



Chautauqua history tour starts in Catonsville this weekend

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Chautauqua is the name, and living history is the game. This weekend, the Maryland Humanities Council begin its 19th annual Chautauqua tour throughout the state, starting with free performances on the Catonsville campus of the Community College of Baltimore County Friday, July 5; Saturday, July 6; and Sunday, July 7.

The theme for this year's Maryland Chautauqua is "Turning Points in History" and will feature portrayals of Amelia Earhart, Rachel Carson and Jackie Robinson.

After the only stop in Baltimore County this weekend on the South Rolling Road campus, performances will be at Perryville Middle School on July 12, the Elkton Branch of Cecil County Public Libraries on July 13 and Harford Community College on July 14.

"We're in all regions of the state and people are learning that Chautauqua means this engaging, living history program," said MDHC program officer Judy Dobbs. "It has really grown to be one of our largest audiences."

Modern Chautauqua features professional actors and actresses dressed in full period costume speaking, interacting and responding as historical figures, telling their stories in an entertaining and educational way.

"It's a nice broad theme where we can choose a variety of characters that would be of interest to the general public," Dobbs said. "It turns people on to history, which is great."

Last year's event, for example, honored the bicentennial of the War of 1812 with portrayals of President James Madison, flag maker Mary Pickersgill and British Maj. Gen. Robert Ross.

The 2011 event marked the 150th anniversary of the American Civil War with portrayals of President Abraham Lincoln, Confederacy President Jefferson Davis and Harriet Tubman.

The movement began as a training course for Sunday school teachers at the Chautauqua Assembly church in the late 1800s and later expanded to become an educational program for adults, with emphasis on arts and humanities, Dobbs said.

"This sort of became a movement," she said. "(It) brought educators and lecturers to towns all across America."

Varied cast of characters

Arnold resident Mary Ann Jung will perform at CCBC as Amelia Earhart on Friday, Silver Spring resident Kate Campbell Stevenson as Rachel Carson on Saturday and Pittsburgh resident Gregory Kenney as Jackie Robinson on Sunday.

Jung was in Catonsville on June 25 performing as Queen Elizabeth I at the Catonsville Senior Center.

She said that, after graduating with a degree in British history from University of Maryland in 1982, she wanted to find a way to share her love of history while exploring her passion for theater.

"It's a show, I'm an actress," she said. "I just happen to be performing history."

"I like bringing to life stuff people don't know," said Jung, who has also worked with the Maryland Renaissance Festival for over 30 years.

In addition to Queen Elizabeth and Amelia Earhart, Jung also acts as Clara Barton, founder of the Red Cross in America, Margaret Brent, the first female landowner in Maryland, and Julia Child in her one-woman acting company, History Alive!

She said she is looking forward to wow-ing the Chautauqua audience with her Earhart program and promised to transport them back to a time when the art of flying was just newly born.

"These people were half nuts to get into these things (planes) made of wood," Jung said. "This was all very new and very scary, and she still loved it."

Earhart was the first woman to fly solo across the Atlantic Ocean.

"I like to surprise my audiences. Even if you think you know Amelia Earhart, you still need to come out," Jung said.

Silver Spring resident Kate Campbell Stevenson will perform in her first Maryland Chautauqua as Rachel Carson, who, was also portrayed by a different actress in the first Chautauqua held at CCBC Catonsville in 2004.

"I am very appreciative and excited about being involved," Campbell Stevenson said. "I had heard about it (Chautauqua) but had never been in town when it was happening."

She said her performances focus only on American history. In addition to Carson, she also has portrayed Abigail Adams, the wife of President John Adams, and Sacagawea, the Indian guide for the Lewis and Clark Expedition.

She classifies herself as a singer as well as an actress and said she will use her singing talent to demonstrate that, while she had a very quiet personality, Rachel Carson had a great impact on history.

"What I love about being able to do this is that Rachel Carson wasn't really a dynamic personality or a dynamic celebrity," Campbell Stevenson said of the mid-century author and environmentalist. "But she was very much a dynamic woman.

"I have written this seven-and-a-half minute musical piece to bring to life her passion for the environment and what she feels for nature," she said. "I can do that much more theatrically through the music than I could just by talking as her.

"It's educational, it's motivational, it's entertaining," she said.

All three shows at CCBC will start at 7 p.m. in the Q Theatre and are free to the public.