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# BROOKGREEN

## *Journal*





**Ethnic Rhythm & Movement Dance Company of Georgetown performs at Brookgreen's Lowcountry Trail Dedication.**

# *Lowcountry Trail Dedication*

**I**mmediately following the Lowcountry Trail dedication and ribbon cutting ceremony on April 22, the sun shone resplendently while guests toured and conversed with awe and excitement. Overcast skies, thunderstorms, and torrential rains that initially seemed to portend gloom for the event served as a catalyst for moving activities indoors to the E. Craig Wall, Jr. Lowcountry

Center Auditorium. The ambiance, intimacy, and vibrancy that followed were serendipitous: as though it had all been planned.

Ethnic Rhythm & Movement Dance Company of Georgetown opened festivities with African drumming and dancing that showcased the cultural identities from which enslaved Africans were uprooted and which undoubtedly lingered in their memories. Following the ribbon cutting, the CAAHO Singers, also of Georgetown, serenaded with spirituals, the folk songs that Gullah forebears developed and sang to African rhythms in order to express

sorrows, hopes, and joys.

Brookgreen President and CEO Bob Jewell presented a project overview, citing the program's start in 1998 with volunteers who participated in the Campus Brookgreen Program. He stated that through 2002, approximately 4,000 man-hours were invested in archeological research and excavations for the kitchen, smokehouse, and slave dependency. Also, more than 10,000 historic artifacts were recovered along with numerous pre-historic ones.

"The culture of the enslaved workers on rice plantations has been regarded by many throughout history as solely menial and comparatively



insignificant,” Jewell continued. “Documentations along the Lowcountry Trail and through other on-going programs at Brookgreen Gardens, however, inform all that the ingenuity and physical prowess of West Africans and their Gullah descendants under-girded the success of the South Carolina rice economy.”

During his presentation, Ronald Daise, Vice President for Creative Education, also acknowledged the significance of Gullah heritage along the Trail. “For Gullah and Geechee descendants and African-Americans who stroll the Brookgreen Gardens Lowcountry Trail, the experience will tap many sensibilities,” Daise stated. “It will be a rhythmic song, a heaping serving of flavorful rice, a strange but familiar speechway, and a spiritual journey—all in one. You see, Gullah music, foods, language, and beliefs are ways in which our heritage continues to impact the American cultural landscape. And when Gullah descendants as well as those of other cultures visit this site, these metaphors of experience will pervade and enrich them.”

Daise led the audience in singing *Unda the Same Sun* (sung to the tune of the spiritual, *Feel Like Journey On*), which he wrote for the occasion.

“These sculptures were placed here so that we could understand our past and embrace our future,” Babette Bloch stated, while delivering her artist’s perspective. “They are portals of times gone by, mirrors to our souls. I believe these sculptures will evoke a range of emotions, from pride of place to mourning. They are echoes of the lives

that lived on this historic site. When the sun is behind the figures, they will read as silhouettes. And when the sun dances over the surfaces, the figures are a shimmering silver imbued and filled with the hues of the surrounding landscape.”

Robin Salmon, Vice President for Collections and Curator of Sculpture, initially explored with Bloch the possibility of stainless steel sculpture at Brookgreen in 1998. She stated that Bloch’s figures “are ghostly reminders of the antebellum past.”

John S. Rainey, Chairman of the Board of Trustees said, “We are grateful for all here present, and we are deeply indebted to all whose lives through the centuries have brought us to this time and place.” After acknowledging the contributions of Englishmen, French Huguenots, and Dutch engineers to Lowcountry rice production, Rainey continued: “But it was African slaves who provided not only some of the knowledge but all of the labor in rice planting, growing, harvesting, and threshing. Just as Ron Daise’s song reports, ‘There was the Planter, there was the Overseer’ – always white – and there were in much greater numbers, he continues, ‘male and female Africans snatched from their homelands dear.’ Through the centuries, these human tides flowed into a single tragic history, often bitter history, with which we are afflicted in so many ways even today.

“Babette Bloch has cut from stainless steel four works of extraordinary power to help us remember our past whenever we



**Enslaved African American Male by Babette Bloch**

walk these treasured and now tranquil grounds.”

Hal Cottingham, outgoing President of the Friends of Brookgreen – which funded the Lowcountry Trail – performed the ribbon cutting, while the following stood beside him: Bloch, Rainey; Jewell; Salmon; Daise; William Weeks, consultant; Charlene Winkler, Director of Guest Services; Mike Ammons, Senior Manager of Landscaping; and John Strickland, Senior Manager of Physical Plant.

Pat Tukey, Vice President for Development, organized and officiated during the festivities. Afterwards, as guests toured the Trail and conversed, comments by Rev. Constance Barnes, Pastor of Brookgreen Charge (including Brown Chapel, Heaven’s Gate, and St. James Methodist Church) who earlier had delivered the invocation, summed up the day’s significance. She stated, “I learned so much today! I just didn’t know. Others need to know what’s here. This is so important!”