

Warren Fleming Declaration of No Further Need Testimony

In 2003, I, along with my uncle Harvey Zeigler entertained an idea to turn Inez McAbee's home into an African American Museum. The purpose of this museum was to capture the history of the freed slaves that settled on Holsey Road after the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation. The home of Inez McAbee was built by slaves and was moved from the Plantation to Holsey Road.

I contacted our State Senator at that time (Rona Kramer) along with one of her house delegates (Karen Montgomery) to see if they would be interested in this project. I received positive feedback from them and others, and this news was published in the local newspaper. Shortly after the article was published, we were contacted by a local business called the Damascus Alliance Group. The purpose of them contacting us was to setup a meeting to hear more about the museum project. During this meeting we were asked if the Damascus Alliance Group could join forces with the Damascus Connection committee to form a township museum that would preserve both the African American and Anglo-Saxon history. We were informed that other members within Damascus had tried to form a museum before but without success.

The Damascus Connection and Damascus Alliance conducted follow-up meetings, and it was decided that this concept would be the first time in history that an African American firm and an Anglo-Saxon firm would join forces to work together in the township of Damascus to bring unity in the community. In 2004, I pitched this concept to our local and state government agencies and received positive feedback. The decision was made by the Damascus Alliance Group and the Damascus Connection Committee to form a non-profit organization called the Damascus Heritage Society featuring a museum.

Twenty years later, with help from our board members, private donations, our County Executive, our County Council (Especially Mike Knapp) members, and our Board of Education, we went from an idea to a full-scale museum that created over forty different exhibits and entertained over thousands of visitors that include all ethnic backgrounds. In March of 2024, the Damascus Heritage Society received approval for \$75,000.00 from the State of Maryland Senate to extend our current facility to accommodate more exhibits, as well as cabinet space, facility upgrades, storage, and tour space, which will better accommodate our visitors.

During the Damascus Festival on October 19 and 20 of this year, it was clear that Damascus is changing, and the Damascus Heritage Society is on the forefront in bringing our community together via our museum Exhibits and partnering with our local businesses and government. The approval of this lease will allow us to continue our mission in preserving our Damascus History for another fifteen years, which will give us enough time to put in place a concept to build a permanent state-of-the-art facility.