

S O M A

COMMUNITY INITIATIVE

soma (sōmâ) v. read; learn; study; receive education [Kiswahili]
Stimulating Our Minds Always



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EXECUTIVE OVERVIEW

Parents, Educators and community leaders are seeking ways to build better communities. Most recognize that a choice to be active partners in funding and delivering strong programs sends a powerful message that our community cares, and yields positive results for us all. This initiative is a valuable partnership between a Corporate donor, a non-profit organization or School District and Black Board International.

This initiative is youth-focused and will address the lack of positive, culturally inclusive, historical teaching material in our places of learning. Such material is specifically designed to counter racist and negative attitudes and to build self-esteem and literacy skills in children and youth.

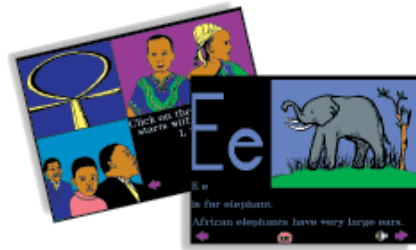
The deliverable will be the purchase and implementation of teaching software that focuses on cultural diversity and the achievements of people of African descent at locations designated by the non-profit organization or School District.

PROJECT GOALS

- To enable children and youth between the ages of 3 and 18, to acquire and improve their knowledge of the global community, to improve reading and computer literacy skills and to build self-esteem through guided study using Afrocentric educational software.
- To expose children and youth to positive role models in their history who would influence them to make responsible life choices and to become role models also
- To encourage children and youth to use the computer as a tool for learning
- To instill in the children and youth participating in the program, a sense of pride in our diverse culture

METHODS

The Corporate funding will be used to finance the purchase and implementation of selected modules of the Ashaware Afrocentric Software. Taking into consideration the ages of the children and youth at each location, selections will be made from the following 12 modules:



Alphabet Program

Age 3 and up.

Here's a fun and engaging way to introduce early learners to the exciting world of letters. They'll learn all about upper and lower case identification, alphabet order, word/object association and much more. This multimedia interactive program also includes basic reading material that teaches valuable lessons in history and culture.

Numbers Program

Age 3 and up.

Learning to count is one of the greatest gifts you can give a growing mind. Using a multimedia approach, the Numbers Program introduces early learners to number sets, addition, subtraction, number/object orientation and more. It all adds up to a fun way to learn.



"It is the only package of its kind that deals exclusively with the African experience, and therefore is worthy of purchase by any school, parent, organization, or church group."

Clyde Robertson, Director of Africana Studies and Cultural Unit, New Orleans Public Schools

Careers

Age 10 to Adult

What do I want to be when I grow up? This program allows you to browse through a collection of fascinating career profiles.

You'll be introduced to pictures, articles and in-depth profiles of positive role models involved in the Arts, Business, Education, Language Arts, Politics, Law and Science.



Geography

Age 10 to adult.

Encourage kids to think globally. Show them how to explore different countries with this exciting Geography program.

They'll be captivated by the variety of colorful maps, readings and multiple choice questions that focus on Africa, the Caribbean, and other parts of the world. It's looking at the world from a fresh new perspective.

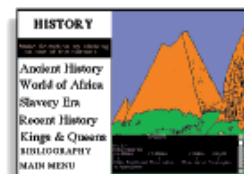


History

Age 10 to Adult

The more we know about our history, the more we know about ourselves.

The History program uses pictures, essays and multiple choice questions to make this subject come alive. The focus is on the history of people of African descent, with topics including Ancient History, The Golden Age, Kings and Queens, The Slavery Era, and Recent History.



Minimum System Requirements:

- Pentium II or higher, Win. 98/2000/NT/XP/ME, 16MB RAM
- 68030 or higher, Macintosh System 8.x/9.x, OS X 16MB RAM
- CD-ROM & VGA compatible monitor
- Hard disk space requirements vary with individual programs

Language Arts

Age 10 to adult.

Bring out the writer and the reader in your students with this entertaining and educational program.

The interactive program examines the important works of writers and the written word. Explore topics ranging from Literary Giants, Vocabulary, Writers and Poets and Writing Systems. Browse through a collection of pictures, articles, multiple choice questions, and more.



