



Clem Richardson

## Bronx resident creates Afrocentric puzzles to teach children about culture

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Kevin Dunn is a puzzling guy.

The 52-year-old Bronx resident and father of five creates Afrocentric crossword and word-search puzzles to teach children young and old about African and African-American culture and history.



Lombard for News

Marketed under the "Puzzles For Us ... the puzzles with a purpose" label, Dunn's puzzles have started appearing in New York City public school classrooms - a nice turn of events, since that's where the first one appeared more than 15 years ago.

He's also under contract to create puzzles for both the American Civil Liberties Union - on racial profiling - and the legendary Apollo Theater.

"I call these cultural entertainment," Dunn said. "The idea is to whet people's appetites so they want to know more." Though schoolchildren are the target audience, the scholarship behind each puzzle is more college-level. Dunn's puzzle clues are taken from history, culture and popular culture; solutions to one puzzle include a speech by Sioux Chief Sitting Bull, ancient Egyptian ethics and an award-winning recording by local radio personality Gary Byrd.

Dunn was born and raised in Brooklyn. His mother, Juanita Francis, was a seamstress, and his father, Silas, was a longshoreman with an interesting history of his own - he was once offered a spot on a Negro Baseball League team but had to turn it down because his mother didn't like the idea of her son playing baseball on Sunday.

Dunn is a data programmer and a former after-school counselor who also ran a computer club for students.

He created his first crossword puzzle in 1991 as a way to help his stepdaughter Ebony learn more about history. His other children are stepdaughter Latoya, and sons Jisun and Lordikim. Another son, Ikim, died in 2001.

"I was really trying to find something for the kid to do, besides watch television," Dunn said. "I wanted to get her interested in finding out more about her history."

His daughter took the puzzle to her junior high school, where approving teachers made sure it found its way to the principal, who copied it and distributed it across the school.

"They asked me if I could make more of them," Dunn said. "I told them I'd make more, since it gave me something to do."

Dunn had created three puzzles when his sister Zenola Smalls told him he was onto something.

"She convinced me to go out on the street and sell them," he said.

He put them in a little booklet and stood - rather tentatively - in front of the old Mays Department Store on Fulton St.

"I didn't want any of my friends to see me," he said. "But then a couple of pretty girls came by, and I thought maybe it wasn't so bad after all."

Dunn found himself energized by the favorable public reaction to his puzzles. He kept creating them - "I spent a lot of time at the New York Public Library and at the Schomburg [Center for Research in Black Culture]," he said.

By 2001, Dunn had a collection of puzzles and was looking for ways to expand his business. He turned to Project Enterprise, a nonprofit with offices in Brooklyn, Queens and the Bronx that provides advice and seed money to budding entrepreneurs looking to get businesses off the ground.

That group helped Dunn launch "Invision Publications" his puzzle-making company. Last month, Dunn was named Project Enterprise's 2007 Entrepreneur of the Year.

Public school teachers can order his puzzles from the Education Department's Web site, <http://www.shopdoe.com/>.

Others can get it from <http://www.puzzlesforus.com/>, or by calling (718) 538-6102.



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Clem Richardson writes the City Beat and Great People columns. Prior to joining the Daily News in 1993, he worked for New York Newsday, the Miami Herald, the Chicago Sun-Times, the Atlanta Journal-Constitution and the Anderson Independent newspapers. The Duke University graduate is married and the father of two.

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