

Remember to set
your clock



forward
1 hour
Sunday
March 10

2024 Black Family
Wellness Expo -Page 3

Historic first: Black girl wins Tiny
Miss Princess of America -Page 5



THE ROANOKE TRIBUNE

MAKING AND RECORDING BLACK HISTORY SINCE 1939

ROANOKE, VIRGINIA, THURSDAY, MARCH 7, 2024

www.theroanoketribune.org

VOLUME LXXXIV – NUMBER 43

Publication No. (USPS 640-080)

75¢

Meet Elani Spencer, Roanoke's first youth Poet Laureate

BY SHAWN NOWLIN

Words have the power to motivate, inspire, heal and comfort.

Among the first words that children encounter in their reading journey is poetry. Studies show that those who write poetry at an early stage are much more likely to have compassion for others, have advanced literacy skills and understand how to compartmentalize their emotions.

Elani Spencer, 18, has been writing poetry for a good chunk of her life. The first-year Hollins University student was born in New York, and grew up in Rochester. At an early age, it was apparent that she possessed advanced writing and reading skills.

As a child, Spencer would read books as her mom got her hair done at the salon. Her favorite series at the time was "The Mysterious Benedict Society" by Trenton Lee Stewart.

When Spencer took a "The Craft of Writing" course as a ninth-grader, one of her first assignments was to write about Billy Collins. She would



SPENCER

later title her piece, "The Red Mitten."

Today, Danez Smith, Sarah Kay, Ariana Brown and Tomi Ad-eyemi are among the acclaimed writers that Spencer admires the most.

"I feel like poetry is such an important medium to inspire change and inspire other writers. It needs to have something more than just poetic language. Anything that doesn't reflect humanity or talk about issues or just capture the beauty

(See Spencer, Page 6)

Spencer

(Continued from Page 1)

of the world – I feel like that kind of falls flat,” said Spencer on a city webpage.

In a performance contest at last October’s Rhythm & Rhyme Festival, Spencer blew attendees away with her poetic talents.

A coaching and selection panel consisting of seven individuals - Bryan “Harvest Blaque” Hancock, Soul Sessions; Adria Cintron, Soul Sessions; Angelina Randolph, The Listening; Douglas Pitzer, Strokes of Genius, LLC; Dionte “Taye the Truth” Hall; Meighan Sharp, Roanoke Arts Commission and Douglas Jackson, City of Roanoke Arts & Culture Coordinator selected her as Roanoke’s First Youth Poet Laureate.

The role of the position is to serve as an ambassador for social action, poetry and arts. Applications for the position were accepted for months. When Spencer learned that she



2024 Roanoke Youth Poet Laureate Elani Spencer (front right) with supporters (from left) Amber Lowery of Roanoke Public Libraries, Arts Commissioners Becky Carr, Vice-Chair William Penn, Charlene Graves, Arts and Culture Coordinator Douglas Jackson, and Roanoke Arts Commission Chair Meighan Sharp.

was the chosen recipient, she was elated with joy.

During a recent city council meeting, she read an original piece titled “Perennials” which likened the city to a garden.

“Elani is already off to a great start as the Youth Poet Laureate. Last weekend, she read some poems at Arts Pop with poets from Artemis Journal and we’re fielding requests for

appearances,” Jackson said.

Spencer’s role will last through 2024. Her writing professor, Meighan Sharp, is among the many people rooting for her every step of the way.

To learn more information about the Roanoke Youth Poet Laureate Program, visit www.roanokearts.org/ypl.