



**Action Plan for the
Renovation and
Restoration of the
Conney M. Kimbo Black
Cultural Center**

Grinnell College, Grinnell, Iowa

August, 2010



**The Conney M. Kimbo
Black Cultural Center**

Presented by Irma McClaurin, PhD ('73)



Where ideas and creativity merge

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Background

On April 16-18, 2010, a group of Black Alumni convened for a reunion after a five-year hiatus. The purpose was to revitalize the involvement of Black alumni, a goal made all the more significant by the unanimous appointment of the first African American president of the college in its 150 year history. In addition, the reunion would also connect Black students to Black alumni to establish new networks, mentoring possibilities, and an opportunity to share lessons learned both professionally and socially.

One of the unexpected accomplishments of this reunion was the granting of a gift to the College by Black Alumni and Trustee, Dr. Robert Austin'54 and his wife, Joan Austin. A letter written by them (Appendix A) was read to those in attendance at Black Alumni Reception held Friday evening at the Connie Kimbo Black Cultural Center. The letter announced that Dr. Austin and his wife, Joan, had requested that a contribution made to the College in the amount of \$50,000 be earmarked as a **challenge** gift to renovate, restore, and expand the Kimbo Black Cultural Center. He also announced that he had requested me, Dr. Irma McClaurin'73 of McClaurin Solutions, to provide the strategic leadership to guide the process, and to help solicit matching funds, with support from the College's Development staff, from other Grinnell alumni (Black and white) to support this venture.

In my discussions with Dr. Austin prior to the reunion, we had discussed what it might mean to "renovate", "restore", and "expand" the Kimbo Black Cultural Center. We agreed that such a process would ensure that the history of the facility was preserved, that acknowledgements of the contributions of Grinnell's Black alumni be established (a wall of fame), and that its programmatic contributions be resurrected and restored to their previous stature, including reinstatement of program funding. We would appeal to all Grinnell alumni, but in particular Black alumni, as well as friends and the College to support this venture of restoration and cultural preservation of the KBCC.

McClaurin Solutions agreed to donate up to five hours of time monthly to develop an action plan, lead a process to determine the current condition of the KBCC, and the costs associated with renovation and restoration. In addition, as a Black alum and the principle of McClaurin Solutions, I pledge \$1,000 from McClaurin Solutions, to launch the match campaign.

Preliminary Assessment

While in attendance at the Reunion, I toured the facility and, after the announcement, spoke with the two students who currently live in the building. It is clear that there are different and competing understandings of the history of the KBCC. Current students have some

undocumented perceptions that the Center and CBS were separatists, and lack the knowledge and understanding of the historical and cultural context of social isolation within which the Center was requested by Black Students and provided by the College. They have limited understanding of the scope of programming which used to occur, the size of the Center's original budget for programming, which made significant contributions to diversifying the campus culture, and also have somehow disconnected the Center from being the operational arm of the Concerned Black Students organization. CBS itself also appears to have changed, and its constitution rewritten, with little regard for the history that gave birth to it.

McClaurin Solutions is committed to cultural preservation not for the purpose of simply hanging onto the past, but because understanding the past can serve as a guide to present and future actions. Further, in the spirit of cultural preservation, we acknowledge that the history of Blacks within predominantly white institutions (PWIs) has not always been archived and preserved with equity. Without assigning blame, or suggesting that the changes that have occurred to date are not compatible with renovating and restoring the KBCC, McClaurin Solutions proposes the following action plan.

Our purpose is to outline clear and ascertainable goals, solicit input and financial support from Black and other alumni, current students, and partner with the College to fulfill the vision embodied in the Austins' gift, in order to preserve the history and symbolism of the Connie Kimbo Black Cultural Center and the ongoing presence of Black students and Black alumni at Grinnell College.

While seeking to restore the past to a respectful place, the KBCC must be looked at in the present moment with an eye to its future potential, and any renovation and restoration must answer the question of how any changes to the physical plant can contribute to the development and sustainability of the history of Blacks at Grinnell College, the institution's ongoing commitment to diversity, and the preservation of the past, present, and future cultural knowledge of Black Students and alumni at Grinnell College as an integral component of the College's commitment to the Liberal Arts and education, and the building of a diverse and global community of scholars.

