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**Stratton Academy of the Arts to Celebrate New Murals, African American Heritage Trail
Marker and Traveling Art Exhibition**

Community celebration on October 30 will honor local artists, the legacy of Kenneth O. Stratton and the African American experience through public art.

CHAMPAIGN, IL — Art, history and community will come together on Friday, October 30, as Stratton Academy of the Arts, the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail and the Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation invite the public to celebrate the unveiling of new murals by acclaimed artists Langston Allston and Oscar Joyo, the dedication of a new Heritage Trail marker honoring Kenneth O. Stratton, and the traveling exhibition, *The Black Gaze: Portraits of Community through an African American Lens*.

The celebration will take place from 9:00–10:30 a.m. at Stratton Academy of the Arts, 902 N. Randolph St. in Champaign. The event will feature remarks from distinguished guests, student performances, artist talks, and opportunities to experience the new public art and exhibition. Media and community members are encouraged to attend.

The two new murals add to the growing collection of public art as part of the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail, bringing powerful visual storytelling into a space where students learn, create, and explore their own artistic voices. Through their distinctive artistic styles, Allston and Joyo contribute to the Trail's mission of celebrating African American history, culture, and contributions throughout Champaign County.

A significant highlight of the celebration will be the unveiling of a new interpretive marker honoring Kenneth O. Stratton, the namesake of Stratton Academy of the Arts. An educator, civic leader, and civil rights advocate, Stratton dedicated more than 33 years to Champaign Unit 4 School District as a teacher and administrator. In 1961, he became the first African American elected to the Champaign City Council.

Throughout his career, Stratton championed educational equity, civil rights, and opportunities for African Americans in the community. He played an important role in the 1968 effort to integrate Champaign's elementary schools, helped negotiate an agreement to end discriminatory hiring practices in downtown Champaign businesses, and contributed to the city's urban renewal planning. He was also a founding board member of the Champaign County Urban League and Don Moyer Boys Club.

In 1998, the school was named Stratton Academy of the Arts in recognition of his lasting contributions to education and the Champaign-Urbana community.

“Public art connects generations, sparks conversations, and makes history accessible to everyone,” said Robert White, Heritage Trail Manager at Experience Champaign-Urbana. “These murals bring the stories and creativity of African Americans into the everyday lives of students, while the new Heritage Trail marker ensures Kenneth Stratton's extraordinary legacy of leadership, education and advocacy is never forgotten.”



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The celebration will also feature the traveling exhibition, *The Black Gaze: Portraits of Community through an African American Lens*, a photography collection featuring 30 images by Dwayne Banks Jr. The exhibition offers an intimate look at African American identity, culture and community through the perspective of a Black photographer.

The exhibition complements the African American Heritage Trail's mission by highlighting the people and experiences that shape the community's history and identity. Through photography, visitors are invited to consider how representation and storytelling can deepen our understanding of the African American experience in Champaign County.

Together, the murals, Heritage Trail marker, and photography exhibition demonstrate the power of art to preserve history, encourage dialogue, and celebrate the individuals who have shaped the community.

Event Schedule — Friday, October 30

Stratton Academy of the Arts

902 N. Randolph St., Champaign, IL

- **9:00 a.m.** — Welcome and coffee in the library
- **9:30 a.m.** — Remarks by distinguished guests
- **9:45 a.m.** — Kenneth O. Stratton Heritage Trail marker unveiling
- **10:00 a.m.** — Student performances and artist talks
- **10:30 a.m.** — *The Black Gaze* exhibition in the library

For more information about the Trail and its growing collection of public art, interpretive markers, and historical sites, visit ccafricanamericanheritage.org.

About the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail

The Champaign County African American Heritage Trail celebrates the lives and contributions of African Americans in Champaign County. Its mission is to educate today's residents and visitors about the rich cultural history of people whose stories have been largely unrecognized but who directly shaped the place we call home. Through interpretive signs, murals, public art and educational programming, the Trail brings these stories to life for current and future generations.

About the Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation

The Experience Champaign-Urbana Foundation, a 501(c)(3) organization, generates resources that support destination experiences for people who visit, work, and live in the greater Champaign County area. Through initiatives including the Champaign County African American Heritage Trail, the Foundation invests in projects that preserve local history, strengthen community pride, and create meaningful experiences for residents and visitors alike.