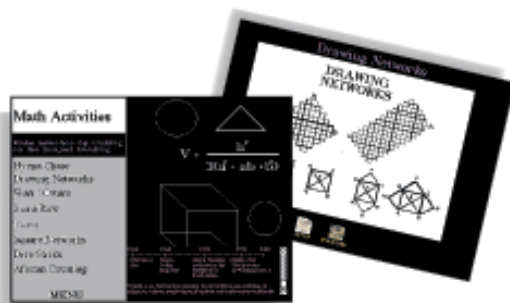
"These materials are absolutely necessary in an electronic age. They are well organized, user friendly and well executed."

Molefi Kete Asante,
Chairman of African Studies, Temple University

Science

Age 10 to adult.

With the growing predominance of technology in our changing world, knowledge of science becomes even more important to today's learner. This multimedia interactive program uses pictures, activities, multiple choice questions and articles to introduce the thrilling world of science and the contributions made to the field by persons of African descent. Explore Aeronautics, Astronomy, Inventors, Medicine and more.



Mathematics

Age 10 to adult.

Here's a great way to learn about some practical applications, and about the contributions of African-descended people to the field of mathematics. We make math a joy to learn and explore through a variety of pictures, activities, articles and multiple choice questions. Discover the excitement of fractions, number systems, games and more.

Social Studies

Age 10 to adult.

Early Societies, African Empires, Modern Issues. These are just some of the fascinating topics covered in this multimedia interactive program. Users will learn about different models of society and civilization, and about some of the social dynamics of people over time. You can explore through pictures, essays, activities, multiple choice questions and time lines.



Music

Age 10 to adult.

Music is an excellent teaching tool, but it's also a field to which many young people feel naturally drawn. This is a program that teaches interactively with multiple choice questions, illustrations, written articles. Topics include Music Over Time, African Instruments, Jazz Traditions and more.



Clip Art & Screen Saver

BBI's Ashaware Clip Art includes over 80 images that can be used in a variety of desktop publishing applications to create documents that are fresh and exciting. Many of these inspiring images are also included in our new Ashaware Screen Saver, which is available for DOS, WINDOWS, and MAC O/S.



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EVALUATIONS AND OUTCOMES

Various methods will be used to evaluate the success of the program, including surveys and interviews with participants, agency staff and volunteers.

Youth who are exposed to positive role models in their community, acquire better social and interpersonal skills, and are more confident, self-reliant and responsible. They have a greater chance of themselves becoming role models in the community.

The program's success will be evaluated based on the following outcomes:

- Continuous and escalating use of the software
- Participants demonstrating an increased knowledge of historical facts
- Attitudes of self-reliance, self-confidence and responsibility
- Increased knowledge of cultural heritage
- Demonstration of healthy and positive attitudes

SOMA 2006 PARTICIPANT SURVEY RESULTS

How often is the software used:

Daily.....0%
 A few times/week.....20%
 A few times/month.....40%
 only in February.....20%
 rarely.....0%

What is the age of the people who are using the software:

3-7.....60%
 8-12.....40%
 13-16.....60%
 17-19.....40%
 20-30.....0%

How would you rate the ease of usage of the software?

very easy.....0%
 easy.....100%
 somewhat easy.....0%
 difficult.....0%
 don't know.....0%

How would you rate the value of the software?

very valuable.....40%
 valuable.....60%
 somewhat valuable.....0%
 not very valuable.....0%

Do you feel that this initiative was worthwhile?

Very worthwhile.....40%
 worthwhile.....60%
 somewhat worthwhile.....0%
 not very worthwhile.....0%
 don't know.....0%

Would your centre be interested in participating in a city-wide competition that is based on the software?

yes.....67%
 no.....33%

In what way(s), if any, do you feel that your users have benefited from this initiative?

"users of the software in our centre are children primarily from the African Canadian community, this software is ideal as it incorporates a Black focus which is a major component of our program. Participants have an opportunity to not only learn maths and English but to explore the African culture in the process. A huge hit with our tutors and participants!"

"Participants find useful information in the ASHAWARE program for homework and class assignments. They have mentioned that the program is easy to use and they can find pictures for their projects."

"... We found that the younger youth who had limited knowledge of African History and were more interested and learned a number of things from the software...."

