

THE STORY OF "FIND YOSEF A HOLIDAY"

In order to understand what this exciting program is all about it is important to understand where the program originated and how it has evolved over the years since its inception.

In the Fall of 1997, I was working as a Residential Coordinator (RC) at Queens College (now Queens University) in Charlotte, NC, a very small liberal arts college of about 600 on campus residents and 5 residence halls. Together with the other 3 RCs, we decided to host some holiday open houses in lobbies of each of the residence halls to help the faculty to understand where their students lived and to celebrate with a little holiday cheer. It was essentially assumed that we would decorate the lobbies for Christmas. While I was shopping for decorations for my building, I saw a few Chanukah decorations and decided to pick them up as well. The event went very well. Many faculty members showed up and the students loved showing their faculty around the buildings. As the event was winding down, I had a few of my residents approach me, thanking me for recognizing their holiday with the Chanukah decorations. This heart felt reaction really made struck me and had a deep impact on my thinking about the December holiday season.

The following fall, I was an Associate Resident Director at Eastern Illinois University, working on my Master's degree. I decided to build on the idea for the program. We continued the idea of an open house, but this time created full educational displays for Christmas, Chanukah, Kwanzaa, and Winter Solstice. Each Holiday included a table with decorations, appropriate food or drink, and an educational component so attendees could learn about the holiday and its associated culture and/or customs. The event drew many students but not so many staff or faculty. The following year we added Ramadan and again saw the idea of open house kind of fade away and concept of a multi cultural holiday festival highly accepted.

In the fall of 2000, I had graduated and moved on to the Rochester Institute of Technology as a Resident Director. Again, I pitched the program to my colleagues in my area and this time the program became supported by several residence hall staffs. The following year it needed to be put into the lobby of one of our cafeterias to allow more space for tables and attendees. The following year it became and remains an annual program put on by the Department of Residence Life. Each year it grew in size of attendance and in the number of holidays. Some of the holidays added included Boxing Day which became the community service aspect of the program, Diwali, Bodhi Day, Chinese New Year, and St. Nicholas Day. Christmas was also split to include Traditional American Christmas, Religious Christmas, and International Christmas. We added live entertainment including a performance of "How the Grinch Stole Christmas" in spoken English and Sign language and photos with Santa.

The fall of 2004 found me at Appalachian State University as an Area Coordinator. With a desire to continue the program on yet another campus, I went to Tracey Wright to pitch the idea for a collaborative effort on the program. With great support from her and the Multicultural Student Development office, we prepared to initiate the program at ASU. We sought participation from university committees, clubs, and organizations with a very good response. It was decided this program would be called "Find Yosef A Holiday" on this campus.

We ended up with about 15 different tables and well over 200 people in attendance. We even saw new holidays added such as Day of the Dead and Junkanoo.

The program was submitted as a Diversity Program "Of The Month" (OTM) through the National Residence Hall Honorary (NRHH) and won at the Local, Regional, and National Level for the month of December 2004. There is also a program proposal currently being considered that would allow for the story of the program to be told, along with passing the basics of how to create such a program, and a discussion of the importance of multicultural holiday celebrations, at a national conference.

As we head into the 2nd Annual "Find Yosef A Holiday" program, what new and exciting new milestones will we see this year? The answer to that question is up to you!!!

-Peter P. Smith