

South Africa choir expected in Toledo

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Mayor Carty Finkbeiner's trip to South Africa last August is beginning to bear fruit.

The Amazwi KaZulu Choir of Durban, which greeted Mayor Finkbeiner upon his arrival with a delegation of U.S. mayors, will be in Toledo this week. Drummers and dancers are part of the 28-member South African choir.

Public performances at no charge are planned for 7 p.m. Thursday at Warren A.M.E. Church, 915 Collingwood Blvd.; 7:30 p.m. Friday in the Great Gallery at the Toledo Museum of Art, and about 5:40 p.m. Saturday in Promenade Park as part of the Olympic Torch celebration.

"The arrival of the Amazwi KaZulu choir to Toledo for their first performance of their first tour of the U.S.A. is both a great honor and [is prestigious] for our city," the mayor said in a statement.

The mayor noted that the goal of the U.S. mayors' South African mission was to link Toledo and other American cities "closer to the dynamic economy of the new democratic republic of South Africa."

"This is the first time we have had a direct link with Durban," said John Henry Fullen, executive director of Toledo Sister International, who is helping spearhead the choir's visit.

Toledo is the only major American city where the choir, known as "The Voice of the Zulus," is scheduled to perform.

Its members represent a variety of professions, including law enforcement, nursing, and the machine trade industry. Mr. Fullen plans to match them with Toledoans with similar occupations during the choir's visit, which will last at least a week.

Mr. Fullen also is working toward a sister city relationship between Toledo and Durban, which has a metropolitan population of about 1 million. Toledo is in competition with Boston and San Diego for the link, which would promote economic, educational, and cultural development.

"We are establishing ourselves as reliable, hard-working partners to link up the economies of Toledo and Durban," said Mr. Fullen, who accompanied Mayor Finkbeiner to South Africa.

The choir's Toledo visit is historic, said Virginia Haywood-Smith, the chairman of the African sister cities committee of Toledo Sister Cities International.

"I cannot recall a choir of this size from the African continent being in Toledo. And it's historic that [South Africa] is a new, emerging democracy. We are working hand-in-hand with them to try to build a partnership.

South African funds are paying for the choir's trip to Toledo, but choir members will stay with Toledo-area host families.

They and other volunteers will provide food, transportation, and entertainment during the choir's stay, which is to include a performance Friday afternoon at an international food fair at the University of Michigan in Ann Arbor.