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# Building bridges a way of life for student

Pat Daly  
Oregon Daily Emerald

Building Bridges is more than the theme to this year's Martin Luther King Celebration.

For University student Maajo Cooper-Henry, building bridges is a form of personal growth.

"I feel if people learn to communicate, it could change a lot of poor perspectives," he said. "It could really bring out a lot of better issues."

For this year's Martin Luther King Celebration, Maajo put together what he calls Cultural Communication Artistry, a discussion panel focusing on communication bridges between the University and the Eugene community. The discussion panel will take place Jan. 19 at 7 p.m. in the EMU Fountain Court Cafe.

This is a project Maajo has been developing on his own since last summer. He says it is about connecting with African-American men and women, in both the University and Eugene communities, who have been successful in their fields. Maajo's idea was to create a network of these people for students to get questions answered and exchange ideas.

"Part of my whole project was for me to contact people of African-American descent here in this community. These are people who can help me climb the social ladder," he said.

"I figure University life is really about contacting people who you're going to do business with later on in life."

As Maajo worked with contacts he already had, like advisers and teachers, his network grew. One person, he said, would put him in contact with another person or two.

"Eventually," he said, "I was able to build myself my own kind of phone book."

Multicultural Affairs adviser James Florendo directed Maajo to Jane Maitland-Gholson, professor of fine arts and coordinator for the Martin Luther King

Celebration. Both Florendo and Maitland-Gholson saw Maajo's networking project as fitting neatly into the school's King celebration theme of Building Bridges.

But building a project like Maajo's was no easy task.

"I've come across some obstacles," he said.

Maajo said he tried to work with some of the student leaders on campus to get them to network with him. He said he wanted to "work together and bring up some good ideas or some novel ways of approaching issues."

Not being a member of any student groups, Maajo received little support from these organizations.

"A lot of these group leaders already had their own intentions their own directions," Maajo said.

Some student leaders, like Women's Center director Edwina Welch, were very supportive of Maajo. In fact, Welch hopes to take part in the discussion panel.

"For the most part," Maajo said, "a lot of the people I've come across have been willing to help, to say 'I like what you've put together, I want to be a part of it.'"

People Maajo worked with at other institutions — such as Donna Alvero, head of the affirmative action office at Lane Community College — were vital to his research, he said.

"She directed me to a lot of other good people over there, people like Jeary Morrison, a student at LCC. He's given me a lot of information and guidance."

Maajo found plenty of people at the University willing to help too, like Pearl Hill, director of Upward Bound, and Carey Drayton, director of the Office of Public Safety. Others helping Maajo were Jane DeGidio of the University Race Task Force and Associate Dean of Students Gregg Lobisser, both of whom



Maajo Cooper-Henry and his dog Basenji relax in the Fountain Court where the Cultural Communication Artistry panel will take place on Thursday at 7 p.m.

helped him find money for the project.

Maajo's dedication to this project is what impressed the people he worked with.

"Maajo's follow-through is wonderful," said Welch. "He has a lot of heart and a lot of energy, and initiative you don't really see a lot of."

Lobisser was impressed by Maajo's program itself.

"It has broad appeal," he said. "[It] has a little bit for everybody."

Eugene City Councilman Bobby Green, who also is vice chair of the African American Community Coalition, was impressed with Maajo's willingness to rework elements his project.

"He wasn't afraid to get in there and do the work," Green

said.

Many participating in the discussion panel have had positive influence on Maajo. People such as University creative writing instructor Dwayne Thomas and Randy Ross, leader of the reggae band People's Choice.

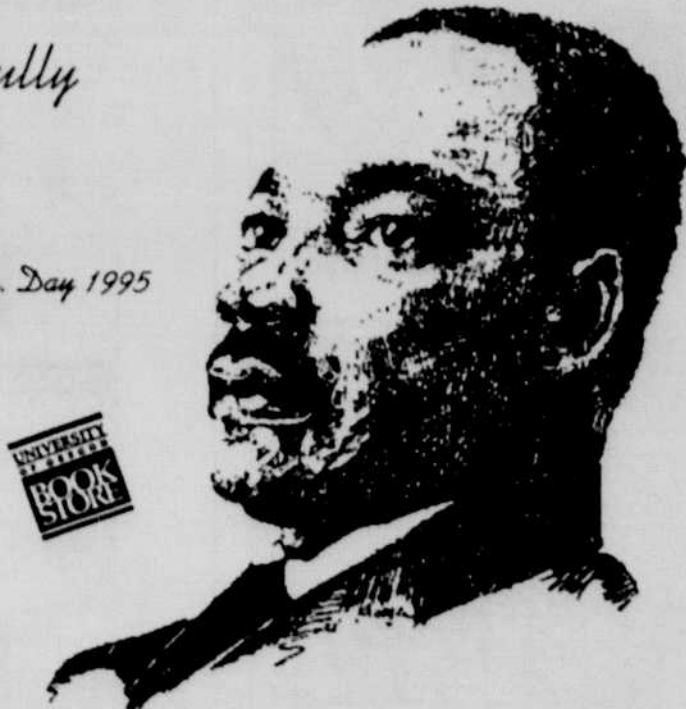
"These two guys, they really helped me along the way," Maajo said.

Upward Bound's Hill will start off what Maajo calls the heart of the program, which is "the recognition of people of African decent who work on the campus and are strong people in their community."

"These people are my personal role models," Maajo said. "They've taught me a lot. I figure a lot of people should hear what they have to say."

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Martin Luther King, Jr. Day 1995



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