

The Weekly Challenger

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED TO YOUR COMMUNITY

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50¢

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Julius Bradley's family was presented with his Congressional Gold Medal and certificates of recognition for his service to the country as a Montford Point Marine during World War II. He died in 1991. The Bradley family is seen here with 95-year-old Montford Point Marine George McIvory.

Julius Bradley: Montford Point Marine is finally honored

RAVEN JOY SHONEL
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – Julius Bradley was a Black U.S. Marine in World War II, which made him a Montford Point Marine. He put his life on the line for a country that considered him a second-class citizen. He died in 1991 without any recognition for his service.

On March 27, Bradley's family was presented his Congressional Gold Medal along with certificates of recognition from President Barack Obama, General David H. Berger, the current Commandant of the Marine Corps, and the Montford Point Marine Association, Chapter #29, who worked tirelessly to make sure his name was not lost to time.

Ret. Cpl. Eddie Pringle, USMC, welcomed the crowd, stating that in Bradley's era, there

were three boot camp entry points into the marines: Paris Island, San Diego, and Montford Point in North Carolina for Black enlistees.

"And it was the most difficult boot camp of all because they had a little racism thrown in there," said Pringle.

Members of Chapter #29 came from Jacksonville to honor Bradley alongside his family and friends at his gravesite at Royal Palm Cemetery North on Gandy Boulevard.

"These men and all Black men and all Black history is American history that was originated and came from within the borders of this country," stated Master Gunnery Sgt. George Gillis, Retired. "Don't let anyone tell you that our history is not American history. We belong to America just like they belong to America."

In 1941, the United States was

organizing white troops to enter World War II. President Franklin D. Roosevelt had no interest in ending the hiring discrimination practices based on race in the defense industry, but civil rights leaders fought for change.

With a planned march on Washington to pressure the president into opening up the defense industry to Black people, Roosevelt conceded a week before the march. He signed Executive Order 8802 on June 25, 1941, prohibiting racial discrimination in the armed forces and in government.

The Executive Order opened the door for Black recruitment into the armed forces, but unfortunately, Jim Crow and all its ills also enlisted. Throughout the military branches, Black servicemen and women endured segregation, mis-

See **BRADLEY**, page 18

A healthy taste of home at the new SPC Deuces Den

ST. PETERSBURG – What started as an idea on their vision board became a reality for Lennise and Omar Germany because their dream restaurant, Livy O's, is now serving up home-style cooking at the new SPC Deuces Den at the Midtown Center.

From shrimp creole salad to the Titan Cuban sandwich and lemon pound cake, get ready to enjoy their delicious cuisines from 8-6 p.m. Mondays and Wednesdays and 8 a.m. to noon on Fridays.

The SPC Deuces Den, dubbed after its location on St. Petersburg's 22nd Street, locally known as "The Deuces," is an innovative approach to facilitating collaborative work among small minority businesses. The Den offers aspiring restaurateurs a place to sell their cuisine to the public at no cost to the vendors. Every semester, a new food vendor will rotate in to serve fresh food for customers to



Director of Urban Affairs Nikki Gaskin Capehart congratulates Lennise and Omar Germany for being the first featured restaurant at the new SPC Deuces Den.

purchase.

SPC Downtown and Midtown Center Provost Dr. Tashika Griffith believes this space is more than just a café — it's also a business incubator for small minority businesses. SPC is working with the City of St. Petersburg's Urban Affairs

to identify and attract these restaurateurs.

"This concept is very important to the college and is our way to engage with community members," Griffith said. "Unfortunately, south St. Petersburg is labeled as a food

See **TASTE**, page 13

Benefits of art in mental health



ACT co-founder
Dr. Alex Harris

BY J.A. JONES
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – The mental health and well-being of Americans has taken a hard hit in the last few years, according to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC). A recent study completed by 5,400 interviewees revealed more than a third were experiencing anxiety or depression in the months following the onset of the pandemic.

Nearly another third of subjects experienced post-traumatic-distress type disorders, and 13 percent of those surveyed admitted they had begun or increased their level of substance abuse. Almost 11 percent of respondents said they had considered suicide during the previous four weeks. Meanwhile, teen suicide numbers have been increasing for more than a decade.

Addressing the mental health climate calls for a variety of solutions. On Wednesday, March 31, local and national educators, counselors and advocates took part in a virtual symposium to discuss how arts and art therapy can improve mental health.

Local practitioners included Dr. Alex Harris, the co-founder of Arts Conservatory for Teens (ACT); Ronald K. Porter, Ph.D., director of Service-Learning at Eckerd College and yoga instructor at Metro Inclusive Health, and Dr. Tonicia Freeman-Foster, CDP, CHES, co-founder and principal consultant with Kusudi Consulting Group.

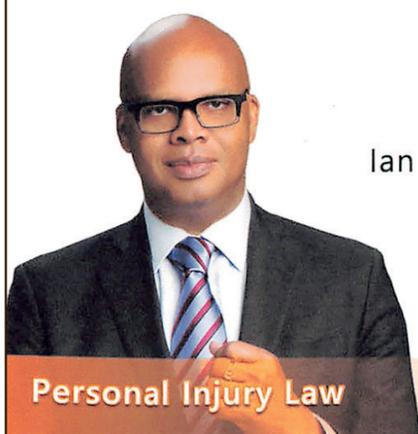
New York City practitioner Amina Shaw-Moss, LCAT-LP, MPS, a creative psychotherapist at Third Hand Healing, also joined the symposium, which was moderated by Carl Lavender of the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg.

Harris began the event by noting that while most people realize the importance of our mental well-being, in African American and Latino/Spanish-language-speaking communities, the subject of mental health was often not appropriately addressed.

