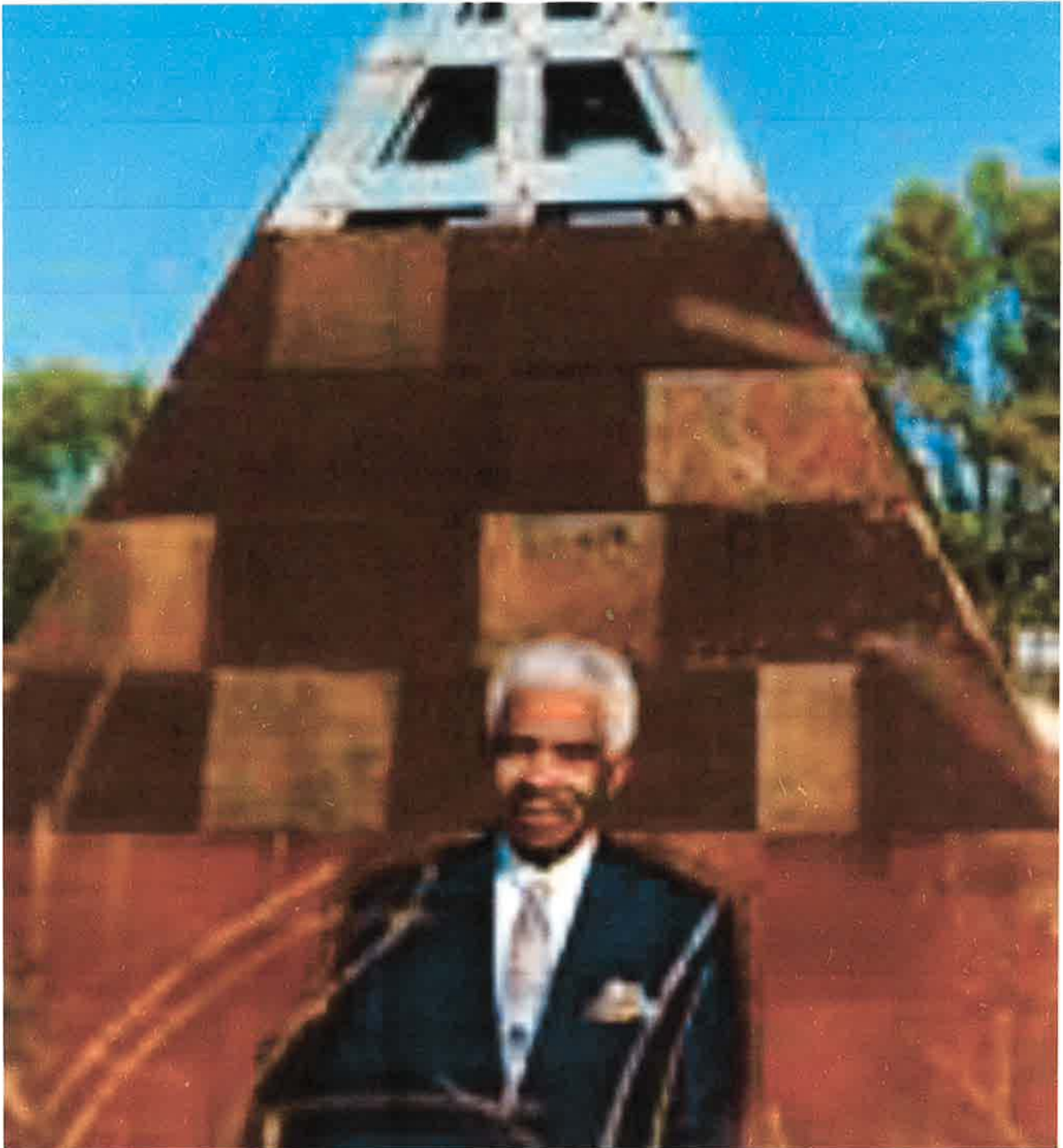


# The Columbus Dispatch

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## 'Nubian pyramid' goes from vision to reality at Africentric Early College





**Bill Bush The Columbus Dispatch @ReporterBush**

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The story starts about 5,000 years ago in the “Land of the Bow,” when a jet-black people formed one of the first nation states in the world along the Nile, where women and men had equal rights and the warriors fought like ancient versions of Navy SEALs.

At least that’s what Charles Tennant explains when you ask him about the new pyramid in front of Columbus Africentric Early College. An artist’s rendition of an ancient “Nubian pyramid,” the new structure is a long way from present-day Sudan, rising 10 feet above the landscape of the East Side campus, about a mile south of the main runway for John Glenn Columbus International Airport.

The pyramid is about as unlikely as the sprawling new Africentric campus itself, first proposed by Tennant — the school’s founder and resident lobbyist — to the Board of Education in 1993, when he was a vocational-education teacher at Walnut Ridge High School. Today, its 55-acre campus features a 140,000-square-foot school building, a football field with an in-ground sprinkler system, and a 2,000-seat, 35,000-square-foot “field house” gym is the largest in the district.

“I kept wondering about the outside,” he told the school board at a meeting in February 2016. “I know there will be benches and trees and tables, and I just asked God to help me find what was missing. ... While I was there, a vision of a Nubian pyramid appeared.”

“So I’m looking for a pyramid,” he told the board. And, oh yeah, it should be about 12 feet high

and light up at night, he added.

When nothing happened, he returned.

“Lately, I’ve been going out to the new Africentric School, and one thing that is missing is a pyramid, a Nubian pyramid,” he told the board that fall. “So we need to have this pyramid there, and I’ve picked out a spot where it should be.”

It wasn’t long before then-Superintendent Dan Good was asking: How are we going to build this pyramid? Good was on board. While Tennant has been the school’s big-ideas guy, scores of others have stepped in to make his ideas come to life.

In the case of the pyramid, it was a cadre of volunteers led by local trade unions, including pipefitters, carpenters and welders who supplied the materials and supervised apprentices and district welding students in erecting the structure. The building’s architect and other district officials helped with the planning and design.

“It was a while getting off the ground,” said Rich Manley, training director for the Plumbers and Pipefitters Local 189 JATC. “It was quite a bit of networking, ideas, brainstorming back and forth, planning, and, of course, Vince’s people, his apprentices. They gave all that material.”

The frame was built by Carpenters Local 200 apprentices at the union’s training center under the direction of Vince Wright, a union trainer, Manley said. It was transported and reassembled at Africentric. That’s when Fort Hayes vocational students stepped in, welding the exterior steel plates to the framework under the tutelage of district instructor Andy Taylor and Jimi Green, a retired Local 189 welder, Manley said.

“For the most part, we kind of took over and made it,” said Laurel Bailey, 18, one of the district students who put in about 50 hours of welding on it, and now works as an apprentice with Local 189. Other students put in twice that amount of time, she said.

The only thing still unfinished is the lighting at the top and around the base.

Tennant said Africentric isn’t a black school, it’s a school that specializes in African history and principles, in addition to all the required district coursework. But the concept was in response to the alarming statistics surrounding black students, whose history has been excluded from most American textbooks — with the exception of slavery, he said.

"It's a beautiful story, it's a beautiful history," Tennant said in one of his 2016 board appearances. "Kids and adults and everyone else need to understand African history and understand that it's a powerful history, and it should be something that is not pushed under the rug.

"And I think once kids understand their heritage, understand their woolly hair, understand their dark skin, they'll develop some pride that will be second to none."

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