Vision: To renovate, restore and expand the Kimbo Black Cultural Center and establish sustainable philosophical, programmatic, and financial commitments and practices that reflect the talent and contributions of present-day Black (whose origins can be found in the United States, Africa, and other parts of the African Diaspora) students and Black alumni (across time) to Grinnell College.

Beliefs:

- ✓ That the formation of the Concerned Black Students (CBS) with its African Leadership structure of Kotyko served as the foundation for the development of multicultural and diversity practices at Grinnell College, including the formation of the African American Studies Program (now defunct).
- ✓ That the achievements of Black Alumni be preserved and shared with the Grinnell College community, its alumni, present-day students, and the world.
- ✓ That the Kimbo Black Cultural Center serve as a significant symbol of the struggle for inclusion and cultural diversity, and respect for difference that has occurred at Grinnell College.
- ✓ That the Kimbo Black Cultural Center serve as a lighthouse for programmatic engagement around diversity, community, and inclusion.

Recommendations/Action Steps

- ✚ That a (silent) challenge campaign among Black alumni be launched immediately through a letter from myself and Bob Austin to Black alumni, whether they attended the conference or not. **Start date: July, 2010**
- ✚ That this plan be posted on the Black alumni website and Facebook page. **Start date: August 31, 2010**
- ✚ That the College underwrite a renovation plan for the Kimbo Black Cultural Center to include a current status report (structural issues, wiring, restroom and kitchen facilities, insulation, roofing, etc); a proposal for expansion to include a small museum/library and seminar room; and landscaping for a cultural heritage garden to enhance the physical plant but also to provide learning opportunities about Black culture for the Grinnell community; and the cost to bring the facility into the 21st century. **Completion date: October 15, 2010**
- ✚ That McClaurin Solutions host a teleconference/interactive webinar on “What we Remember” (open to anyone) on the history of CBS, the Kimbo Black Cultural Center (past and present), and the Black contribution to build interest in and generate interest in the challenge campaign. **Completion date: November 15, 2010**

✚ That a KBCC Advisory Committee be established with no more than two representatives of the following: Grinnell Staff, Current Black Students; Black Alumni; Grinnell students at large; Grinnell faculty at large; and Grinnell Black faculty. **Completion date: November 30, 2010.** The committee will be asked to review the data from the conference and the renovation plan and identify priorities based on cost and mission. **Completion date for the KBCC Advisory Committee Recommendations: January 1, 2011.**

✚ That an article about the restoration, renovation, and expansion be published in the Grinnell Magazine with an appeal for contributions from anyone who has an interest and that simultaneously a web-based KBCC Renovation and Restoration and Expansion Campaign be placed on the current KBCC website.

✚ Challenge Campaign Goal: \$50,000

\$50,000

-1,000 (McClaurin Solutions Pledge)

\$49,000 Needed

✚ **HOW TO JOIN THE CHALLENGE CAMPAIGN: give directly or pledge a gift for the challenge by following the instructions below:**

- Online: go to <https://loggia.grinnell.edu/SSLPage.aspx?pid=184>, type in a gift amount, select "Other" as the place where to designate funds and type in "BCC Renovation Match," and fill in the rest of the information requested.
- Mail checks payable to Grinnell College with "BCC Renovation Match" on the memo line and send them to the following address: The Pioneer Fund, Office of College and Alumni Relations, Grinnell College, Grinnell, IA 50112-1690
- Fax the following form to (641) 269-4313:
<http://www.grinnell.edu/files/downloads/10WF.pdf>
- Phone: (866) 850-1846 or (641) 269-1846

Appendix A

Gift Challenge Letter from Dr. Robert and Mrs. Joan Austin (Presented by Sherman P. Willis on behalf of the Austin's on April 16, 2010, Grinnell College Black Alumni Reunion, Grinnell, IA)

To: Black Alumni, Students, Faculty and the Entire Grinnell Family

From: Joan Perry–Austin and Robert F. Austin, MD '54

The Kimbo Black Cultural Center (KBCC) of Grinnell College has established an on-going history and tradition of bringing together and highlighting the wonderful diversity of Grinnell's African American students, faculty, and alumni for over 40 years. KBCC has been the site of "public engagement" within the College and externally, during times of national and global crisis as well as campus activism. Students, faculty and alumni have also committed themselves to the service of the College when the centrality of African American leadership was necessary and required to support the expansion and preservation of the College's strategic goals of inclusion and diversity.

