



NSU Campus Email Announcement

To the faculty, staff, and friends of NSU:

In September 2008 a proposal was presented to Norfolk State University by the Southeastern Virginia Arts Association (SEVAA) inviting the University to host the 2009 Afr'Am Fest. I do know that Norfolk State has spent enough time, which in today's world translates to money, on the Afr'Am Fest 2009. We began the discussions with this: **unless the community neighbors support this venue, NSU will not participate**. Out of respect for our neighbors and our ongoing commitment to be good neighbors and good citizens, we have notified SEVAA in writing and within the 90 day notice period required by the MOU that NSU will not be the site of Afr'Am Fest 2009.

Norfolk State University entered into conversations and later signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with SEVAA with the sole and exclusive intents of 1) supporting the City of Norfolk and SEVAA in continuing to hold the well established Afr'Am Fest in the City of Norfolk, and 2) enhancing community relations within the city. We thought we were being good citizens and serving the City and SEVAA as well as patrons of the arts. We knew when NSU entered into the discussions with SEVAA that there would be no financial benefit for the University, but we felt the good relations benefit would be, as the commercial says, 'priceless'.

NSU's original caveat stands; that is, **unless the community neighbors support this venue, NSU will not participate**. The first community meeting with our neighboring groups on November 3, 2008 at 6 p.m. opened with this caveat being explicitly stated. In attendance were representatives from the civic associations of Broad Creek, Central Brambleton, Chesterfield Heights, Ingleside, Middle Towne Arch (2) and Stonebridge. The results of this initial meeting, organized by NSU not SEVAA, were used as the basis for the development of the MOU as well as the subsequent plans being developed by Norfolk State.

Even though community relations are designated in the MOU as the purview of SEVAA, NSU orchestrated several community meetings as well as placed notification in residents' doors of meetings, incorporated their feedback as far as possible, and even went so far as to work with community leaders, so we thought, in developing detailed safety and security plans. NSU sincerely appreciates those individuals who collaborated in good faith with us in developing plans.

SEVAA representatives at the February 3 Council meeting did not comment or bother to inform the Council and the citizens present of the proactive and enabling roles of NSU in engaging the community before a decision was made. Instead at the recent press conference on February 5, SEVAA leaders commented that their boards and their supporters would be upset if they had. At this time nor ever has NSU had any intention to go forward with any activity of this magnitude without the City's support. We were led to believe that the City and SEVAA were in agreement in extending the initial invitation to NSU to be the site for the Fest. Apparently that was not the case.

In my remarks at the press conference, I stated that we had flubbed this opportunity. Indeed we did – all of us involved flubbed what could have been a spectacular example of municipal, institutional, and non-profit cooperative venture for the promotion of the arts and to benefit all.

Once more NSU gets the public blame for an intended good deed; others who share *in writing and by position* the responsibility keep smiling, untouched by the controversy that their negligence, dearth of honorable values, and lack of good faith precipitated. No good deed goes unpunished.

We wish the City and SEVAA all of the best and will continue to support Afr'Am Fest. NSU will also continue to try to engage our neighboring communities.

Carolyn W. Meyers, Ph.D.
President
Norfolk State University

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