

Bradenton Herald, The (FL)

January 2, 2005

Section: LOCAL & STATE

Edition: BRADENTON

Page: 1C

Memo: Melissa Followell, Herald reporter, can be reached at 708-7920 or mfollowell@bradentonherald.com.

KWANZAA FOCUS SHIFTS TO FRIENDS

Melissa Followell, Herald Staff Writer

BRADENTON --- For **Cynthia Newell**, Kwanzaa is a personal holiday meant to be shared with friends and family. "Everybody's got their own unique story they celebrate in their own unique way," **Newell** said.

Newell chose to celebrate by inviting her family, friends and neighbors into her East Bradenton home Saturday, the final day of Kwanzaa. Inside, a wall is covered with a collage of pictures, each with a special memory.

"It becomes a time when you can cherish warm memories," **Newell** said.

The seven-day celebration gives participants a time to reflect and a sense of renewal as the new year begins.

"It's a great way to know who you are, to keep you on track," said JoAnn Spencer, who began celebrating the holiday about six years ago. "I am proud of my heritage and I wanted to share it with others."

Throughout the year, the seven principles celebrated during Kwanzaa have become part of Spencer's Sunday school classes at St. Stephen African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Unity, self-determination, collective work and responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose, creativity and faith are the principles taught during Kwanzaa.

"These principles can be used in every ethnic group and every religion," Spencer said.

Kwanzaa celebrates the past and the future by honoring ancestors, elders and children.

Retired teacher Naomi Bivens smiled as she listened to **Newell** recount how much their community has gone through since Kwanzaa was founded in 1966.

"We have come this far, but the struggle is yet alive," **Newell** said.

While Kwanzaa is a time to celebrate and be with loved ones, **Newell** said her heart goes out to those who have experienced terrible loss both home and abroad.

"I'm really concerned about the killings and the shootings happening here," **Newell** said. "I look at these senseless shootings of these children and my heart just hurts."

PHOTO/BRIAN BLANCO/The Herald

Cynthia Newell, right, explains the importance of family to long-time friends, from left, Naomi Bivens, Clovia Byrd and JoAnn Spencer at her East Bradenton home Saturday afternoon during a neighborhood Kwanzaa celebration. BRIAN BLANCO/The Herald

Raphael Allen and Clovia Byrd organize raffle tickets at a Kwanzaa celebration Saturday at the home of **Cynthia Newell** in East Bradenton.