By the nature of this association with the College, we African American students, faculty, and alumni consider ourselves special members of the Grinnell College family. As such, we stand committed to nurture, expand, and preserve the rich heritage of the African American experience at Grinnell through the arts, history, cultural understanding, inclusive research, and social justice. We wish our ongoing presence at the College to serve as a model of how to build bridges and establish alliances among diverse communities near and far.

To effectively carry out these tasks, we must have an institution that will assist us in leaping forward into the 21st Century. For African Americans at Grinnell that institution is the Kimbo Black Cultural Center; we must prepare it to stand shoulder to shoulder with the "state of the art" character into which the College has evolved over the last decade.

We announce a bold new initiative—one that remains true and faithful to the original mission of the KBCC, while at the same time expanding its vision to create a lasting legacy that honors the African American presence (past, present, and future) at Grinnell College. This legacy initiative will be launched and sustained in conjunction with the contributions of Dr. Robert and Joan Austin, the Grinnell Black Alumni, and all interested persons whose hearts are consistent with the mission of the KBCC in the

21st century. It is just and timely to enlarge the vision and mission of the KBCC as the College makes history and prepares for *an ever expanding African American presence and leadership in the College.*

It is in this spirit that the Austin family pledges that a contribution it has made to the College of \$50,000 be earmarked to launch this endeavor. We estimate that the entire renovation and an expansion of the KBCC's programmatic direction can be achieved for \$100,000. And so today, we appeal to you as Black Alumni, and as friends and supporters of the KBCC and the African American presence at Grinnell to contribute towards the remaining \$50,000 for this vision.

In doing so, you will help lay the foundation for us to build a lasting institutional legacy of the African American presence at Grinnell College; one that began with Hannibal B. Kershaw '1879, was followed by Grinnell's first black woman graduate, Edith Renfrow Smith '37, and continues in each of you present here to celebrate this Black alumni reunion, and will continue on into the future, symbolically preserved through the KBCC.

Thank you

History of the Kimbo Black Cultural Center:

<http://www.grinnell.edu/offices/bcc/bcc-30>

Appendix B

Recommendations from Black Students about the KCC (to be shared with KCCC Advisory Committee)

From: Montfort, Charisma H
Sent: Wednesday, April 28, 2010 8:40 PM
To: Sherman P. Willis
Cc: Slick, Daria (Dotty); Jacks, Marlene; Jacks, Marlene S
Subject: RE: Hi There

Dear Mr. Willis,

I am pleased to let you know that many of the items on the list have been completed.

1. CBS had a faculty/ staff/ student Meet 'N Greet at which we brought up the importance of such events like Black Alumni Weekend. A formal letter will be drafted and sent to all of our members.
2. I was informed by Drew Myers (new BCC monitor) that Dotty made keys for both BCC monitors and CBS Kotoko Board members. We are trying to find a time to get together and go through the cabinets as a group.
3. BCC Wish List

BCC List of Changes

- Sticky letters and stained glass stickers (BCC for entrance no curtain)
- Bean Bags for spare room
- Put game closet upstairs
- Mural/Graffiti on 1 spare room wall
- Paint entrance door dark blue “like window accents”
- Window unit upstairs in spare room
- Replace defective windows.
- Change outlets to 3 prongs
- Update thermostat
- Replace curtains
- (4) 10X10 Area Rugs
- Fix or Replace the entertainment system (amplifier)
- *Find a key for the dining room cabinets (I believe this has already been done)*
- Make the guest room the multicultural room
- Repair loud heater upstairs.
- Ribbons and decorations for NSO week and the first week of classes
- ISO/NSO BBQ and Welcome Back All Campus Bash
- Keyed Door installed at the top of the Stairs to close off upstairs
- Picnic tables in yard
- Expansion (additional bedrooms)
- Meditation Garden

- New Television and updated VCR and DVD player
- Replace furniture
- Create a space where there can be lectures and presentations
- BCC Grill
- Replacement of dishes and silverware in kitchen
- New printer for computer
- Office chairs
- Replace shelves in the BCC library