

Never in a million years would have I imagined that HNGD would become the organization that it is today. As with any newly formed group, while we tried to define ourselves, we experienced some challenges and growing pains along the way. We gradually went from a social club, to a bona fide non-profit cultural organization that has become the beacon of the Haitian community. The monthly social gatherings around a home cooked Haitian meal; our first attempt at theatrical production with Maurice Sixto's *Lea Kokoye* followed by two additional plays over the years; the l'Ajoupa events during which we tried to recreate the rural atmosphere of Haiti's *Fèt champèt*; the film festival, *Eyes on Haiti: the Reel Deal* at the Arab American Museum; The celebration of the Bicentennial of the Haitian Revolution at the Charles H. Wright Museum of African American History; the philanthropic activities to help our compatriots back home; the organized group trips, the most memorable being the recent cruise to Cuba; and now, the *Bèl Bagay Lakay* festival with the main purpose of shining a positive light on Haiti...

The amount of energy, manpower and dedication it took to organize these events is awe-inspiring! Yet, in spite of all these great accomplishments, HNGD's work is just starting. Thanks to an active board that's determined to take HNGD to the next level, the organization is stronger than ever. Shirley, Janny and Alain what a dynamic group to work with! The fun never stops as we eagerly venture in uncharted waters. We are no longer content to remain cocooned in our comfort zone; we are collaborating as much as possible with other entities and even branching out and going beyond the State boundaries to reach other Haitian communities in the Midwest.

As I look back at this amazing journey, I can't help but think how HNGD's trajectory would have been less spectacular without the community's support and the special love for Haiti that keeps Michiganders engaged and wanting to get involved with the organization. I think fondly of the pioneers in our community who laid the framework for us: Dr. Jean Alcé, Dr. Guérin Montilus and Dr. Karen Davis along with the members of HAM: Dr. Philippe Charles, his wife Marcelle, Dr. Serge Jean-Louis, Mr. Gérard Charles, Mr. Pierrot Joseph, Mr. Jean-Baptiste (Boule) Louis, and Mr. Julio Désir. They started the work decades before HNGD and modeled for us what community involvement should look like. I take this opportunity to salute these trailblazers and thank them for their dedication. As we say in French, "Chapeau bas"!

I dare hope that, as it was the case for us, the younger generation will see the importance of keeping the Haitian culture alive in Metro Detroit and of continuing a tradition that started long before HNGD came on the scene.

Maggy Corkery ■

RECOLLECTIONS, REFLECTIONS AND PROJECTIONS



HAITIAN NETWORK GROUP OF DETROIT (HNGD): A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Jean Alcé, MD and Jean-Claude Dutès, Ph.D.

Haitian immigration to Michigan has been going on for years, but it took more than a decade before Haitians came to see themselves as a vibrant community. That it took that long for a sense of community to develop is related to a number of factors, both personal and social, that cannot be covered here. Perhaps, the daily life challenges confronting many Haitians living away from the nuclear family left in Haiti coupled with the difficulties associated with adjusting to a host country with a different language and customs played prominent roles.

Being away from Haiti, however, did not shield Haitian immigrants from the realities back home and in this country. Haiti's internal problems, as experienced through television, telephone, newspapers and letters did not leave Haitian immigrants indifferent. The travails of Haitians braving the high seas to get to Florida, their unjust incarceration in Krome Detention Center, and CDC's discriminatory decision to associate Haitians with the HIV virus assaulted the dignity of Haitians everywhere. At about that time, the fall of the Duvalier dynasty, father and son, combined with the indignation, anger and disgust about the depiction of Haiti and unfair treatment of our Haitian brothers and sisters in America triggered a renewed sense of hope and generated a new consciousness in Haitians living in the United States. Thus, it is not surprising that the brutal years of shame, death and desperation associated with the dictatorship, and the disappointments experienced as immigrants, awaken our resolute and combative spirit into a renewed sense of brother and sisterhood that brought out the best out of the Haitian immigrants, not only in Michigan but in many other parts of America. From the immigrant factions emerged the sense of shared experiences that generated a much-needed sense of community. In Michigan, we experienced the birth of a community coming together through organizations such as the Haitian American of Michigan, or HAM, and ESPOIR in Detroit and in other American cities.

HNGD came from the entrails of these early organizations but is a totally new experience. With a new generation of highly intelligent leaders with a vision informed by the experiences of the previous organizations, the Haitian Network Group of Detroit (HNGD) has so far avoided the mistakes and pitfalls of its predecessors. Its vision is broader and its reach more inclusive, focusing on what unites instead of what has been divisive in the past. This recipe has worked. After twenty years, HNGD is vibrant and successful, defying our

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