

AFRICAN BURYING GROUND

Putting her stamp on history

Portsmouth woman designs pictorial postmark for SAACC

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PORTSMOUTH — The faces of prestigious African Americans were positioned on the walls of the Seacoast African American Cultural Center Saturday, as the organization celebrated the anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation as well as the unveiling of the center's own pictorial postmark.

Area residents and those curiously poking their head into the center at Discovery Portsmouth were rewarded with a presentation from SAACC President Kelvin Edwards, as well as a speech

from Portsmouth resident Courtney Daniel, whose rendering for the African Burying Ground was chosen as the pictorial postmark for the cultural center.

Her rendering featured stark, poignant blades of grass with two drums resting atop of them, with the name and location of the cultural center.

"The grass represents the hands of the slaves reaching through the ground. The drums represents the voices of those forgotten," Daniel said to the gathered audience. "When you put hands to a powerful instrument in the presence of those who have

something to say, they will make noise."

Daniel dedicated the moment to her children, adding she "wants them to be confident with who they are and where they come from."

Designing of the postmark and Black Heritage Stamps exhibit were months in the making, said Sandi Clark, programming chair for the SAACC.

"We wanted to do something to showcase black heritage," Clark said, adding that when she called the postmaster in Maine, she recommended applying for a pictorial postmark, which was on display with Portsmouth Postmaster Erin Sullivan.

The post office also loaned the cultural center the large picture depicting each of the

21 African American stamps, ranging from Jackie Robinson to Harriet Tubman to Sojourner Truth. Each photo had a page or two of biographical information next to it for viewers to learn more.

"This is our way of recognizing and celebrating Juneteenth, the celebration of the Emancipation Proclamation," said Edwards. "We thought, at the same time, it would be nice to honor the African Burying Ground. Take your time looking around at the photos and the stamps. There are some you know, others you may not know."

The exhibit will be featured at the cultural center through the summer, Clark said.

Daniel, who moved to Portsmouth in 2012 from Atlanta, said it was a culture shock at



Courtney Daniel was the winner of the pictorial postmark contest of the Seacoast African American Cultural Center. Daniel's design was inspired by the African Burying Ground Memorial Park. PHOTO BY JESSE SCARDINA/SEACOASTONLINE.COM

first, but she has been able to indulge in the history of her culture during her time in New England.

"Who would have thought a young woman from LaGrange, Ga., had to move to Portsmouth

to learn about her African American heritage?" Daniel said with a laugh. "Today I stand here and say I put a Daniel stamp on a moment in history. It's been such an honor to be here."