

New Crossroads builds Heritage Day bridges

CAPE ARGUS 26/10

ZENZILE KHOISAN

THUMB pianos, drums, beautiful voices, graceful dance moves, colourful garb and adornments, and the food of many nations in Africa made for a joyful Heritage Day celebration at the Masezake Youth Centre in New Crossroads.

The day-long programme on Thursday, which included traditional dances, music, comic skits and short speeches, was also part of the 14th anniversary celebrations of Africa Unite, the cross-cultural youth organisation established in 2001 after conflict erupted between locals and Africans from countries north of the border.

Highlights from the cultural offerings included the display and explanation of various aspects of Xhosa, Kenyan, Somali and Khoi culture, as well as a children's dance group. Praise poet Mandisi captured the spirit of the event when he chanted: "Africa unite,



MUSIC: Haroldene Tshienda, left, with Mandisi, right, part of the Shammy Group, sing at the Heritage Day event.

the integrity of our universe is the revolution of our common humanity." He was answered by Haroldene Tshienda, who said a united Africa was "a place I call home, where I find my identity".

Abdi Khadi, representing

the Somali community, said Africa's heritage treasures had been recognised by the international community with Unesco conferring World Heritage status on 129 sites throughout the continent. He explained about various cultural attri-

utes of his people, including the use of henna, scented stones for fragrance, and the delicious pancakes that many of his people enjoy for breakfast.

Solomon Ngokoyi, a herbalist from Kenya, noted that there was heritage "in every human being".

He said he was able to walk in the forest, talk to the trees and find cures for many ailments because of his closeness with his culture. There was also a unifying element in heritage that could bring people together because "all cultures and people are one".

Angelina Zenani, manager of the Masezake Education Project, provided insight into elements of Xhosa heritage and culture that most people take for granted, explaining the intricate meaning of the traditional beadwork, and of the garments worn by initiates and a traditional Xhosa bride on her wedding day.

Organiser Zoe Mkhongololo said the event had been con-

ceived as a shared experience to help people recognise diversity, gain insight into different cultures, and build social cohesion.

The programme was the culmination of more than a decade of practical grassroots work to address tensions between young South Africans and their counterparts from other African countries.

"This Africa Unite event comes from actively working in places where there was conflict, where youngsters from places like New Crossroads were fighting because they did not know one another and what we discovered through this process was that there was ignorance of other cultures."

He said the organisation had deliberately chosen New Crossroads to hold the celebration, because "it is at the grassroots where the need is greatest".

"We chose Heritage Day to bring together people from different backgrounds."