"The users, mainly students in Tropicana's Tutorial (Saturdays) and summer/March Break camp programs, are very pleased to have an interactive and computerized method of learning about their history. The software also allows for a certain degree of friendly competition which keeps the exercise interesting. It is very important that our young people are able to find images and information about their history and culture in state-of-the-art programs on the computer. We have to provide our children and young people with educational products that promote positive reinforcement, self-esteem and pride in their heritage and achievements. The product provided a deeper knowledge of black history."

Do you have any additional comments about the software?

"Thank you for providing this tool to enhance our children learning opportunity."

"Good integration of knowledge and fun."

"It sounds wonderful and will complement the work that we do on African Heritage Recovery and Celebration."

PRESS



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Contact
Pete Karageorgos – Public Affairs
Supervisor
(416) 290-4434

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News Release

For Immediate

STATE FARM SUPPORTS S.O.M.A. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

Scarborough, ON. February 10, 2006 – State Farm has partnered with the United Way of Greater Toronto for the SOMA Community Outreach project. State Farm's support for this program will provide funding that will allow 11 participating United Way agencies located throughout Toronto receive licenses to **Black Board International's Ashaware line of Afrocentric Software**. This neighbourhood initiative which is focused on youth from the ages of 3 to 18 is aimed at improving reading, computer literacy skills while building self-esteem and increasing cultural knowledge and pride.

"State Farm is proud to support this community initiative aimed at local children and youth. We have a longstanding tradition of supporting our communities with safety and educational programs. Being a good neighbour means actively supporting and improving our communities, by focusing on our children and youth we are building on the future." says State Farm Vice President-Operations, Barbara Bellissimo.

State Farm is the second largest auto insurer in Ontario and the fourth largest in Canada. State Farm is also the third largest property and casualty insurer in Ontario and fifth Canada. State Farm has been serving Canadians since 1938. State Farm's 460 Canadian agents currently provide insurance and financial services from mutual funds and life insurance to vehicle loans, home and auto insurance in Ontario, Alberta and New Brunswick. For more information, please visit StateFarm.ca.

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BUSINESS & MONEY

Black Business Helps Youth Gain Grounding In African Heritage

By Colin Rickards
Pride Contributing Writer

TORONTO, Ontario — State Farm Insurance, Warren Salomon's Black Board International and The United Way of Greater Toronto — TUWGT — have joined forces to create an innovative educational program called the SOMA Community Initiative, to help raise awareness about Black history and culture.

"State Farm is providing funding that will allow 11 United Way-supported agencies, located throughout Toronto's neighbourhoods, to receive licences to use Black Board International's African American Software," Salomon explained. "This neighbourhood-based initiative, which is focused on children and youths, aged 10 to 18, is aimed at improving reading and computer literacy skills, while building self-esteem, through awareness of Black culture and history."

Since 1990, Toronto-based Black Board International has provided culturally-related educational software and services, for use at home and in educational and learning facilities. Their line of software includes programs, in many different areas, for children and adults.

Salomon, the Chief Executive Officer of Black Board International, creator of the company software, explained that State Farm Insurance made "a generous donation" to TUWGT, specifying that the money be used to purchase and implement the Black Board International educational



Warren Salomon

software, for organizations and agencies, in a variety of high-need areas.

"State Farm is proud to support this community initiative aimed at local children and youth," said Barbara Bellissimo, the company's Vice President, Operations. "We have a longstanding tradition of supporting our communities with safety and education programs. Being a good neighbour means actively supporting and improving our communities. By focusing on our children and youth, we are building for the future."

The SOMA Initiative was launched, last Friday, at the offices of Tropica Community Services Organization, in Scarborough.

"My appreciation is to launch the SOMA Community Initiative during Black History Month, because the foundation of the content within the software is Black history," said Salomon. "I applaud State Farm and The United Way for recognizing the value of our software, which has been

designed to address many of the challenges facing Toronto, through its emphasis on positive role models and history-related content."

Blackboard International's programs have been matched with various Provincial curriculum standards, and have received recommendations for use at the home, and at all school levels, by a number of educators in a variety of school- and home-based applications.

"Our work with youth is at the core of The United Way's commitment to making real change in our city, particularly in neighbourhoods in the inner-city," said Bart Miller, a board member with TUWGT, and Chair of its African Canadian Committee.

"We hope the fruits of this partnership will engage African Canadian youth in their rich heritage, and encourage them to further explore the important contributions of Black people."

