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## Community Readies for Juneteenth Commemoration

LARRY ELL

Staff Writer

LEESBURG -- In this age of instant access to information, waiting minutes, even seconds, for important news is unimaginable. So imagine the ramifications of being kept in the dark for more than two years.

That was the scenario facing many slaves in Texas. Even though they were freed by the Emancipation Proclamation in 1863, they didn't find out until 1865.

"So, really, that marks the very end of slavery," said Dr. Harriet Masembe. "While it was true that Lincoln had set them free, some of them were not told."

As an English professor at Beacon College, African storyteller and native of Uganda, Masembe's expertise and intimate knowledge of the subject will add a cultural richness to Leesburg's sixth annual Juneteenth celebration.

Since no one knows the exact day in June these slaves finally learned of their freedom, the commemoration of the ending of slavery in the United States was given the name Juneteenth.

This year, for the first time, Leesburg will mark the occasion with two days of celebration instead of one. Beginning Friday night 7, Masembe will highlight a two-hour program at the Citadel of Hope Church of God. She will show slides of Africa and tell traditional African folk tales that were used to educate young people.

"I really enjoy them," Masembe said. "I also have a song that I teach the audience and they sing along with me. It's sung in a native language and most people don't often get the chance to speak an African language."

Friday's festivities will be followed by an outdoor celebration on Saturday. The day-long event runs from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. at Berry Park. The program will feature games for the kids, food, jazz, music and dancing. "People of all races are welcome," said Masembe. "It would be nice if people of different races celebrated because this is the community we all share."