

Westchester Chapter of the United Nations Association of USA (UNA-USA) and the community celebrates *International Diversity in Westchester* on UN Day 2013 in Mount Vernon, NY, marking UNA's 70th anniversary and United Nations' 68th anniversary!

November 2, 2013, Westchester, New York - Members of the Westchester community, local government officials and United Nations Association's Westchester Chapter Board members, in partnership with the artistic talents from local musical groups and performers, celebrated the 70th anniversary of the United Nations Association and the 68th anniversary of the United Nations on Sunday, October 20, 2013 in Mount Vernon, New York. More than 150 guests filled the Wartburg's Conference Center in Mount Vernon to celebrate this year's theme of *Celebrating International Diversity in Westchester: Partnerships for Global Progress*.



In 1943, before the end of World War II, the American Association for the United Nations (AAUN), predecessor of the United Nations Association of the USA (UNA-USA), was founded by a group of prominent citizens in order to gain support to form a new international organization, the United Nations (UN). The UN Charter was signed on October 24, 1945, and it is this anniversary that members of the Westchester community and guests from outside of the county gathered to celebrate on Sunday, October 20th.



The evening included messages from many wonderful presenters, both in person and through other media forms, endorsing the theme of global progress, and how the UN and the UNA-USA are both needed now more than ever. Marcia Brewster, President of UNA Westchester, presented a written statement from H.E. Ambassador John W. Ashe, President of the UN General Assembly who is also a Westchester resident. In the words of Mr. Ashe, it is important now to look to the founding ideals and values of the UN in order to guide and inspire the world. The work of UNA-USA is essential as it spreads knowledge and support of the work being performed by the UN. As Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, UN Secretary-General's Envoy on Youth pointed out in a video message, the "UN is YOU."



As guests entered the room and took their seats, they were warmly welcomed by the Akosua Living Legend Afrikan Drum and Dance Troupe, an exciting and upbeat start to the celebration. The evening's speakers commenced with Mr. David Gentner, President of Wartburg Adult Care Community, who was pleased to offer the Conference Center as the host site for our festive

celebration. Having just opened a new rehabilitation center for senior residents of the facility, Wartburg is undergoing many changes and served as an ideal site for this annual event.

Following Mr. Gentner's warm opening was Mayor Ernest D. Davis of the City of Mount Vernon, who has made great strides to welcome the diversity found in his city. The city has citizens who represent 98 nationalities, and the mayor embraces the importance of bringing peace and understanding home. Mayor Davis said it best when he noted



that the "United Nations is extremely important to the world." He noted that the work of the UN has never been more significant in the world than the present day, as all people and nations are more intertwined than ever. Mayor Davis presented the UNA-USA Westchester Chapter with a wonderful UN Day proclamation. Highlights of the proclamation included how what is good for the community is cause enough for celebration, and how we must all work towards achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

Accepting the proclamation on behalf of the Westchester Chapter, Ms. Brewster enlightened the crowd to the history of the UNA, which laid its roots as the AAUN in 1943, two years before the UN was formed. The AAUN had grown from the League of Nations and vigorously supported the establishment of the UN. The UNA-USA is the largest grassroots member organization that supports the UN in the world, with 125 chapters and over 18,000 members in the United States.



Ambassador John W. Ashe of Antigua and Barbuda, sent a beautiful message to share with the guests. As communicated by way of Ms. Brewster, the audience was captivated by the words of Mr. Ashe, who spoke of how the UN provides a unique forum for 193 countries to arrive at common solutions. The UN's post-2015 agenda needs to pick up exactly where the MDGs left off, leaving no country behind. We need to increase prosperity by creating cheaper energy sources, goods and services, while protecting our planet. The UN needs to guide and inspire us in these efforts.



