HONORING HERITAGE

Students celebrate African culture in 2nd annual ball

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Dozens of University of Louisiana at Lafayette students and alumni made their way into the Alumni Center for the second annual Black Heritage Ball, which showcased the clothing, colors and pride of shared African heritage.

Co-hosted by the UL Lafayette NAACP and the African Student Association, the event was filled with guests sporting traditional clothing decorated with elaborate patterns and designs. The room was filled with excitement, English and French, and no one was excluded from the flow of events.

“We’ve been doing it on the first kick off of Black History Month and a celebration of black culture,” Danielle Edwards, president of the UL NAACP, said. “It’s not just for people of African descent; however, it’s targeted at people of African descent, as well as bridging the cultures between African people and people that identify as African American or simply just as black.”

Because of the previous year’s ball, Edwards said the planning took less time.

“Typically we start a couple of months in advance, like two or three months in advance,” she explained. “We knew how we had to contact as far as sponsors and getting the food donated as well as who we needed to contact for our venue.”

The event began with a presentation, an idea Edwards said was proposed by peers after the previous ball.

“We’ll have a group discussion as black UL,” Edwards explained. “Talking about black identity, how do you celebrate black culture, and my black is what? Whatever that means to you.

The discussion in the boardroom yielded answers both meaningful and light-hearted.

“My black is unapologetic,” said Mashara Alexander, vice president of the UL NAACP. Often, she said, black people had been forced to ignore or push away their culture.

“I just feel like my black is handsome,” Lotanna Nweke said, a senior in petroleum engineering, opening up about his personal experience. “I know that I have faced where I hated myself, my skin complexion. I hated being so dark, but I’m happy that I’ve realized my black is handsome.”

Asked about how they “celebrate their black,” Muhamed Cadet, originally from Haiti, explained he tried not to forget where he is from.

“I celebrate my black by staying to my origins,” Cadet said, sporting an umber outfit with gold patterning.

Following the presentation, the group moved into the next room for a buffet spread from end to end on the table. The line grew quickly and the food disappeared even quicker as guests ate before heading into the room where music flowed heavily from the speakers.

“We’re going to have two different dance contests,” Edwards said. “The first one is a jiggling contest … and then, an African contest. Whoever can do the African dance best will win a dashiki that was donated by One Love International.”

One Love International is a cultural shop located at 317 Bellot St. in Lafayette, selling products for the “reggae community,” according to their Facebook page. Husband and wife owners Emeka and Lola Ezulike offer a wide array of items beyond their clothing such as body oils, soaps, and even books.

Music varied from modern-day dances that had everyone on their feet to more traditional African songs. Contestants grouped up with their dance instructor for the night, leader for public relations for the UL Lafayette’s ASA Temmi Oyebola.

Finance student Ebiwa Aduwa took home a multicolored dashiki for her performance; other prizes, including two watches and a doorprize dashiki, were distributed.

Dancing and mingling continued long into the night with the occasional performance such as the drumming done by Nweke and two friends.

“We have food and drinks and a DJ and laughter and fun and good friends,” Edwards said, “and good time.”