

Often referred to as the "Sewickley Eight" by local historians, the three surviving honorees include brothers Mitchell Higginbotham and Robert Higginbotham, of California, and William Johnston of Ohio. Jim Addison, Curtis Branch, William Curtis Jr., William Gilliam and Frank Hailstock will be honored posthumously for their unprecedented service by the society as well.

These distinguished men continued their successes after the war. In a period of extreme racism, these men overcame immense professional challenges. Mitchell Higginbotham, commissioned as a Second Lieutenant and pilot, now serves as an itinerant Ambassador of Goodwill for the Tuskegee Airmen. After serving as an expert in multi-engine aircrafts, Robert Higginbotham went on to become the first African-American intern and resident at the Sewickley Valley Hospital. William Johnston, commissioned as a Second Lieutenant, serving as a Tuskegee pilot, went on to become a corporate pilot.

The "Sewickley Eight" and their families will be honored on Thursday August 4th by the Daniel B. Matthew Society's first annual Founders Luncheon at St. Stephen's Episcopal Church Sewickley, Pennsylvania. This event will take place on the opening day of the 39th annual Come-On-Home Weekend in Sewickley.

I ask my colleagues in the United States House of Representatives to join me in honoring the brave Sewickley natives of the WWII Tuskegee Airmen of the all African-American. 99th Pursuit Squadron. It is an honor to represent the Fourth Congressional District of Pennsylvania and a pleasure to salute such citizens as the Tuskegee Airmen who embody the spirit of patriotism.

**TRIBUTE TO KENYA AJANAKU, A
MULTIFACETED CULTURAL
LEADER**

HON. WM. LACY CLAY

OF MISSOURI

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 28, 2005

Mr. CLAY. Mr. Speaker, I rise today to call attention to an article that appeared in the July 15th edition of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch, which pays tribute to a man of abundant and diverse talents, Mr. Kenya Ajanaku. Not only has Mr. Ajanaku played an important part in my personal life as an admired relative, he has been a huge asset to the city of St. Louis. As the executive director of the Harambee Institute, and a professional jewelry maker, drummer, singer, dancer, storyteller and educator, Mr. Ajanaku has proven that pursuing one's passions can be personally rewarding as well as beneficial to one's community. The article, aptly entitled "Multifaceted", delivers Mr. Ajanaku the proper recognition he deserves.

Mr. Speaker, I ask that the entire text of the St. Louis Post-Dispatch article be placed in the RECORD.

[From the St. Louis Dispatch, July 15, 2005]

MULTIFACETED

(By Kathie Sutin)

Some of the best things in life happen by serendipity, that accidental, happy discovery that comes when you're looking for something else.

Take Kenya Ajanaku, a multi-talented man—a professional jewelry-maker, drummer, singer, dancer, storyteller and educator.

Ajanaku, 57, is executive director of the Harambee Institute, a nonprofit organization he created in 1994 to pass on to others what he has learned about making jewelry and the performing arts. He also performs a 45-minute interactive program incorporating drum-playing and the storytelling of African folk tales to groups around St. Louis and the country.

Except for singing, which he has done most of his life, he came upon each of his other professions by chance.

"I became a jeweler at 25, I became a dancer and drummer at 31, and I became a professional storyteller at 41," says Ajanaku (pronounced ah JAHN ah koo).

"It has enabled me to have heaven right here on Earth: he says. "I do this for a living, and it's really a blessing. I can't call it a job because a job is something you hate to do. I have to call this a profession because it's something I love to do."

Not that the path was easy. In the '70s, when Ajanaku started, it was almost unheard-of for an African-American to make a living selling jewelry.

"Most people said, 'He has gone crazy talking about he gon' make a living making jewelry,'" he said with a laugh.

Ajanaku understands the skepticism of those days.

"Our people hadn't seen anyone making a living doing this," he says. "And then I got involved with the drumming, and my mother—bless her soul—says, 'Bi-State is hiring. You're 31 years old. What are you going to do with a drum?'"