Following the words of Mr. Ashe, in an inspiring video message, Mr. Alhendawi said that we all play an important role in the work of the UN. Although the challenges facing the world today are enormous, so are the possibilities. Mr. Alhendawi is the first ever Envoy on Youth, and believes we need to harmonize in order to move forward. He plans to do this by:

- 1) Serving as a global advocate on youth issues;
- 2) Promoting the empowerment of youth and youth organizations;
- 3) Creating partnerships to create a system-wide action plan for youth (this point was endorsed by all members of the UN in 1995);
- 4) Encouraging governments to collaborate in the implementation of the action plan on youth; and
- 5) Ensuring the integration of the gender prospective.

It is clear, however that no one person can implement these ideals alone. Collaboration between businesses, governments and grassroots organizations such as the UNA is the only way to effectively implement these plans and achieve our goals.

The honorable J. Yuhanna Edwards, President of the Mount Vernon City Council, took the stage and spoke of how Mayor Davis embraces the nationalities of Mount Vernon so fully. Previously, Mayor Davis had hosted a parade of flags in Mount Vernon. Such events not only promote knowledge of the diversity of our world, but also promote acceptance of all peoples within our communities, states, nations, and across the world.



Ms. Lilli Schindler joined Mr. Edwards, providing invaluable insights to the young members in the crowd about her position at the Department of Public Information (DPI), at the UN Secretariat. Ms. Schindler works to provide the general public information about the UN. She also works with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and journalists to promote the work of the UN. Subsequently, Mr. Edwards, Ms. Brewster and Ms. Schindler graciously and collectively held a question-and-answer session with the audience. Certain highlights from this session included discussion of the eight MDGs, and how to register an organization with the UN as an NGO.

Following the Q and A session, Dr. Brenda L.G. Smith, former Superintendent of Schools of Mount Vernon and an active member of the UNA Board, was presented with the 70th Anniversary Chapter Legacy Award. Dr. Smith, after expressing her gratitude to Councilman Edwards and Ms. Brewster, looked to the youth in the room, and stated how proud she was of each and every young participant. She then quoted the inspiring words of an American educator and civil rights leader Mary McLeod Bethune, a fitting end to a beautiful speech: *“The world around us really belongs to youth, for youth will take over its future management. Our children must never lose their zeal for building a better world. They must not be discouraged from aspiring toward greatness, for they are to be the leaders of tomorrow.”* Councilman Edwards concluded the award ceremony by saying “Ms. Smith, you’re the best!”



Last, but definitely not least, it was time for the presentation of awards to the producers of top videos about the UN (“The World I Want”) from the middle school and high school video competition organized by the Southern New York State Division of UNA-USA. The students in the crowd went wild cheering for their friends whose videos were being viewed. Representatives from the Board of Legislators of

Westchester County (MaryJane Shimsky of District 12 and Lyndon Williams of District 13) joined our board members to present the winners with certificates and awards. Winners came from Yonkers Montessori 27 (Ms. McCormack’s 6th grade class); Woodlands Middle School (Ms. Freeman-Mack’s 8th grade class); White Plains High School; and Sleepy Hollow High School (Model UN Club).



The program concluded with the wonderful voices of Concordia College’s GospelKings filling the room with musical grace. Young musicians Ahkeel and Dehniq played the



steel pan as guests enjoyed a delicious international buffet.

Contributions to the buffet were made by our board members and our generous cosponsors: The All Islands Association, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Inc. (Zeta Nu Omega Chapter), and the Bronxville Rotary Club. A special thanks to our other cosponsors Wartburg, the City of Mount Vernon, NY and the Southern New York State Division of UNA-USA.

On behalf of the UNA-USA Westchester Board of Directors, a heartfelt thanks to all our cosponsors, community and chapter members, volunteers, and everyone who made this event a wonderful success!



[View UN Day 2013 Photo Album](#)



[View video message from Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi, UN Secretary General's Envoy on Youth and The World I Want Contest videos.](#)

UN Day, history of UNA-USA: <http://www.unausa.org/membership/una-usa-events/un-day>

UN SG's Envoy on Youth, Mr. Ahmad Alhendawi: <http://www.un.org/youthenvoy/>

Obtaining Consultative Status with UN's Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC): <http://esango.un.org/civilsociety/displayConsultativeStatusSearch.do?method=search&sessionCheck=false>

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UN Day 2013