

Alexandria Times

Denise Dunbar  
Publisher & Executive Editor  
ddunbar@alextimes.com

Margaret Stevens  
Sales Director  
mstevens@alextimes.com

Caitlyn Meisner  
Editor  
cmeisner@alextimes.com

Sydney Kodama  
Reporter/Photographer  
skodama@alextimes.com

Andrew McCabe  
Photo Intern  
amccabe@alextimes.com

Ella Mitchell  
Reporting Intern  
emitchell@alextimes.com

ADVERTISING

Margaret Stevens  
mstevens@alextimes.com

Marty DeVine  
mdevine@alextimes.com

Patrice V. Culligan  
pculligan@alextimes.com

Stephanie Santiago  
ssantiago@alextimes.com

Tina Franco  
Office Administrator  
tfranco@alextimes.com

DIRECTOR OF ART & DESIGN

Jessica Kim  
graphics@alextimes.com

CONTRIBUTORS

Kim Davis  
Mark Eaton  
Mark Edelman  
Thompson Eskew  
Kim Gilliam  
Ryan Hopper  
Louise Krafft  
Jim McGrath  
Erin Shackelford  
Hannah Shiblaq  
Dr. Vivek Sinha  
Kathryn Ziemer

ACM BOARD

Barbara Beach  
Chair

Denise Dunbar  
President

Russell Bailey  
Suzanne Brock  
Carter Flemming

Tax-deductible donations  
can be mailed to:  
Alexandria Times  
908 King Street, Suite 200  
Alexandria, VA 22314

Alexandria  
COMMUNITY MEDIA

# A Kwanzaa celebration: rooted in unity

BY ALYSHA PAGE

Habari Gani? What is the news? This call opens each day of Kwanzaa, inviting families and friends to gather, share and reflect on a guiding principle for the day. The greeting sets the tone for connection, conversation and celebration.

Kwanzaa is more than a holiday. It is a return to culture, memory and collective care.

Rooted in African tradition and shaped through African American experience, Kwanzaa encourages communities to come together, honor history and look toward the future with purpose. The celebration offers a moment to slow down, share stories and strengthen bonds across generations.

Kwanzaa is celebrated annually from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1. Maulana Karenga, Ph.D. created the celebration in 1966 after the Watts Uprising in Los Angeles while serving as a professor of Africana studies in California. He envisioned a cultural tradition that restored pride and united African Americans through shared heritage. Kwanzaa takes its name from Matunda ya Kwanza, meaning “first fruits,” based on African harvest rituals that honor gratitude, shared labor and abundance.

The holiday is guided by the Nguzo Saba, or Seven Prin-



PHOTOS/ALEXANDRIA BLACK HISTORY MUSEUM

**Top:** The seven symbols of Kwanzaa. **Bottom:** The Kwanzaa table at the 2024 Alexandria Black History Museum event.

ciples, that correspond to the seven days of celebration. Umoja teaches unity. Kujichagulia affirms self-definition. Ujima encourages solving chal-

lenges together. Ujamaa supports cooperative economics. Nia centers purpose. Kuumba inspires creativity. Imani calls for faith in the future. Each

night, a candle in the Kinara is lit to reflect on one principle.

The celebration table becomes a teaching space through the Seven Symbols. The Mkeka mat represents heritage. Mazao crops honor labor. The Kinara holds the Mishumaa Saba candles. Muhindi corn uplifts children as the future. The Kikombe cha Umoja unity cup is raised in remembrance. Zawadi gifts are often educational, encouraging responsibility and growth.

Kwanzaa’s message extends beyond those who celebrate it at home. It highlights the importance of family, cultural pride and community support, values that benefit neighborhoods, schools and local institutions alike.

The Alexandria Black History Museum, a community-founded institution dedicated to preserving Black stories, embodies these values. We welcome all to visit this holiday season, to explore history, connect with heritage and experience the spirit of community that Kwanzaa uplifts.

When we gather with intention, we learn from the past. We help build a future rooted in unity, creativity and shared growth.

*Out of the Attic is provided by the Office of Historic Alexandria.*