

Event to target health issues for black women

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Lower Hudson Valley residents will learn how to build a healthy, balanced lifestyle at Sister to Sister International Inc.'s 13th annual "Health Extravaganza" this weekend.

The three-day event, from Friday to Sunday, will include a reception and awards dinner on Friday hosted by 98.7 KISS FM's Shaila, a health symposium on Saturday, both at the Westchester Marriott Hotel, and a Sunday spiritual service at the Kingdom Christian Cultural Center in Yonkers.

"We're excited because we have a cadre of honorees and presenters who have been outstanding role models and who have had tremendous success in various aspects related to balancing the total woman, and especially women of color," said Cheryl Brannan, the founder and chief executive of Sister to Sister.

The Yonkers-based nonprofit organization holds forums and workshops related to health, nutrition and women's issues throughout the year.

This theme for this year's extravaganza is "Sisters Beating the Odds & Claiming Wellness '07: Balancing the Total You!"

The awards dinner's honorees include Jeanette Ray and Rose Taylor, two founding members of Sister to Sister, as well as a number of dignitaries, health professionals and corporate executives.

Other who will be honored are M. Monica Sweeney, the assistant commissioner for HIV/AIDS at the New York City Department of Health; New York Secretary of State Lorraine Cortes-Vazquez; Delores Scott Brathwaite, executive director of the Westchester County Human Rights Commission; Rachel N. Mayanja, United Nations assistant secretary general for gender and women's affairs; Wilma Waithe, executive director of the state Office of Minority Health; Monica Azare, senior vice president for public policy and government at Verizon Communications; and State Sen. Andrea Stewart-Cousins, D-Yonkers.

"They all bring something special to the occasion," said Adell Dowdy, chairwoman of the extravaganza and vice president of Sister to Sister.

Dowdy said both men and women are welcome at the event.

The health symposium will feature guest speakers, health screenings and a healthy cooking demonstration. Lifestyle expert Teresa Kay-Aba Kennedy will be the keynote speaker in the morning, and Susan Taylor, editorial director at Essence Magazine, is the keynote speaker at lunch.

"I think (people) will walk away with the extended knowledge and understanding of just hearing others' experience," Dowdy said. "They'll walk out with a better understanding of themselves in many ways, from a healthy point of view, a spiritual point of view and just networking with others."

Doctors will be on hand Saturday to answer questions and network.

Brannan said her organization decided to center the weekend around healthy living due to the large number of black women affected by illnesses such as diabetes and HIV/AIDS.

"This entire weekend is going to help women beat the odds and claim wellness," Brannan said. "The odds are against us, so this is a how-to or survival kit to help women adopt healthy lifestyles and become more balanced and centered as it relates to the mind, body and spirit.

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Sister to Sister International will kick off its annual "Health Extravaganza" with an awards dinner on Friday, followed by a health symposium Saturday at the Westchester Marriott Hotel, 670 White Plains Road. A spiritual service will take place at 11:30 a.m. Sunday at the Kingdom Christian Cultural Center, 68 Palisade Avenue, Yonkers. For tickets, go to www.stsi.org or call 888-403-4878.