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Group says time has come for celebration

by Mike Laberge
Staff Writer

For the members of the newly formed Afro American Association, celebrating Martin Luther King's birthday on campus was an idea whose time had come.

"Our original idea was to get together to celebrate Martin Luther King's birthday," said Carole Saunders, a UMaine sophomore and treasurer of the group, which represents American blacks on campus.

But during the group's first meetings, its purpose began to take a new direction, Barry Dean, a senior from Chicago said.

"We realized when we came together that there were other things we could do to help minority students on campus," he said.

Members will admit they are atypical; black students at a largely white university.

"I didn't expect a lot of minorities, but that didn't stop me from coming here," he said.

Dean said he intended to come to UMaine to play hockey.

After an injury, his athletic plans changed, but his mind didn't — he decided he would come here to pursue his education.

Saunders said her interest in the group stems from her high school years.

"Every year in my high school we always did something for Martin Luther King's Birthday," she said.

Keith James, a sophomore from Peoria, Ill., said in addition to celebrating King's birthday, the group wants to promote black awareness on campus and to recruit more minority students to campus.

James, like Dean, is well aware of the group's potential.

"When we came together, we realized the importance of this group."

But members, too, are quick to add that without the efforts of Ted Mitchell the group probably would not have come together at all.

Mitchell is director of minority affairs on campus.

The original idea for the group dates back to mid-October.

At that time, Mitchell said, he began discussing the possibility of celebrating King's birthday on campus with the administration.

"I felt it would be proper for the university to recognize what Martin Luther King means to America," he said.

Mitchell said he then met with Esther Rauch, the only black faculty member, to discuss the possibility of bringing students together from such a group.

To attract interest for the group, he said he wrote all black students on campus a letter inviting them to attend a meeting in early November.

Despite his efforts, he downplays his role.

"It's through their own efforts that the group is together," he said.

He, like the members of the group, spoke of the group's potential, and added, "this is a beginning."

After the initial efforts of



Barry Dean and Keith James discuss plans for the celebration of Martin Luther King Day.

(Bear Photo)

Mitchell, members decided that the group decided that its time had come.

"This year, we decided we had to do something," Dean said.

Members began putting their energies into the group, holding weekly meetings and attracting new members.

Now, he said, the group has about 15 active members.

But some meetings have attracted more than 30 people, Saunders added.

The group meets Tuesdays at 7 p.m., usually in the 1912 room of the Memorial Union, Saunders said.

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The group has a full schedule of events planned for today. At noon, films featuring Martin Luther King will be shown in the south Low Room of the Memorial Union.

Throughout the day, an exhibit of arts and crafts by black artists will be displayed in the union.

Members say the highlight of the day will be a speech by Julianne Malveaux, an economist at the University of California at Berkeley, who will speak on Keynesian Economics at 7 p.m. in Hauck Auditorium.