

King-Tisdell's New Director Looks to the Future



Photo by Ava Johnson

Minnie Marianne Miles, new director of the King-Tisdell Cottage Foundation and the Beach Institute, wants to give national and international exposure to the museums.

By Jennifer Rust

The new director of the King-Tisdell Cottage Foundation and Beach Institute African-American Cultural Center, Minnie Marianne Miles of Nashville, has ambitious plans for the two organizations, but says her main plan is "to expand on what has been started, to give it national and international exposure."

The work done by recently retired founder and past president W.W. Law and the Savannah-Yamacraw Chapter of the Association for the Study of Afro-American Life and History made it easy to come to Savannah, she said. "I was so impressed with what Mr. Law had done with the concept," said Miles. "It is just a wealth of tradition. I couldn't resist the challenge to build on what they started."

It was also her love of history and work as a curator that made her

want the position. "I'm very dedicated to preserving the heritage of not only African Americans but all Americans," she said. "I feel that the institute and foundation is so rich in American and African-American history. It is so important not only to Georgia but to the USA."

Her first projects include fund raising. "That is always one of the major functions of a museum director," she said. "In order to further promote the credibility of the foundation, it will take a lot of financial endowment to do that."

She also wants to keep attention focused on the wood sculpture collection of Ulysses Davis, recently acquired by the Beach Institute after a year-long fund drive.

"That is one of the most unique collections of sculpture that I have ever seen, and I've seen a lot of art," she said. "I want to do it justice in the memory of Ulysses Davis and in

honor of his family that was so gracious in allowing us to purchase it."

Miles has a varied background as an arts administrator, art instructor and curriculum developer. She was the head of the art department at Austin College in Austin, Texas, and director of the Carl Van Vechten Museums and Galleries of Fine Arts at Fisk University, Nashville, Tenn. She is in demand as a lecturer and juror at conferences and shows.

An artist herself, her work is in the collections of private citizens as well as the First American National Bank of Nashville, Tenn. and Fisk University. Miles holds a B.A. in art from Fisk University and an M.A. in art from New York University. She is listed in Who's Who in the South and Southwest, The World's Who's Who of Women, Contemporary American Artists and Who's Who in American Art.

Dr. J.W. Jamerson, secretary of the board of trustees of the Beach Institute, said that Miles' multidimensional background was a factor in their selection of her. "We were impressed with her as a performing artist, as an organizer and as a person who had seen museum directorship in the past," he said. "We're excited to bring someone of her caliber to Savannah."

In addition to her immediate goals, Miles has many dreams for the future of the King-Tisdell Cottage Foundation and the Beach Institute. "I also hope to build a very fine contemporary African-American art collection to complement the Ulysses Davis collection, to build upon the historical concept of the King-Tisdell Cottage Foundation and to expand the museum concept to include not only art, but historical archival materials," she said. "To make it a museum center which is built upon the concept of W.W. Law.

"I think he had a dream, the board has a dream and I intend to make that dream come true." ☪