



## Alpha Kappa Alpha convention starts today

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About 10,000 members of America's first Greek-letter organization for African-American college women will meet today in St. Louis for the sorority's biennial convention.

Hundreds of worldwide Alpha Kappa Alpha members sporting the sorority's traditional light pink and green colors plan to kick off the event in the morning with a "global walk" starting from America's Center.

The highlight of the convention, which honors sisterhood and service, will be a visit from Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, president of Liberia and Africa's first woman elected as a head of state. She will receive the sorority's most prestigious honor, the International Service Award.

An Alpha Kappa Alpha member, Johnson Sirleaf will be honored at a meeting open to the public at 4 p.m. Sunday at the convention center. Other honorees include U.S. Surgeon General Regina Benjamin, who organizers said plans to attend, and rapper-entrepreneur Jay-Z, who will not be at the event.

St. Louis has special meaning to sorority members, spokeswoman Melody McDowell said. It was the home of one of AKA's founders, Ethel Hedgeman Lyle.

"To start our second century of service, we wanted to honor her legacy," McDowell said.

The organization plans to pay tribute to Lyle with an exhibit at the convention detailing her writings and life. The exhibit includes items pulled from the organization's archives and shows how Alpha Kappa Alpha has commemorated Lyle, including an award, endowment and historic markers in her name, said Earnestine McNealey, chairman of the archives committee.

Lyle, a Sumner High School graduate who died in 1950, also had a city charter school named after her. The school closed this year amid financial problems.

Alpha Kappa Alpha was founded in 1908 by 16 women on the campus of Howard University in Washington. The organization has grown to 250,000 women in more than 950 chapters worldwide.

The convention in St. Louis runs through Friday.