



**Office of
General Services**

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WILL DOWNING TO HEADLINE THE BLACK ARTS AND CULTURAL FESTIVAL PRESENTED BY MCDONALD'S

New York State Office of General Services Commissioner RoAnn M. Destito today announced the lineup for New York State's 2015 Black Arts and Cultural Festival presented by McDonalds, formerly African American Family Day, which will be held from noon to 7 p.m. on Saturday, August 1 at the Empire State Plaza in Albany. Due to construction, seating will not be available on the museum staircase, so people are encouraged to bring their own lawn chairs.

"The Black Arts and Cultural Festival is a celebration of the history, art, culture, and entertainment of the people of the African Diaspora," Commissioner Destito said. "This is a more widely encompassing version of our annual festival, and there will be a great variety of new attractions for people to look at, listen to, and learn from. I want to thank McDonald's and all our generous sponsors for helping us to bring an exciting lineup of music, art, dance, and activities to the Empire State Plaza for this annual cultural event."

The festival will feature a special performance by headliner Will Downing who is known as "The Prince of Sophisticated Soul." Over the course of a 27-year career, Downing has become a living example of the absolute best that smooth R&B and soul has to offer.

"McDonald's is proud to be a longtime sponsor of this event," said Renee Reardon, local McDonald's owner/operator and president of the McDonald's Operators of the Capital District. "We have a commitment to giving back to the communities where we do business, and the Black Arts and Cultural Festival – which provides outstanding entertainment and terrific educational opportunities for people in the greater Albany area – is a wonderful event that we are pleased to support each year."

"The 2015 Black Arts and Cultural Festival is a wonderful opportunity to celebrate the heritage of New York State, and MVP Health is proud to be a sponsor. We are fortunate to live and work in a state that has such a rich diversity in culture and experiences," said Denise Gonick, president and CEO.

The main stage will be located on the north end of the Plaza closest to State Street, and the festival will kick off at noon with an opening ceremony and celebration of cultures that have

contributed to the shaping of America. The opening ceremony will feature the Kings and Queens Honor Guard from Albany Community Charter School as well as dramatic and dance performances by students from the school.

The day's lineup will also include performances by the winners of the 2015 Plaza Lites Talent Competition for young people talented in song, rap, poetry, drama and dance, Amber Bullock, season four winner of BET's "Sunday Best;" Ragan Whiteside, a soulful contemporary jazz flutist, vocalist, and songwriter; and One World Tribe, a multicultural ensemble that performs a mix of Afro-pop, funk, Latin, reggae, and soul.

In addition to an exciting lineup of talent on the main stage, the festival will feature five destination areas:

- **Destination Heritage** are where people can get access to information or find out about services available for learning about the black experience from the past to the present.
- **Destination Finance sponsored by Sunmark Federal Credit Union** where people will be provided with financial assistance and information and a chance to win a financial makeover from Sunmark.
- **Destination Education sponsored by the University at Albany** where information on everything education related can be found, from college admissions and student life to financial aid.
- **Destination Empowerment sponsored by the New York State Department of Labor** where there will be a mini job fair and Labor Department representatives who will provide information about their workforce initiatives.
- **Destination Health and Wellness sponsored by MVP Health Care** where there will be Zumba and Bokwa fitness demonstrations, healthy cooking demos, and information on available insurance coverage and health services. MVP's new community outreach vehicle will also be at this destination.
- **Destination Beauty sponsored by Austin's School of Spa Technology** where people can receive styling tips, see demonstrations, and watch hair stylist and barber battles. The barber battle starts at 3 p.m. and will feature competitions in traditional cut and style; free style design; and duplicate design, as well as a speed fade battle.

Activities throughout the day include an expanded children's area with pony rides, face painting, arts and crafts, science experiments, and bounce rides; Scratch Academy, where kids can learn the techniques practiced by hip hop DJs; storytelling, a spoken word and poetry slam with Urban Guerilla Theater; Triple Threat All-Stars Cheerleading and Dance; Trinity Alliance Hoops Challenge; and an Albany Center Gallery satellite exhibit with 18 artists showcasing their work on black arts and culture, including an artist who will create a work of art on site specific to the festival theme.

One the biggest draws of the festival is the amazing food our vendors will be serving, including Jamaican and other Caribbean cuisine, chicken, fish, and ribs prepared by local churches, and desserts to satisfy everyone's sweet tooth.

Performance Schedule

12:00	Opening Ceremony
12:45	Plaza Lites Talent Competition winners
1:30	Amber Bullock
3:00	Ragan Whiteside
4:30	One World Tribe
6:00	Will Downing

Free parking will be available in the East Garage off Madison Avenue, and \$5 parking in the visitor or V-lot under the plaza. For event updates, people can follow @plazaevents on Twitter, visit Empire State Plaza on facebook, or call (518) 474-4759.

Ground rules for all Summer at the Plaza events can be found online at www.ogs.ny.gov. No alcoholic beverages, coolers (defined as rigid insulated containers), or glass containers of any kind; animals or pets (excludes ADA-defined service animals) will be allowed. Alcohol will be served by vendors to adults with proper identification.

Sponsors include McDonald's, NY State of Health, New York State Homes and Community Renewal, NY's 529 College Savings Program, Austin's School of Spa Technology, University at Albany, MVP Health Care, NYS Department of Labor, Sunmark Federal Credit Union, Hot 99.1 FM, Price Chopper, CDTA, and NYSUT.

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