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KYMIA CRUM, GREAT-GRANDDAUGHTER TO ONEIDA "MOTHER" BRANCH, WHO DIED TUESDAY



Kirstina Sangsahachart / Daily News

Kymia Crum, from left, Darcel Dabney-Windom, and Shauntisha Chappell look at family photos of Oneida "Mother" Branch at their East Palo Alto home on Thursday. Branch, known for providing food and clothing for East Palo Alto's needy, died on Tuesday at 92. Crum, one of Branch's granddaughters, said the whole family is supporting each other after the death of their beloved matriarch. "We love her. She raised us all, not just us, but everyone," Crum said.

'Mother' Branch dies at 92

East Palo Alto humanitarian was known for her generosity

BY JESSE DUNGAN
Daily News Staff Writer

East Palo Alto lost its loving matriarch this week.

Surrounded by family and loved ones, longtime resident and humanitarian Oneida "Mother" Branch died of natural causes in her home at about 4 p.m. Tuesday, her family said. She was 92.

Even in her final weeks, Branch was inviting residents into her home and handing out donations of food and clothing, something she had done for years, her great-granddaughter Kymia Crum said.

"She was doing it to the day she left us," Crum said. "She was still welcoming people in her home. She was still feeding people. She was still receiving donations until the very end."

Branch, who was born in New Orleans in 1918, moved to East Palo Alto with her late husband, the Rev. James Branch, to start a church more than 50 years ago, her eldest granddaughter Cheryl Branch said.

"Her heart was so big — she took on the Peninsula," Cheryl said. "She's going to be very well missed."

In 1955, Branch helped organize St. John Missionary Baptist Church on Bay Road in East Palo Alto and became its first member. She was a Sunday school teacher through the 1970s and started a sewing club. Branch attended services until last month, said Ricky Williams, the current pastor.

"She was loved by the community as a whole," Williams said. "Everyone knew her as Mother Branch."

She "trained young women to be women of dignity and honor" and she pushed youths toward education, Williams said. The church plans to start an Oneida Branch Scholarship Foundation in her honor, he said.



Bay Area News Group file

Oneida "Mother" Branch, shown in this undated photo, was known to say that her home is "everyone's home."

"She had more stories, you don't know if they were true or not, but they were hilarious stories and they all had a message to them," Williams said. "You didn't know if they were true, but the message at the end was."

Williams said he has been the church's pastor for six years, but had known Branch for much longer through the state and national Baptist conventions. She was a convention historian and was considered a "legend," he said.

She was the epitome of what a grandmother and great-grandmother would be, Williams said. "She couldn't be cranky because she was too full of life."

Branch started the East Palo Alto Community Center in the 1970s. The first office burned down and a second office flooded.

She decided to hand out food and clothing from her three-bedroom house on Farrington Way after that, Cheryl Branch said. Cheryl, who was raised by Oneida Branch, said the family will pick up where she left off.

"Her heart goes out to people who are in need," Cheryl said. "And this is what she instilled in her children."

She described her grandmother as a deeply religious woman who traveled around the world, including Japan, Jerusalem and Paris, doing missionary work. But her last trip, which included stops in Florida, Chicago, New Orleans and the Bahamas, was for fun.

"We had a ball," Cheryl said. "She's in a her little scooter. And I was the only one walking because her other granddaughter was in a scooter. We did it. ... Twenty-six days."

Cheryl said the family is planning a memorial service, which will likely take place over the weekend. A funeral is expected to follow a few days later.

The family is asking that anyone who wishes to make a donation to send it to Jones Mortuary at 660 Donohoe St. in East Palo Alto in care of Mother Oneida Branch.

Email Jesse Dungan at jdungan@dailynewsgroup.com.

RAVENSWOOD CITY SCHOOL DISTRICT

Charter school petition rejected

Superintendent: Rocketship program would 'disrupt' district

BY BONNIE ESLINGER
Daily News Staff Writer

The Ravenswood school board on Thursday night rejected a charter school's petition to open a K-5 school in East Palo Alto, agreeing with the superintendent's opinion that the school's model wouldn't work for the district.

Rocketship Education, based in Palo Alto, has a stated goal to open charter elementary schools nationwide in high poverty neighborhoods and boost academic achievement. The organization established the first of its three charter schools, which are currently all in San Jose, in 2007.

The relatively new schools have shown promise: Of the 413 students tested in 2009-10, more than 70 percent scored at grade-level proficiency in English and 88.5 percent in math, according to state data.

In comparison, the Ravenswood City School District, while showing improvement in recent years, saw one-third of its students test proficient in English and about 42 percent reach proficiency in math, according to 2009-10 state data.

Nonetheless, three of the five Ravenswood board members — board President Sharifa Wilson, Vice President Marcelino Lopez, and Saree Mading — rejected the petition, following the recommendation of Superintendent Maria De La Vega.

