Etched in stone: KSU nursing alum part of team to make
African American Cultural Garden a reality

Monument one of the Cleveland sites to volunteer at annual Alumni Day of Service

If you live near, or visit Cleveland’s historic University Circle neighborhood, it’s almost impossible to get there without traveling the 1.5-mile winding stretch of Martin Luther King Boulevard that makes up a large portion of the Cleveland Cultural Gardens.

Unique in the nation, the Cultural Gardens are home to 29 (and counting) gardens and monuments to the many immigrants and ethnic groups that made Cleveland what it is today. You might see a monument built to honor the Croatian, Polish, Greek or Indian communities in Cleveland.

Thanks in part to the efforts of KSU alum Lavita Ewing and her husband Carl, as of 2016, we can now see an imposing sandstone, limestone and black granite monument on the grounds of the African American Cultural Garden standing proudly beyond the red, black and green flag planted along the west side of the boulevard that runs between Euclid Avenue and I-90. The monument was built by Cleveland architect Daniel Dan Bickerstaff of Ubiquitous Design, LTD.

The African American Cultural Garden is once again one of the sites across the country where KSU alumni will have an opportunity to volunteer their time on this year’s annual Alumni Day of Service, held April 21. Ewing, KSU class of ’72, is Development Chair for the Association of African American Cultural Gardens. She has been working alongside her husband, who has served as president of the Association, for the last five years, to bring all of the elements together to break ground and begin construction of the monument.

“The African American Cultural Gardens is something my husband and I volunteer every day with, said Ewing, a graduate from KSU’s nursing program, former KSU nursing instructor, former president of the KSU Nursing School Alumni
chapter and proud member of the Epsilon Gamma Chapter of Alpha Kappa Alpha sorority. “Our clean up every year is very vital to what we do in terms of bringing all generations of alumni and others in the community together.”

She said being a site at the annual Day of Service not only allows people of all generations to play a part in maintaining the beauty of the African American garden, but also to appreciate its past present and future – literally and figuratively.

The monument as it stands today is just phase one: The Past Pavilion, which Ewing said represents the story of African Americans’ painful journey to this side of the world.

“The Past Pavilion speaks of our coming from Africa through the slave trade,” Ewing said. “The Past Pavilion is the doorway of no return and corridor of no return from the Slave Castles along the western coast of Africa. It escalates down with water to the Present Pavilion.”

The completion of the Past Pavilion, in a way, pays homage to the Cleveland luminaries of the past, like former Cleveland City Councilman Leo Jackson and esteemed educator and Mayor George Voinovich cabinet member Booker T. Tall, who fought for an African American Cultural Garden since 1966.

“Since then, we have excelled in education, medicine, sports, art, science and technology,” Ewing said. “As we look toward the future, we reflect back on our past to leave something for our future generation with our Future Pavilion.”

Ewing said the Association is currently raising the $2.6 million needed to construct the Present and Future Pavilions and complete the garden by a planned 2020 formal dedication. The Association will hold fundraiser events this year toward reaching its goal. One will be a Juneteenth celebration held June 16 at the Garden site. The association will also hold a fall fundraiser gala Oct. 18 at the Inter-continental Hotel in University Circle. Visit www.AAACG.org for information about the fundraiser events and read more about the African American Cultural Gardens.

The Cultural Garden clean up will take place between 9 a.m. and noon Saturday, April 21. Volunteers can select the African American Cultural Garden or other sites to serve across the country at the KSU Alumni Day of Service registration page by April 9.
Meet the officers of the Black Alumni Chapter of the Kent State University Alumni Association

The 2017-2018 Black Alumni chapter board members and their roles. We’re proud to serve you!

Cinnamon Small (’09, ’13), President
Outreach Coordinator, Kent State University Department of Pan African Studies

Kenneth Atchinson (’89), Vice President
Associate Professor, Department of Computer Science, Baldwin Wallace University

Terri Shavers (’92, ’11), Fundraising, Scholarship & Student Recruitment
Forensic Clinical Supervisor, Community Support Services

Director of Rehabilitation Services, Northcoast Behavioral Healthcare and Adjunct Nursing Clinical Instructor, Kent State University

Kellea Tibbs (’97) Special Events – Homecoming, Alumni Networking & Membership
Assistant Director for Campus Relations, Ohio University Alumni Association