

# 98 years old and counting: Igbozue Connecticut, USA, celebrates with Professor Austin Okwu

NEW HAVEN, CONNECTICUT, USA, May 29, 2022 /EINPresswire.com/ -- On May 21, Professor (and former Nigerian-Biafran Ambassador) Austin Okwu celebrated his 98th birthday at his home in New Haven, Connecticut, surrounded by his friends and family. The event was organized by Igbozue Connecticut USA, a social-cultural organization of Nigerian Igbos living in Connecticut, which Professor Okwu co-founded.

What an auspicious day it was! As the evening spring sun, obstructed by tall backyard trees, cast glints of rays on the tables, chairs, and canopies, guests arrived one after another. Justin Eicker, the Mayor of New Haven, inspired the guests with his presence, as did Father Morgwicz, the parish priest of Saints Aedan and Brendan in New Haven. Doctor Kalu Ogbaa came to showcase the symbolism kola nuts play in Igbo celebrations.



Professor Austin, Ike, and Joe

Addressing the guests, Ike Chukwurah, the President of Igbozue, said many people dream of reaching age 98 and beyond. Yet, only a few people achieve that goal. Not only did the Ambassador reach age 98, said the President, he is also living in strides with great mental and physical capacity.

In his speeches, the Professor talked about longevity and how blessed he feels to have lived this long. Eating and drinking in moderation are factors contributing to longevity, said the nonagenarian. Anger and the hatred of others, he cautioned, can limit longevity. Even if you have a family history of adverse health risks, choosing to live with love, peace, and moderation in consumption and other activities can reverse such health risks, said the professor.

When Mayor Eicker spoke, he declared that the ongoing celebration lifted his spirits and the spirits of those in attendance. The Mayor also added that Professor Okwu is a man who has friends who love him and believe in him. Had the Mayor arrived a little earlier, he would have witnessed the breaking of the kola nuts, another uplifting moment.

The Igbos of Nigeria hardly have a celebration without breaking a kola nut. Showing the captivated guests the three kola nuts he held in a saucer, Doctor Ogbaa explained that the three kola nuts resemble the Christian trinity of God the Father, God the Son, and God the holy spirit. The three nuts are a reaffirmation of the cultural belief that “the Igbos do not die,” Dr. Ogbaa declared. “Rather, they transition or reincarnate through the realms of the Igbo trinity from the living to the dead and then to the unborn.” Pivoting to face the nonagenarian, Professor Ogbaa continued, “Nnaanyiukwu [our venerable father], you will be with us for a long time, many more years to come. We shall be here next year and the year after to celebrate you.” From where he sat next to his wife, Dr. Okwu, the Professor continued nodding gently in affirmation.

Only one minor hiccup occurred in the entire event. Father Morgwicz was invited to say the opening prayer. He arrived on time at 6 PM, but to his shock learned that the occasion was operating on African time (meaning that the event was 90 minutes behind schedule). In fact, the priest didn’t have an opportunity to pray until 7:30. Reading from the scriptures, he prayed to God to surround the nonagenarian with love and to



Professor Austin, Joe, and Mayor Eicker of New Haven



Friends and some members of Igbozue Organization



bestow him with peace and kindness. "Cherish the love that comes from your friends and your family," the priest said, "as they are gifts from God the Almighty."

Once the formalities were over, the event heated up quickly. Food, drinks, and music opened up. Except for the beer, water, and wine, everything else used in the merrymaking had an Igbo signature on it. Name it, we had it. The oily Abacha stew with stockfish, the pepper soup, the fried plantain, the thick Equisi soup, and balls of pounded yam wrapped in aluminum foil all bore Igbo traditions. DJ Nelson played folky Igbo songs. When the guests were not dancing, they shook hands, hugged one another, and talked in loud voices about how happy they were to celebrate with the Professor.

End

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