

Knowledge and heritage

MiraCosta students explore Kwanzaa traditions

By Darcy Leigh Richardson
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OCEANSIDE — Kenneth Norris clapped his hands and tapped his feet to the conga and jembe drumbeats.

When the music stopped, Norris picked up his pen and notebook. He scribbled down some ideas as Josiah Diallo, the jembe player, recited a poem about renewal and redemption.

After attending the presentation about the history and traditions of Kwanzaa yesterday afternoon at MiraCosta College, Norris said he wants to celebrate the holiday for the first time later this month.

For the 21-year-old student who has celebrated Christmas all his life, the difference between Kwanzaa and Christmas is about his heritage and his African identity.

Kwanzaa, meaning "first fruits" in Swahili, is a seven-day celebration of family, culture and community from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1. Each day represents one of the Seven Principles, or Nguzo Saba: faith, unity, creativity, purpose, self-determination, cooperative economics and collective responsibility.

"I knew of Kwanzaa, but I learned a lot today about why people celebrate it," Norris said. "I'm going to try and celebrate this year. I'll have my family with me, so that's a good start."

Kwanzaa is a seven-day holiday focusing on family, culture and

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community. Its traditions include lighting a candle each day and having a feast on Dec. 31.

"Kwanzaa is about coming back into the knowledge of ourselves. It is like a mirror we look into and then discover ourselves," Diallo said. "Anyone can celebrate Kwanzaa because you are free to be who you are."

Kwanzaa was created in 1966 by Maulana Karenga to restore dignity and cultural identity to African-Americans.

"Freedom from oppression was not achieved through violence but through celebration of cultural heritage and worth," Diallo said.

Diallo said all people in a community are connected, and helping each other is part of Kwanzaa. The holiday combines ancient traditions with modern thought and practice.

This was the first Kwanzaa presentation at MiraCosta. Jim Gonzalez, director of student activities at the college, said he is looking forward to having Diallo back next year.

Gonzalez said many students and faculty members are interested in the holiday but don't know much about it.

"It was the first time I had heard Kwanzaa described as a cultural holiday and an African-American New Year's celebration," Gonzalez said.

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