

children's PRESSLINE

Celebrating a century and preserving the past

By GABRIELLE MILNER

Children's PressLine

David Dinkins, former mayor of New York City, recalls that when he was Manhattan borough president in the 1980s, a then-pre-teen Elinor Tatum was chair of his Youth Advisory Committee.

"Even then, you could see that she was a very bright young woman," said Dinkins at the *New York Amsterdam News*' 100th anniversary gala. Now, as publisher and editor in chief of the *New York Amsterdam News*, Tatum is using those leadership skills to make sure that African-American history as chronicled in the paper will be preserved.

In a drive to meet the needs of an ever-increasing digital world, the *Amsterdam News*, under Tatum's direction, has begun digitizing its archives to



President Bill Clinton credits the *Amsterdam News* with influencing how he learned about Harlem and other African-American communities.

a growing audience...You reach people across the nation and across the world, and it lets people know what [the paper has] been doing over the past 100 years."

On Monday, November 30, the *Amsterdam News*, celebrated its 100th anniversary at Lincoln Center's David H. Koch Theater. The gala raised funds to support this initiative so these archives can be

available through the Internet and preserved for future generations at the Wilbert A. Tatum Archives and Library Center. The project is named after the late Wilbert A. Tatum, publisher emeritus, who hoped the center would not only encourage

people to engage in research, but also empower them as they learned about the history of their communities. Among the guests at the gala were elected officials, long-term friends and support-



Benjamin Todd Jealous, president and CEO of NAACP, said the paper has encouraged multiple generations to "fight important fights."

expand access to the history that has been reported in the paper for the last century.

Bevan Springer, a columnist with the *Amsterdam News*, said, "[By going online] you're basically able to attract



Rev. Al Sharpton explains to youth reporters Tatyana Bellamy-Walker and Emma Bally that he was a kid the first time he read the paper. "I grew up reading the *Amsterdam News*," he says.

ers of the *Amsterdam News*, as well as community residents. The event honored several individuals for their steadfast commitment to serving the public good, in line with the spirit of the newspaper.

At the gala, a recurring theme was the impact of the paper in educating the community, as well as others. "We hold a really particular place in the world of newspapers," said Kristin Fayne-Mulroy, managing editor at the *Amsterdam News*. "We give a voice to those who don't often get represented in the mainstream media."

As a result, the paper has served as a guide for many leaders. Gala guest and former President Bill Clinton said he read the paper before he started to run for office. "I learned a lot about how America works in a community way by reading the *Amsterdam News*," he said. "I learned a lot about Harlem, in particular.

"It has influenced how I perceive life in Harlem, its promise, as well as the problems that African-Americans and other people who live in Harlem have," he added.

Benjamin Todd Jealous, president and CEO of the NAACP, said, "This is the newspaper that was on the coffee table in our parents' homes, our grandparents' homes. It's influenced the way our community interprets the world around them and has encouraged people to fight important fights. It plays that role now for my generation and will play that role [for the younger generation as

well]."

Reverend Al Sharpton said he, too, read the *Amsterdam News* when he was growing up. "I read it because it covered my community. It talked about what was going on in the churches. It talked about things I related to. It made us feel that we had a voice. It made us feel that we were included, that we mattered," he said.



Governor David Paterson said the *Amsterdam News* raises issues that other media sometimes avoids, adding, "We have to do everything we can to make sure that voice is still heard."

New York State Governor David A. Paterson, an honorary gala committee chair, said the paper continues to do that for its readers. "It has



A pilot with the Tuskegee Airmen during World War II, Roscoe C. Brown, Jr. (left) tells Children's PressLine reporter Jordan Walker and editor Gabrielle Milner about how the *Amsterdam News* was influential in reporting on the involvement of Blacks in the war.

(Jayna Rust/CPL Media photos)

inspired great movements. All of the social, political and economic achievements are attributed to [its] passage of information."

It is this information that the archives aims to preserve. The *Amsterdam News* collection contains articles by prominent African-Americans such as W.E.B. DuBois, Adam Clay-

ton Powell and Malcolm X, and includes more than 500,000 photographs representing life in Harlem and other Black communities. The archival center will be an invaluable resource for future generations, as it will help connect people to these historical resources that are not available elsewhere.

Hazel Dukes, president of the NAACP, New York State

Conference, said, "The *Amsterdam News* would carry stories no other newspapers would carry about the work of the NAACP: the deaths of slain civil rights leaders such as Medgar Evers and the work of Roy Wilkins,

Frederick Douglass and Langston Hughes. If it wasn't for [the paper], I don't know where our history would be."

The gala ended after New York City Comptroller Bill Thompson

presented an award to R. Donahue Peebles, President Bill Clinton bestowed an award on Congressman Charles B. Rangel, Shahrar Ahmad-Llewellyn gave recognition to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Kenneth Cole honored Robert F. Kennedy, Jr., and Leonard Riggio presented an award to William "Bill" Lynch.

Dukes summed up the evening and its meaning when she said, "This is a great night for the city of New York."

Additional reporting by Emma Bally, Tatyana Bellamy-Walker and Jordan Walker