

# Black History dinner celebrates diversity

**L**inda Roberts is a proud black woman. She's also a loyal member of the

YMCA.

When she learned that the Y was hosting a dinner to celebrate Black History Month, she made plans to attend – and she didn't show up empty-handed. She arrived at the Buxton Room bearing a huge pan of savory smoked pigs' tails with collard greens. She also brought along a friend, Karon Tyler – another one of those women you love to invite to a party.

Tyler arrived with similarly generous portions of goulash and macaroni and cheese. Their offerings were added to tables laden with many other traditional specialties like cornbread, pulled pork, potatoes with pinto beans, salads and cakes.

"The Y is all about diversity," said President and CEO James O'Shea Morton, surveying the decidedly diverse crowd. "We like to pay honor



CICILY CORBETT



made by kids in the Youth and Teen programs. A variety of black heroes were showcased – from President Barak Obama and inventor Garrett Morgan to entrepreneur Madam C. J. Walker

to everyone's heritage."

In the past, the YMCA has celebrated Black History Month with a luncheon. This year, an evening meal was planned to accommodate working folk. The room was decorated with colorful and educational displays

and singer Tina Turner.

Entertainment was provided by youngsters from the Birch Park Youth and Teen Center, located in West Springfield and operated by the YMCA. Volunteer music teacher J. Anthony Di Giore, who has 36 years' experience as a band teacher in local schools, explained the Birch Park program.

Several portable keyboards have been donated by the Rotary Club, he said. The instruments may be plugged in or battery operated. Youngsters are allowed to take the keyboards home for practice sessions. By using headphones, they are able to play at night without disturbing anyone. Since Birch Park Circle is an apartment complex, with many families living in close proximity to one another, most of these children could otherwise not easily learn to play an instrument.

Boomboxes have also been

donated, so that the children can play along with the CDs which supplement their music books.

"It's like having a music teacher who's never late, and never has a headache," Di Giore told the assembled crowd. "They can play the same song over and over till they learn it. Nobody hears their mistakes."

He then introduced several children with obvious pride and affection. Six-year-old Elijah Green played a simple tune; 10-year-old Kaleigha Green, a more ambitious one. Jacob and Ashley Serrano, Gabriel Thaison, Benjamin Green, and Michael Drost performed as well.

Members of the Springfield Armor were also on hand at the event. At 6-foot, 8-inch and 7-foot, 1-inch, respectively, guard Justin Hawkins and center Marcus Campbell towered over the children. A certain petite reporter, having learned that

Connecticut native Campbell had spent many years down South, thought there might be some down-home dietary secret to his impressive height. What did he eat for breakfast?

"Cereal," Campbell stated flatly. "I love cereal – especially Frosted Flakes. I eat a bowl of Frosted Flakes every day."

Both Hawkins and Campbell plan to finish college and coach basketball someday. Campbell also thinks he'd make a good high school guidance counselor. Meanwhile, they're making a little history with the Springfield Armor. And perhaps one day the Youth and Teen Centers will showcase their accomplishments for Black History Month.

For more information on YMCA programs, call 739-6951 (Springfield Branch) or 596-2749 (Scantic Valley Branch), or visit [www.springfieldy.org/](http://www.springfieldy.org/)