

New York Beacon

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MERRY CHRISTMAS



MERRY CHRISTMAS — Santa brings Christmas cheer to students of St. Dominick's Elementary School, located on 73-75 Lenox Ave. in the Village of Harlem, during Create Inc. Children Annual Party
(Photo: Gideon Manasseh)

...and Happy New Year

Entertainment



By Don Thomas

35th annual Harlem tree lighting

Talented teens and stella performers illuminate Harlem Stage on the plaza

By Keith L. Forest
Special Assignment

The holiday season in the Village of Harlem recently came to life as Harlem's own Grammy and Oscar nominated music group Impact Repertory Theatre and youth groups including Vy Higginson's Gospel for Teens and the Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts' Voices of Excellence choir took center stage on the plaza of the Adam Clayton Powell, Jr State Office Building for the 35th annual Harlem Tree Lighting Ceremony.

Hosted by NY1 News leading anchorwoman Cheryl Wills, the festive, outdoor, family-affair also featured a soulful holiday greeting from R&B song stylist Alyson Williams who moved the crowd with her own personal rendition of "This Christmas." Three-time Tony Awards winner Hinton Battle was also on hand.

Broadway community's most respected musical star debut his first inspirational single, "When I Walk," and later introduced cast members from his latest off Broadway production "Sistas."

New York State Assemblyman Keith Wright, the legendary Roxanne Shante, radio personalities DJ Marley Marl and WBLS own Dr. Bob Lee and other luminaries were also in attendance.

The event, which was sponsored by the New York State Office of General Services, Melba's



NY1 News Anchorwoman Cheryl Wills (centered right), Playwright/Producer Vy Higginson (centered left) and the Gospel for Teens Choir take a bow in front of Harlem's illuminated 35 ft. balsam Christmas tree

Restaurant, Harlem Community Development Corporation, American Express, Harlem Arts Alliance, Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce, Healthfirst, Chez Lucienne and City College of New York,

highlighted Harlem's profound legacy and majestic future.

As in the past, organizers used the affair as an opportunity to give back to those less fortunate. "This is the community's tree," stated

Willie Walker, committee member of Holidays in Harlem. "During these difficult economic times, many families in our community are unable to put food on their tables. This ceremony and this tree is our

gift to them."

The history of the Harlem Tree Lighting Ceremony dates back to 1976 when a group of prominent Harlemites decided to celebrate their beloved neighborhood with a ceremonial festival similar to the annual Rockefeller Plaza event.

In 1978, with the assistance of New York State office of General Services, Con Edison and the 369th Army National Guard, the first tree was placed in front of Adam Clayton State Office Building.

35 years later, with corporate and community support, the tradition lives on. The Holidays In Harlem Committee is comprised of concerned citizens from both the public and private sector, in concert with New York State Office of General Services.

Each year a committed body of good spirited citizens come together to create this amazing tree lighting event in hopes that the affair captures the spirit of all who visit the historic village while reflecting the true essence of Harlem.

The main event is the tree lighting ceremony, which features a magnificent 30 foot balsam fir tree adorned with an array of cool LED lights, followed by an after party in the Adam Clayton Powell Jr. State Office Building sponsored by Melba's Restaurant.

(Photos: Hubert Williams of Images of Us)



New York State Assemblyman Keith Wright, Healthfirst George Hulse and NY1 News Anchorwoman Cheryl Wills greets the Harlem community.

(MORE HARLEMTREE LIGHTING PHOTOS ON PAGE 30)

Talented teens and stella performers illuminate Harlem Stage on the plaza



R&B song stylist Alyson Williams raised the frigid temperature with her soulful version of "This Christmas"



The angelic sounds from the Urban Assembly School for the Performing Arts' Voices of Excellence put the crowd in the holiday spirit



Harlem's own Academy Award nominated Voza Rivers' Impact Repertory Theatre delivered an energetic holiday musical performance



(L-R) New York State Office of General Service staff member/tree organizer April Robbins-Bobyns, actor/director Hinton Battle, Cheryl Wills, Alyson Williams and (OGS) Building Manager/Holidays in Harlem committee member Willie Walker with cast of "SISTAS" (background). (SEE STORY ON PAGE 27)

(Photos: Hubert Williams of Images of Us)