spell blues band are scheduled to perform from 5 to 7 p.m. Enid Ferguson, one of



Staff file photos

Doloris Johnson enjoys a cold drink and some funnel cake at last year's Umoja Festival.

the first black nurses in Fayetteville, will talk about her experiences.

A highlight of the festival is a performance by the E.E. Smith High School marching band. The band will march from E.E. Smith to Seabrook Park at 2:30 p.m., Tuprah said.

Aside from the scheduled performers, Tuprah promised some surprises.

But the purpose of the festival remains the same.

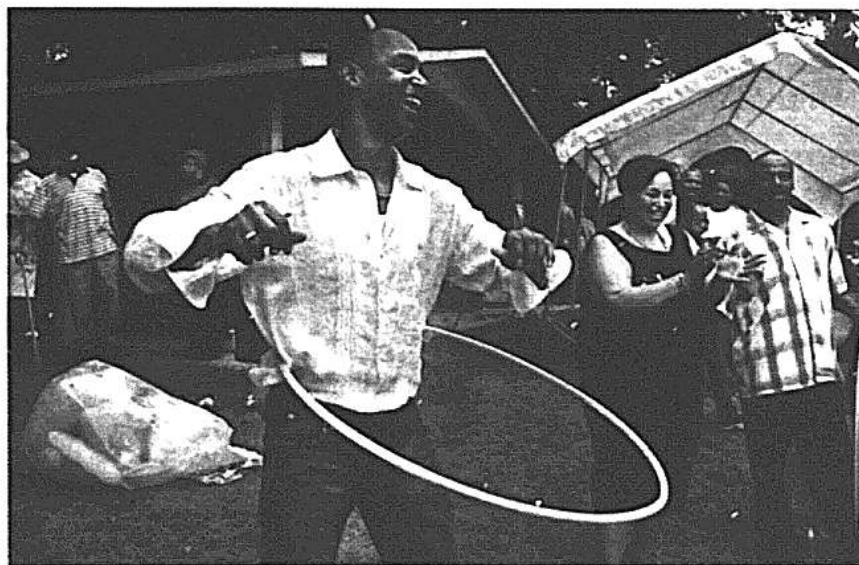
"It's to bring the community together in a positive environment, to promote unity, to promote black businesses and just to have a good time," Tuprah said.

The Umoja Group also sponsors a celebration of the life of Malcolm X in May and a Kwanzaa-Festival in December.

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## UMOJA FESTIVAL

- **What:** A celebration of African-American culture and heritage
- **When:** Saturday, noon to 7 p.m.
- **Where:** Seabrook Park, 1520 Slater Ave.
- **Information:** 488-7130



James McLamb takes part in an impromptu Hula-Hoop contest at last year's festival.

## Katrina survivor keeps smiling and cooking

By Chick Jacobs  
Staff writer

Joe McGee wasn't sure which was more amazing: the misery Michelle Johnson's family had endured or her ability to keep smiling.

The smile won out. And now, a year after Hurricane Katrina took nearly everything Johnson's family had, she wants to say thanks to everyone who helped the storm's survivors.

So Saturday, she'll be whipping up a big thank-you feast.

GOTDAD, a Fayetteville organization that focuses on mentoring children, will sponsor an anniversary gathering for Katrina survivors and friends at Market Fair Mall. Photos, memories and lots of New Orleans-style food will spice up the remembrance of the Aug. 29 disaster.

"It's not a happy anniversary, by any means," said McGee, the group's president.

"There was so much suffering and pain involved. Many people will never get back to where they were.

"But we are thankful to have been able to help, and the Johnson family wants to express their thanks."

Johnson, 29, is a trained chef and mother of three. What her family didn't lose to Katrina was lost in the months afterward in a series of relocations across three states. They finally arrived in Fayetteville this spring, where McGee's organization took them under its wing.

"After all they'd been through, she could keep smiling," he said. "They're a special bunch, and we were determined to help."

The children are enrolled in local schools now. Johnson has a home and hopes to start a new career as a caterer.

"This is a good way for people to meet her and check out her cooking," McGee said. "I think they'll be impressed."

There's no charge for the gathering, though donations will be accepted.

"It's easy to think of the trials and forget the blessings," McGee said. "This is a chance to reflect on all of it."

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### KATRINA ANNIVERSARY GATHERING

- **When:** Saturday, noon to 4 p.m.
- **Where:** Market Fair Mall on Skibo Road
- **Information:** 867-6122 or at [www.gotdad.org](http://www.gotdad.org)