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FEATURED

## Gowns, hats, and raffles: Miss Cleo's Tea Party transforms the Murdoch Community Center

Megan Troutman Apr 29, 2015



All the attendees of the event taking a moment to relax at the Miss Cleo's Tea Party at the Murdock Community Center Sunday, April 27, 2015. Officials of the event told that planning the even took months in advance to prepare. (Photo by Anthony Caruso)

Anthony Caruso

The soft clinking of delicate teacups and quiet chatter filled the room. Women sat at tables in elegant dresses with wide-brimmed hats to complement their outfits. Little girls sat in their Sunday best, painting teacups and enjoying the company of others in the community.

On April 26, the Murdoch Community Center hosted its second Miss Cleo's Tea Party event to raise funds for the Murdoch Center. This community center was previously the location of Dunbar School, the first African- American school in Flagstaff, and still stands as a historic

site. Currently the building is used as a preschool and community center.

Flagstaff resident and Murdoch Community Center committee member Sharon Gooding was excited for the tea party event.

“We’ve been planning for this event since last year,” Gooding said. “As soon as last year’s tea party event was over, we really took some time to just reflect on the event and the successes and things that we wanted to improve.”

One of the main elements they changed was the events. The previous year offered a hat-decorating station for young females attending the party while this year there was a teacup-painting station.

“We hope that this will be an annual event,” Gooding said. “This year we have a hat competition, last year we didn't. So we wanted to make sure with every year we do something a little bit different.”

Not only are the events different from last year, but the raffle prizes also changed. This year, local restaurants contributed to raffle prizes, such as gift cards to the local restaurants Tinderbox Kitchen and Annex.

“It's just really an awesome opportunity for people to socialize,” Gooding said. “There's actually no agenda. Rather than events with a formal sort of delivery, we decided that we didn't want to do that.”

The participants came to the event center, found their seat and enjoyed a cup of tea with finger sandwiches, scones and other donated delicacies. All food and prizes were donated for the event. Senior hotel and restaurant management majors Jasmine Howell and Bianca Bracero coordinated the event.

“The committee members were able to take care of everything [and] get everything planned out, then we coordinated the event,” Howell said. “They helped us out with little things but our goal is to just let them sit down and enjoy their tea and enjoy the party so we're pretty much coordinating the event.”

Howell and Bracero had been planning the event since it was presented to them in January, as an assignment for their event management class. They put everything together for the event, from setting the tables to decorating the walls, as well as organizing volunteers to come serve tea and food.

“We're just making sure all the servers are going to their tables and everyone's getting tea and food,” Howell said. “We have sandwiches, scones and desserts, so Bianca and I are not actually serving, we're delegating our servers and making sure everything is flowing. We also pour water — that's the biggest thing, tea is going fast.”

Last year's tea party hosted 60 Flagstaff residents, while this year 90 residents dined together.

“We came in not knowing what to expect, but we loved it,” Howell said. “It's like an adrenaline rush to get people passing out the tea and people wanting things, but it's good to be busy.”

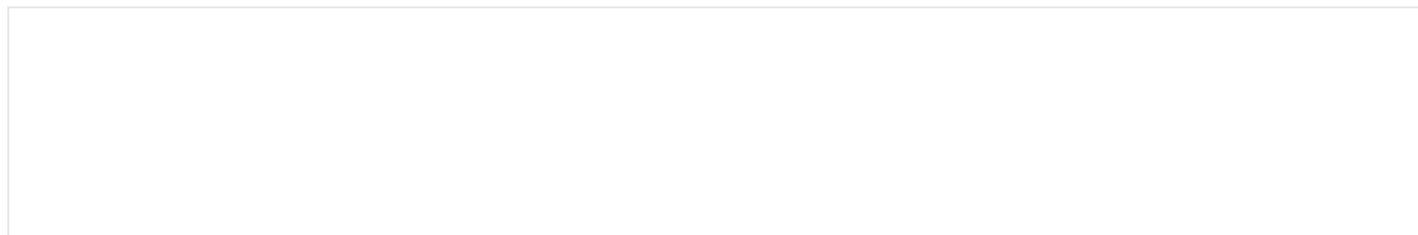
They transformed the Murdoch Community Center into an elegant, yet simple, tea party.

“The best part of this experience is definitely seeing it all come together,” Bracero said.

Due to the fact that part of the tea room belonged to a preschool, it had vibrantly colored walls of painted blue skies. In order to fully transform the community center, they hung tapestries to hide the painted clouds in the preschool.

“It was the time to socialize, enjoy each other, have some fun, eat, make lots of tea, and just meet new people,” Gooding said. “We wanted to make it feel like a community event, and as you can hear from all the chatter and the noise in the background, that's what people are doing while giving back to their community.”

Overall, the event successfully raised money and brought the community together in an interesting way.





**Miss Cleo's Tea Party**  
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