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***Honoring the past and nurturing the future
keeps retired schoolteacher Evelyn Lawrence busy***

Marion, VA resident honored in national “Splendid Seniors Among Us” program recognizing people whose post-65 activities can inspire others at all life stages.

NASHVILLE, TN—Pearlson Press is honoring Evelyn Thompson Lawrence of Marion, Virginia as the “Splendid Senior Among Us” for June 2007.

Lawrence retired as a primary school teacher in 1985, but now in her 80s still actively serves all ages through tireless community and church work. She continues writing and producing children’s plays and operettas, including a recent production with about 30 seven-year-olds celebrating Jamestown, Virginia’s 400th anniversary.

The town of Marion honored her last year by declaring July 22, 2006 the first “Evelyn Lawrence Day,” and in May 2007 she spoke to the community during “An Evening with Evelyn Lawrence” hosted by the public library.

“You know, as a black person, I’ve had all sorts of things that I had to overcome,” Lawrence says. “But no matter how much you lose, do the best you can with what you have. Stick with it—good will come out of it.”

Lawrence serves as director of the project transforming the old Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church building in the Historic District of Marion into an African American Museum. She was choir director and organist at the church for most of her life.

“I was born into Mt. Pleasant,” she laughs. Her maternal grandmother Sallie was one of the founders of the church.

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Sallie had been born into slavery. In the 1840s, when Sallie was five, her family was sold to a slave-owner in another county and she was sold to a Smyth County man who wanted a caregiver and companion for his ailing wife. Sallie coped with her pain and loneliness by sharing her tears with a big white oak tree in her owner's yard. The tree the child wrapped her arms around is still standing, and has been honored as one of the Remarkable Trees of Virginia. (See <http://www.cnr.vt.edu/4H/remarkabletree/detail.cfm?AutofieldforPrimaryKey=1398> for a photo of Sallie's Crying Tree.) Lawrence nominated her grandmother's Crying Tree for the honor.

Lawrence taught in Marion's traditionally black Carnegie High School until that school was closed in 1965 when the public school system integrated. At that time she moved to Marion Primary School, where she was a popular teacher.

She's proud of the work she did at both schools, but many in the African American community are especially grateful for her influence at Carnegie. "I just wanted to see that our children had an opportunity to show their talent and be heard," she says.

As a local historian she compiled a book documenting every child who ever attended Carnegie High School, thereby saving a segment of history that might otherwise have been lost. She still coordinates regular Carnegie reunions, where alumni report that the loving attention given them by "Miss Thompson," as she was then known, and the other Carnegie teachers prepared them to step confidently into and succeed in the larger world.

After Mt. Pleasant United Methodist Church closed, Lawrence joined both Grace United Methodist Church and Greenwood United Methodist Church. She plays the piano at Greenwood United Methodist, provides music for community weddings and funerals, and recently represented both churches as a delegate to the Holston Conference.

She has also served on the board of directors of Smyth County Community Hospital and has been chairperson of the Cultural Relations Committee of the Smyth County Branch of the American Association of University Women.

As the "Splendid Senior Among Us" honoree for June 2007, Lawrence receives a certificate and an autographed copy of *Splendid Seniors: Great Lives, Great Deeds* by Jack Adler (original trade paperback published by Pearlson Press in March 2007).

Pearlsong Press is sponsoring the year-long “Splendid Seniors Among Us” program in conjunction with publication of Adler’s book, to honor seniors who are living inspirations. For more information about the “Splendid Seniors Among Us” program, see the Pearlsong Press website at www.pearlsong.com.

Pearlsong Press, founded in 2003 by psychologist and journalist Peggy Elam, Ph.D, specializes in books and resources that entertain while expanding perspectives on the self and the world.

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