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KWANZAA CELEBRATES CHILDREN, IDEALS

Bre Jones, Herald Staff Writer

Inhaling a deep breath, Maceo closed his eyes and began to rhythmically thump the drum squeezed between his knees. His brown dreadlocks, cascading from beneath a green and red cap, bounced on his shoulders as his body pulsed with the beat. He struck the drum harder and the tribal sounds seemed to roll through the audience, catching the attention of 18-month-old Imani Barnette. With outstretched arms, the toddler slipped off her mom's knee and waddled across the room to Maceo, who uses no surname. Her tiny hand reached to beat the drum, and Maceo scooped her into his lap.

The man and the child played together, creating African music for about 200 people, many donning African headdresses and attire during a Kwanzaa celebration Thursday at Rogers Memorial United Methodist Church in east Bradenton. On the second night of Kwanzaa, the musicians captured the essence of the holiday.

"This is a time to be with family," said **Cynthia Newell**, organizer of the event. "It's a time to reach out to children, teenagers. We celebrate African culture. This year the seven principles of Kwanzaa take on special meaning, with the revitalization of our neighborhoods."

The holiday, which began with the lighting of the first candle Wednesday, continues through Tuesday. Each night, families light one of the seven red, green or black candles, which represent ideals to live by --- such as unity and self-determination. Struggles for freedom during the Civil Rights era inspired the creation of Kwanzaa in 1966.

"This is not just a celebration for the African-American culture," said Che Barnette, Imani's mom. "It's a time of the year to embrace everyone and to celebrate the children."

Cleaning a knife in the kitchen of the church, Dorothy Lockley scurried around percolating pots, preparing ethnic food. Strong scents of fried chicken, black-eyed peas and sweet corn bread filtered from the steamy room.

"I just love the togetherness this holiday brings," Lockley said. "You see the older folks come together with the young, young kids."

Clutching an orange marker, 6-year-old Marcus Alexander stretched out on his belly on the floor to draw a Kinara, or candle holder. Chattering kids huddled around a long sheet of white paper to paint a mural of Kwanzaa symbols.

"Look at this," Alexander said, pointing to his orange drawing. "This is my favorite part of Kwanzaa. The candles. I also love the drums."

Alexander jumped from the ground and slowly inched toward Maceo, who continued to play.

"I want to learn to play," Alexander said.

n Today: A teen Kwanzaa dance is scheduled for today at the 13th Avenue Community Center, 201 13th Ave. East, Bradenton. The dance is to celebrate youth and the role they play in building neighborhoods.

n A Kwanzaa dialogue is scheduled for today from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. at the 13th Avenue Community Center. Dr. Ronald Ferguson, professor of economics at Harvard University, John F. Kennedy School of Government, is expected to lead the discussion.

n Saturday: A workshop for youth and parents on how to use the Internet to research career opportunities for minority students is scheduled on Saturday from noon to 2 p.m. at the Boys and Girls Club East Unit, 1001 26th St. East, Bradenton.

PHOTO/RICHARD M. BROOKS/The Herald: Alonzo Jackson, 6, leads a group of boys in a traditional dance called a ToKe from Ghana, Africa, during Rogers Memorial United Methodist Church's second annual Kwanzaa celebration.

PHOTO/RICHARD M. BROOKS/THE HERALD: Raysheena Gaskin, 9, left, works with about 20 other kids to create a Kwanzaa wall mural during the annual celebration.

PHOTO/RICHARD M. BROOKS/The Herald: Artistic director of the Kuumba Dance Troupe from Tampa, Natalie Jackson whirls in a traditional dance from Ghana during Thursday's Kwanzaa celebration.