De La Vega criticized Rocketship's "hybrid" model, which combines classroom teaching with tailored computer work; the lack of experience and diversity of its teaching staff; and the organization's English-only approach.

The school chief also said the petition didn't adequately address the district's court-ordered special education

requirements.

Evelyn Barajas-Luis and Ana Maria Pulido, the two board members who voted in favor of Rocketship's petition, did not publicly explain their support.

Before the vote, several dozen teachers and parents spoke to the board. Most were against Rocketship. At a February meeting, Rocketship supporters were in the majority.

Another concern also surfaced, though it was not on the list of academic reasons why a district can reject a charter school — the district would lose per-pupil funding when students transfer to another school.

At the beginning of the discussion, De La Vega said that while she could see the opportunities a new charter school could bring to a large district such as San Jose, "By contrast, with a small district, charters can have a tremendous impact ... can cause closures, disrupting students' education." Just before the vote, Mading said she wouldn't support Rocketship since the district was facing a \$3.8 million budget deficit for the next fiscal year.

"We are a small district," she said. "I personally don't feel comfortable making a vote on a new school before I decide what needs to happen with the budget."

Rocketship co-founder Preston Smith asked, "If it was a larger district with a larger revenue base, would you be OK with this petition?"

Wilson interjected: "That's not being evaluated, so I'd prefer you don't answer that."

Rocketship received more than \$7 million in outside funding in 2010 for expansion, including support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation.

Email Bonnie Eslinger at beslinger@dailynewsgroup.com.

SCHOOL MATTERS

Parent workshop tackles digital woes

If you've ever wondered how to cope with the fact that your teen pays more attention to the cellphone than to you, head to Spangenberg Auditorium at Gunn High School on Wednesday at 7 p.m. to participate in "Raising Teens in a 24/7 Digital Media World."

Among the issues the presentation will cover will be addiction to online media, the "digital footprints" teens leave that can affect them in the future, and cyber-bullying.

This workshop will be held in Spanish at the same time in Gunn's library.

"Our hope is that they will be less scared after this presentation," said Sigrid Pinsky, vice president of parent education at Gunn. "Parents will learn about the benefits and risks of digital media."

While teens can be harmed from online experiences, they can also explore their identity, express their creativity, and keep in touch with friends and family.

The two facilitators, Erica Pelavin and Maria Alvarez, have been trained by Common Sense Media in the subject matter.

Pelavin, a mother of two boys, is a family psychologist with more than 15 years' experience and is certified to teach the "Steps to Respect" anti-bullying curriculum. She also facilitates seminars and workshops for parents, teachers and high-tech companies on a variety of topics, including team-building.

Alvarez is an expert in media issues and the Hispanic community. A former journalist, she has degrees from schools in Venezuela, Chile, and California, and teaches extensively in Latin America with her young child.

Common Sense Media (www.commonsensemedia.org) is an independent nonprofit that works with media providers and parents to help them understand and use media.

Wednesday's event is the last in a series of Parent Education workshops about "connecting with your teen." For more parent education programs, visit info.paloaltopta.org.



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By Justin Wilcox
Publisher, Daily News Group
General Manager
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Caterers, contractors and landscapers can display Tag & Text tags on location, on vehicles or signs. Malls and shopping districts can hold "Treasure Hunts," where snapping all the tags yields a digital coupon. At homes for sale, a Tag & Text tag on the lawn sign can deliver information or an online tour — a brochure that never runs out. Tag & Text can work for almost any business.

The results are instantly measurable, and unique tags and phone numbers make it easy to compare the effectiveness of different offers or campaigns.

Tag & Text also lets you build an opted-in list of interested prospects for email newsletters, special offers, and other marketing.

Major retailers including Coca-Cola, Dior and Ford are already making forays into this exciting new form of marketing. Now, BANGConnect offers competitive plans tailored to fit any size business or budget.

Want to see Tag & Text in action? Snap this one, send it and see what happens!

More and more, mobile devices are a way of life not only among the young but across all age groups. Mobile marketing is a way to reach this fast-moving (literally) audience.

Now, adding to the broad range of print and online avenues to reach your customers, the Bay Area News Group is unveiling BANGConnect. With BANG Connect, consumers get information about your business in a snap — literally. The core of BANGConnect is Tag & Text. It begins with a circle like the one shown here. A unique pattern of breaks in the circle work like a barcode. Your logo or message appears in the middle.

This Tag & Text tag can be placed practically anywhere: print ads, delivery vans, placards, billboards, pizza boxes ... even temporary tattoos!

Consumers snap pictures of the Tag & Text tag with their cell phones and message it to the number or email address by the tag. This generates an instant response with the data of your choice: simple text information, discount offers, videos and more.

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Statistics: Scarborough Research R2 2009

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