

Taste

Wednesday, December 26, 2007

Daily Herald

Kwanzaa

At the holiday table,
food is both symbol
and celebration

NANCY ANCRUM

MCCLATCHY NEWSPAPERS

LAMI — Maisie McNaught's first encounter with Kwanzaa pretty much embodied its seven principles in one go:

More than 20 years ago, as a new mother looking to forge family traditions, she discovered a book on the African-inspired holiday at a black-owned bookstore. She joined forces with six other families to host dinners each night from Dec. 26 to Jan. 1 and got her husband to make a special holder called a kinara for the seven symbolic candles.

In the process, McNaught and her friends were Kwanzaa in action, exhibiting unity, self-determination, collective responsibility, cooperative economics, purpose and creativity.

"We could barely pronounce the Swahili words, but we decided to celebrate this thing," she says.

born and reared in Jamaica, fills her Kwanzaa table with Caribbean flavors.

This uniquely African-American holiday was founded in 1966 by Maulana Karenga, who was on the front lines of that era's black-liberation movement. Now celebrated by people of black African descent throughout the world, it is "an ancient and living cultural tradition which reflects the best of African thought and practice," according to officialkwanzaawebsite.org.

It is a celebration of harvest and renewal meant to nurture the future while honoring the past.

"When you set the table with fruits and vegetable and flowers, these are the crops," McNaught said. "But the crops are not necessarily food — it can be buying a house, your achievements, your child graduating from college. These are symbols of the

