

Contact: Mike Lillich
Office: (217) 333-9024
Email: lillich@uillinois.edu

(Note to journalists: A publication-quality photograph of SUBJECT is available at www.uillinois.edu/our/images/)

April 10, 2008

University of Illinois, HistoryMakers' oral histories fete black achievement
Receptions, exhibits to be staged at all three campuses

Urbana, Ill. — The University of Illinois will celebrate the inspiring stories of African Americans, both famous and unsung, with exhibits on its three campuses. There are opening receptions scheduled in Chicago, Springfield and Urbana-Champaign on April 15, 16 and 17, respectively.

The opening receptions kick off the first year of a collaboration between the U of I and The HistoryMakers (<http://www.thehistorymakers.com>), the non-profit African American video and oral-history archive headquartered in Chicago.

The Urbana and Springfield exhibits feature 3-feet by 8-feet standing banners with original illustrations depicting the black Americans as well as short biographies. The banners are the creation of John Jennings, an assistant professor of art and design at the U of I's Urbana-Champaign campus. The Chicago banners are 3-feet by 6-feet fabric panels designed by Amy Reichert.

HistoryMakers, founded in Chicago in 1999 by Juliana Richardson, has completed in-depth videotaped interviews with more than 1,800 black American achievers in art, business, law, entertainment, medicine, the military, politics, sports, religion and other areas of endeavor. Richardson was the first Vernon Jarrett Senior Fellow at the Great Cities Institute, the metropolitan engagement initiative of the University of Illinois at Chicago.

U of I President B. Joseph White helped establish the relationship between the University and the HistoryMakers.

"U of I Trustee Frances Carroll introduced me to Julieanna Richardson," White said. "Then, in a South Michigan Avenue Chicago walkup, I encountered the greatest collection of videotaped interviews with high-achieving African Americans in the world.

"Julieanna's achievement in putting this collection together is remarkable – but she knew the collection needed a permanent home and the archiving expertise and educational reach of a good partner," White said. "She chose the University of Illinois, and we're thrilled."

Richardson said the relationship also was welcome from the HistoryMakers' point of view.

"We are extremely pleased with the collaboration with the University of Illinois," Richardson said. "I'm especially happy that we are able to make the collection available to professors and students on all three U of I campuses."

The University of Illinois African American Studies and Research Program is the collaboration's anchor on the Urbana-Champaign campus, said Jennifer F. Hamer, the program's acting director and an associate professor. Hamer is also chair of the steering committee for the U of I-HistoryMakers collaboration.

"We view HistoryMakers' first-person accounts of African Americans as 21st century research and education tools," Hamer said. "This is our collaboration's pilot year, and we're exploring ways for our students to use the videotaped interviews in classes and projects.

"Then, we'll look at ways to make the HistoryMakers' oral histories available to high schools, elementary schools and the general public."

Opening receptions for the three exhibits are free, and the public is invited.

- The Chicago opening reception and exhibit, "African-American Peace Makers: Agents of Change," is scheduled to take place 5:30-7:30 p.m., April 15 (Tuesday) at Jane Addams Hull-House Museum at 800 S. Halsted St., UIC.

The HistoryMakers featured with banners in the Chicago exhibit all have a Windy City connection, either by birth or residence. They are educator and community activist, Timuel Black; civil rights and spiritual activist, Willie Barrow; educator and U of I trustee, Frances Carroll; sculptor Richard Hunt; children's singer Ella Jenkins; business consultant and entrepreneur, James Lowry; civil rights-personal injury attorney, two-degree U of I alumnus and trustee, James Montgomery; international human-rights activist, Rozelle "Prexy" Nesbitt; student activist and professor, Fannie Rushing; St. Edmond's Episcopal Church rector, Richard Tolliver; and human-labor rights leader and pastor, Addie Wyatt.

- The Springfield opening reception is scheduled for 5:30 p.m., April 16 (Wednesday) at the University of Illinois at Springfield's Public Affairs Center.

The HistoryMakers featured with banners in the Springfield exhibit are architectural critic and writer, Lee Bey; former U.S. Senator, presidential candidate and UIC graduate, Carol Moseley Braun; educator and U of I trustee, Frances Carroll; educator, president of the University of Maryland, Baltimore County, two-degree U of I graduate, Freeman Hrabowski; Illinois Senate president Emil Jones; political campaign manager, media consultant and U of I alumna, Avis LaVelle; civic leader, chairman of Chicago Federal Reserve Bank and U of I Board of Trustees treasurer, U of I alumnus, Lester McKeever; U.S. Senator and presidential candidate, Barack Obama; Illinois legislator Monica Faith Stewart; and poet, lottery winner and former UIC faculty member, Sterling Plumpp.

- The Urbana opening reception exhibit is scheduled for 2 p.m., April 17 (Thursday) in the South Lounge of the Illini Union.

The HistoryMakers featured with banners in the Urbana exhibit are former U.S. Senator, presidential candidate and UIC alumna, Carol Moseley Braun; Chicago educator, professor, consultant and U of I alumna, Nelvia Brady; educator and U of I trustee, Frances Carroll; physicist, space scientist, inventor and three-degree U of I alumnus, George Carruthers; Illinois Senate president and lifelong Chicago South Side resident, Emil Jones; civil rights-personal injury attorney, two-degree U of I alumnus and trustee, James Montgomery; physician, medical educator-administrator, three-degree UIC alumna, Linda Rae Murray; U.S. Senator and presidential candidate, Barack Obama; Illinois legislator Monica Faith Stewart; journalist, black public policy leader, MacArthur Foundation “Genius” Award winner and U of I alumnus, Eddie Williams; and music composer, professor and U of I alumnus, Olly Wilson.

The exhibits will remain open to the public through the end of spring semester in May.

HistoryMakers exhibit news sources:

- Julianna Richardson, HistoryMakers founder and executive director, (312) 674-1900, jlr@thehistorymakers.com.
- Urbana-Champaign: Jennifer F. Hamer, associate professor and acting director UIUC African American Studies and Research Program, (217) 333-7781, jhamer@uiuc.edu.
- Chicago: Barbara Ransby, associate professor of African American Studies and History, (312) 996-2961, bransby@uic.edu; Melissa Martens, curator of exhibits and collections, Jane Addams Hull-House Museum, (312) 413-5355, mjmarten@uic.edu.
- Springfield: Kamau Kemayo, assistant professor of African American Studies, (217) 206-8248, kkema2@uis.edu

###