He credits his wife of 38 years, Weyni, who learned jewelry-making with him and who does the paperwork and teaches at the institute, for believing in him. The couple sell necklaces, bracelets and rings they handcraft from copper, brass, silver and 14-karat gold. They also set semiprecious stones from around the world such as obsidian, turquoise, malachite, black onyx and tiger's eye. Ajanaku also fashions antique sterling silverware he finds at auctions into bracelets and rings.

After graduating from Vashon High School in 1966, Ajanaku headed to Johnson C. Smith University in Charlotte, N.C., on a swimming scholarship. Shortly thereafter, he married Weyni. Then, three years into college, he moved back to St. Louis to become a barber.

A few years later, he and his wife decided to sell their possessions and the barbershop to move to Panama with friends to open a business.

But there, their plans were stymied when they learned that to open a business, they needed a Panamanian partner. They decided to go back to Charlotte, where they opened a small variety store across from the university Ajanaku had attended.

After going to a movie one day, the couple encountered two African-American men near the theater. They had big boards shaped like Africa, and they had black velvet on them, and they had their jewelry pinned on the front, Ajanaku says. One of them said, "Hey, would you be interested in some handcrafted jewelry?"

Ajanaku was amazed.

"It was the first time I had seen handcrafted jewelry, especially made by someone who looks like me," he said. "Up to then, I had never conceived that I could become a jeweler. You see, when I was growing up in my community, you didn't see any professional jewelers."

He was also impressed by the jewelry.

"I was just flabbergasted at the beauty and the time and effort that went into these pieces that they made," he said.

The couple learned that the men, part of a communal group called the Ajanakus, made their living traveling from city to city and selling jewelry. They bought some jewelry and invited the men to dinner. Later they would change their last name to Ajanaku, a Nigerian term meaning "strong-willed person."

After dinner, the men brought out their tools and materials and showed the couple how they made jewelry. That night, Kenya Ajanaku made his first piece of jewelry—a pair of earrings.

Ajanaku and his wife were captivated by the lifestyle, as well as the jewelry.

So they sold their business and eventually headed for Washington, where he met a man who taught him how to solder and set stones in silver.

"I remember our first piece of sterling silver we bought in Philadelphia," he says. "It was 1 foot of 16-gauge round sterling silver wire. Man, you would have thought that was gold to us because we had never worked with sterling before."

The family returned to St. Louis in 1979 and began to sell jewelry at craft shows.

Here, Someone told him about renowned dancer Katherine Dunham and a Senegalese man she brought to East St. Louis to teach African drumming. Ajanaku signed up for the class.

"I became a pretty good drummer, and fortunately Miss Dunham hired me as one of the drummers for the Katherine Dunham Dancers. That was really a help because when I first moved back to St. Louis, the only way I had to make money was through the jewelry. When I got involved in the performing arts, it helped me to diversify."

Ajanaku later played percussion behind St. Louisan Bobby Norfolk, one of the first African-American professional storytellers, who was on the roster of Young Audiences. When Norfolk went on to national and international gigs, the group asked Ajanaku to come up with a storytelling presentation.

Though the Ajanakus spend a lot of time teaching children and adults at the Harambee Institute and at classes they teach through the St. Louis Parks and Recreation Department, the Ferguson-Florissant School District and at Mark Twain Elementary School in St. Louis, they still sell their jewelry at festivals. That includes such events as the Festival of Nations, which will be held July 23-24 in Tower Grove Park, and the Best of Missouri Market at the Missouri Botanical Garden and Ottobrofest at the St. Louis Zoo, both in October.

Ajanaku sees the institute as a way to enlighten the African-American community about professions in the arts and others about African culture.

"Nowadays, I tell people, 'The cotton has been picked; automation is here, so the need for unskilled laborers nowadays is zero,'" he says. "Nowadays you need some type of skill or some type of service you can provide."

The Harambee Institute is at 5223 Raymond Avenue. To learn more about it or to make an appointment to visit the gift shop, which features items from Africa and the Ajanakus' jewelry, call 314-454-6584.

**ON THE OCCASION OF GLADYS
BAISA'S 65TH BIRTHDAY**

HON. ED CASE

OF HAWAII

IN THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

Thursday, July 28, 2005

Mr. CASE. Mr. Speaker, I rise to honor one of my most distinguished constituents on the occasion of her 65th birthday.