

Alton City Hall to Host Black History Exhibit Through February

by Sydney Sinks, News Reporter
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ALTON - Alton City Hall will host a Black History Exhibit starting Feb. 5 and running through Feb. 29, 2024.

First Lady Sheila Goins organized the exhibit with the help of local historians. She said she hopes the display will educate people about the prominence of Black history in Alton.

“The importance in displaying this is really to help the community to understand that it was Black history that was very instrumental in the vibrance of this city,” Goins said. “And there may not have been a lot of Blacks that receive credit for it, but just the very infrastructure of this community was Black people. It’s just a beautiful thing.”

Goins said the display’s history begins in the early 1900s and stretches to the present day. Visitors will learn about some of the Black leaders and community members who helped build Alton.

Charlotte Johnson, a well-known historian and genealogist, worked closely with Goins to put together the exhibit. She used documents and artifacts obtained from Hayner Public Library District, as well as display items from Eva Perkins and other community members who have sponsored Black History Month exhibits in the past. According to Johnson, Alton history doesn’t exist without Black history.

“Nothing happened in Alton without brown hands on a project,” Johnson said. “They might not have been at the forefront, but brown hands were working on it. And people really don’t believe that. But when you do the history and do the facts, it’s all laid out right there for you.”

Johnson, Perkins and Goins hope to see many visitors at City Hall this month, including Alton’s youngest residents. Goins noted that last year’s exhibit attracted a lot of guests, and several parents brought their children to City Hall to see the exhibit firsthand.

“I think it’s important for this generation now to understand and know and be exposed to the history of Black legacy in this community and the wealth of Black history here, because it is endless,” Goins said. “Quite a bit of this information is not taught in our schools. But people were bringing their children down, Black, white, bringing their children down just to share with them and educate them about Black history in Alton.”

This is partly why Goins would love to see a Black history museum open in Alton year-round. While there are no immediate plans, Goins said she is interested in the idea and thinks it would be possible.

In the meantime, Alton's Black History Exhibit runs Feb. 5 through Feb. 29, 2024. It is open to the public during City Hall's open hours, from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. on weekdays. If you have items or information you would like to see displayed, email queenelaine9@aol.com.

"People need to know. People need to see all the history that comes out of Alton," Perkins added. "Kids are not taught about history in Alton. They need more of it, Black history."