

Happenings

Personality: Beryl Walters-Riley Spotlight on chair of Carib Fest Committee

Escape to the Caribbean islands without ever leaving Richmond?

Well, in a way, you can do just that.

Just go to the Carib Fest this weekend on Brown's Island in Downtown, says Beryl Walters-Riley.

Mrs. Walters-Riley says there you'll find "a place to celebrate all things Caribbean."

Those who attend will have "an opportunity to understand and experience island life," says the Jamaican native. She helped create the festival and now serves as chair of the festival committee.

Involved in international relations, Ms. Walters-Riley, with her pronounced dignity and proclivity for smart, conservative attire, makes a striking presence that resembles that of a high-level government official.

Concerning the Carib Fest, she says the affair will be highlighted with lively music that will have many in the crowd dancing. Along with the sounds of reggae and steel pan, the entertainment, she says, will include one of the biggest names in island music, Mighty Sparrow, who's been dubbed the "calypso king of the world" for his performances.

The event will also allow participants to savor tasty traditional foods, enjoy books and artwork, and see Caribbean artisans at work, she says. There will be children's activities and a space for adults to sample different rums — the signature island drink.

This is the fifth year for the festival that serves to showcase 20 Caribbean countries and territories — from Anguilla to the Virgin Islands, Ms. Walters-Riley informs with pride.

For her, the festival is an outgrowth of her passionate efforts to promote trade and cultural ties between Virginia and the island she is from.

She's been pushing the connection since 1999 when she was named honorary Jamaica consul for the state.

She also continues to promote educational and cultural ties as a founder and executive director of the



nonprofit Virginia Jamaica Education Exchange Foundation (VJEEF).

The festival was born as a way to recognize the Caribbean influence on this area. Today, an estimated 25,000 area residents are émigrés from the islands and other nations that border the shimmering blue waters of the Caribbean, she says.

From that beginning this event has become a centerpiece, continuing efforts "to build awareness and appreciation of the Caribbean identity and legacy, while at the same time sharing this rich culture with Virginia," she says.

The festival is growing. For the first few years the event was staged at the city's Pine Camp Community Center on North Side. Now that it draws bigger crowds, the event needs the kind of space Brown's Island provides, she says.

More than 150 volunteers will be involved in staging the event that also has gained a broad base of sponsors that range from Richmond area business groups, Caribbean embassies and concerns, like Air Jamaica to the VJEEF and the Association of Jamaicans in Richmond.

Besides the festival, Ms. Walters-Riley also is passionate about Richmond and is not shy about offering her views on ways to make the city a better place. A close-up of Beryl

Want to go?

What: 5th Annual Carib Fest.

When: Saturday, Aug. 9.

When: Noon to 10 p.m.

Where: Brown's Island.

Features: Caribbean-style food, music, dancing, arts and crafts exhibits, and book fair.

Entertainment: Calypso singer Mighty Sparrow, steel pan D.C. Pan Jammers; reggae performer Ever-G.

Admission: \$10 per person, free for children 12 and under.

Information: (804) 515-0999, or www.caribfestonline.com

Walters-Riley, this week's Personality:

Place of birth: Thompson Town, Clarendon, Jamaica, West Indies.

Current neighborhood of residence: Bellevue in Richmond.

Alma mater: Virginia Commonwealth University, bachelor's degree; Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, master's degree.

Family: Husband, William Riley; three adult sons: Erick, Enrico and Andre Riley.

How I will feel when the festival is over: Delighted! Then the phones will not ring as often — at least, immediately afterward.

Richmond's international flavor is: Becoming richer and richer each year!

How I start the day: Very focused on tasks with the highest priority, and being flexible to accommodate unexpected occurrences.

A perfect day: 80 degrees, breezy and sunny in the garden. Then, after some gardening, remaining in the garden, relaxing while reading a book.

A perfect evening: Dinner in the garden with my husband.

What would make Richmond a better city: Richmonders are blessed with great gifts such as outstanding museums, parks, education systems, diverse housing and a good business climate. More regional cooperation is needed at the political level. The fact that our bus system

does not cover the entire region leaves part of the population that wants or needs to use mass transit to get to work underserved. Having more public art, like many European cities, would make us a more attractive city.

How I unwind: Working in my garden!

I place top value on: Integrity.

Best late-night snack: Jamaican Bami with Escoveitched Fish.

When I look in the mirror, I: See a determined woman!

The one thing I can't stand: Unreliability.

Biggest chance I ever took: Having the support of my husband, William, to "hold down the fort" with the family at home (along with his full time job), while I went to graduate school — full time at Virginia Tech.

When people first meet me they think: Kind, outgoing, warm, dedicated, focused, pride in being a daughter of Jamaica and pride in my adopted home of Richmond, as well as politically sensitive.

Quality I most admire in another person: Trustworthiness.

Greatest source of inspiration: William, Alfred and Rose and Charlotte (my husband, my parents and my grandmother).

My next goal: Getting through Carib Fest — and having enough time to get to New England to meet Alexander Orion Forbes Riley, our first grandson (newborn)!