State Farm, which has been operating in Canada since 1958, is the second largest non-franchise in Ontario, and the fourth largest in the nation.

It is also the third largest property and casualty insurer in Ontario and fifth in Canada, with 460 agents currently providing insurance and financial services, from mutual funds and life insurance, to vehicle loans, insurance into insurance, in Alberta, New Brunswick and Ontario.

PRIDE

ADVERTISING IN

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Program will help stimulate young minds

By RIN FURBER

Canada's fourth largest auto insurer has announced that it will provide funding of close to \$200,000 over the next year for 11 United Way of Greater Toronto-supported agencies in the city to receive licences to use the African American software.

State Farm Insurance, United Way of Greater Toronto and Black Board International which develops the software, launched the Stimulating Our Minds Always (SOMA) project last week at Tropica Community Services centre in Scarborough.

The neighbourhood-based initiative, focused on youth ranging in ages from 10-18, is aimed at improving reading and computer literacy skills while building self-esteem through awareness of Black culture and history. Black Board International chief executive officer Warren Salomon said it's appropriate that the initiative was launched during Black History Month because Black history forms the core of the software content.

The company has provided culturally-related educational software and services for use at home and in educational facilities for the past 15 years. The programs have been matched with various provincial and state curriculum standards and have been recommended for use at school levels.

"I applaud State Farm and United Way for recognizing the value of our software which has been designed to address many of the challenges facing Toronto through its emphasis on positive role models and history-related content," said Salomon.

"I especially value corporate entities like State Farm's that are willing to work with us to help deliver the programs that are designed to educate, motivate and stimulate."

State Farm's vice-president of operations, Barbara Bellissimo, said her company was proud to be associated with a community project aimed at local kids and youth.

"We have a longstanding tradition of supporting our communities with safety and educational programs," she said. "Being a good neighbour means actively supporting and improving our communities. By focusing on our children and youth, we are building for the future."

United Way of Greater Toronto board member Bart Miller said his organization's work with youth is at the core of its commitment to make real change in the city, particularly in neighbourhoods in the inner suburbs.

"We hope the fruits of this partnership will engage African Canadian youth in their rich heritage and encourage them to further explore the important contributions of Black people," added Miller, a former executive co-chairman with the Ontario Race Relations Association. The participating agencies are: Community of the Mosaic; Dixon Neighbourhood Youth Centre; East Metro Youth Services; East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club; Jane-Finch Community and Family Centre; Jamaican Canadian Association; Scarborough Area Youth; Regent Park Pathways to Education; St. Stephen's Youth Arcade; Tropica Community Services and Warden Woods Community Centre.

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Participating United Way Agencies

Community on the Move (North York Community House) - Dixon Neighbourhood Youth Centre (Community Microskills) - East Metro Youth Services
East Scarborough Boys and Girls Club - Jane/Finch Community & Family Centre - Jamaican Canadian Association - Participating Agencies - Rathburn Area Youth (LAMP)
Regent Park Pathways to Education - St. Stephen's Youth Arcade - Tropicana Community Services - Warden Woods Community Centre

SPONSOR RECOGNITION

Participating Organizations will recognize donations received from sponsors in the following ways:

- Underscore the value of program to the Black and wider community by timing the launch of the joint initiative between the corporate sponsor, Black Board International and non-profit organization at the start of Black History month
- Announce the program at a joint press conference and invite a cross-section of Community and main-stream media
- Mention the corporate sponsor in all publicity and promotional events
- Include the sponsor's logo on any promotional material that is normally prepared for the Press conference
- Include the sponsor's logo on any promotional material that is posted online

The sponsor will benefit in other areas as well. Hundreds and perhaps thousands of children and youth who participate in the program will be more aware of sponsor as a caring community leader.

All visitors to the participating organizations will learn of the sponsor's commitment to building a better community.

FOR MORE INFORMATION CONTACT:

Warren Salmon, CEO
First Fridays
Box 114, 123 Queen St. W.
Toronto, ON M5H 3M9 /
P.O. Box 59
Buffalo, NY 14205-0059
416-441-0792
416-441-0794 (Fax)
wsalmon@ashaware.com
www.ashaware.com

or

Sharleen Mascoll
Philanthropy & Multicultural Markets
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sharleen.mascoll.jobg@statefarm.com
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