"This conversation is very important to me as an artist, as an educator, as a person, as a humanitarian, and as an African-American male because in the African-American community,

See **ARTS**, page 10

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DOG DAYS

6-8 1-3
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4-5 8-6

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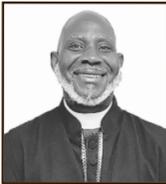
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Breaking the Cycle

REV. DR. ROBERT L. HARRISON, PH.D.
Men of S.T.E.E.L. Ministries
www.menofsteelministries.com

Bishop Buzzkill Bob – Part 2

Praise the Lord. Now, I'm already prepared to watch my viewing numbers from the website link get smaller and smaller cause I have seen some numbers as high as over 8,000, but when I spoke on subject matters of a nature like this, only a few hundred view or read it.

That's fine with me because as the scriptures state, am I to please man or please God, and well those that know me know I have never and will never be swayed towards pleasing man when I serve an Omnipotent, omniscient, and ubiquitous God that gave us all life.

Jesus told the disciples that you better get ready because just as they hated Him, many will hate us for His sake and I've been prepared for decades.

To the meat of the matter. Several things or posts and videos have come to my attention since my last article and have somewhat sidetracked me but momentarily but they bear addressing.

One post was relating to the recent uprisings in the number of homicides and the post in and of itself I commented was comical. I said comical only in the sense of who posted it and the nature of the posting itself. Why do "religious" folks believe that you can live a certain lifestyle but when you see something germane to the community or you know or feel you will get a high level response from the people as though you are some super negro coming to rescue the neighborhood, you leap at that opportunity. The reality is that you have been like a "church mouse" on Sunday morning for almost the past year and when a major story hits you surface like its groundhog day.

Look, at some point South St. Pete will have to come to the understanding that until there is a "SPIRITUAL" resurgence, not a "RELIGIOUS" play pretend make believe showing, these kinds of sorrows and unfortunate happenings with continue.

Again, this is not the first time in South St. Pete that we have had this uprising. There was one some years ago and the Mayor and Chief Holloway called all the clergy together to reach new solutions. Unfortunately, the "solution" wasn't that we are fighting a spiritual battle and this is spiritual warfare and the ONLY way to combat spiritual warfare is with spiritual weapons that only come through a right relationship with Jesus Christ. NO, no money and no programs wasn't the answer back then and as we can see they won't be the answer now nor ever.

The fact that most don't believe in the true and living Holy Spirit because if they did, this would be the #1 focal point in the life of any TRUE Bible-based house of God.

To just talk and preach it but not put action to it by way of ensuring that no one in the house of God can hold any position until they have obtained it the Bible way by evidence of speaking in tongues, not mimicking or uttering repeating babble, but speaking this heavenly spiritual language only God can give you as His gift. No, its not just for certain spiritual leaders but everyone that completes the process as proclaimed in Acts 2:38.

But because they want to everybody's most loved preacher, they will glance over or omit it totally from ever teaching on it and continue to shuck and jive and tap dance to make the folks happy and they will pay to see that.

And to use my best vernacular you ain't seen no new growth or miracles lately have you. Wonder why?

Even though this passage was not directly given to us and many use it out of proper context, its applicable for this subject matter. 2 Chron 7 is the passage Im referencing. Oh how we can quote it verbatim but oh how we never obey it fully and completely.

Notice how humility is the first and foremost commandment prior to you going to your knees or going to Him for anything. Humility allows you to seek Him in your prayers but without following these simple instructions which are actually commandments from the Most High, you cannot spark Him to move on your behalf.

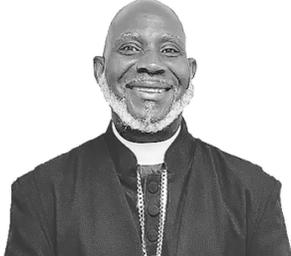
And your most talented and gifted spoken word preacher, no matter how eloquent they sound, all that they say falls on deaf ears if at all goes beyond the ceiling of the room they are in.

You expect miracles from Jesus but you don't expect that this same expectation must be reciprocated in the form of honor, praise, TRUE praise and worship, not America's Got Talent singing and dancing, and glorifying the One and Only True God, our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ.

I stop here before moving on to a new train of thought as to not over feed you till you are stuffed.

Next week I'll speak on the Zoom meeting we had with Chief Holloway regarding the actions they are taking regarding the homicides.

Till next week,
Blessings,
Bishop Dr. Robert L. Harrison, Jr.



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All news items, advertising copy and related art submitted for publication on Thursday must be received no later than 4 p.m. Monday.

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ST. PETE
CHAMBER OF COMMERCE
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BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Business Spotlight Sponsored by:  Green Book of Tampa Bay

Uniquely Original Art Studio

Owner: Catherine Weaver
Years in Business: Over 30
Location: 915 24th St. S, St. Petersburg
On Green Book: greenbooktampabay.org/listing/cultural-art-painting-parties/

Catherine Weaver is the owner of Uniquely Original Art Studio, offering cultural art painting parties and other arts and crafts parties.

"Uniquely Original Art Studio is a place where your creative expression can be put on canvas, expressed through spoken words, or felt by the rhythm of the African drum during one of our drum circles," she shared. "We are a cultural art studio in the heart of

the African-American community."

A self-taught artist in a family with three-generations of entrepreneurs, Weaver shared, "The building where Original Art Studio is located has been family owned and operated since 1947 when it was first built by my grandfather."

She added, "I believe that ownership is the key to generational wealth."

Weaver was one of a group of artists chosen to paint the Black Lives Matter mural in front of the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum. She also spoke on an artist's panel arranged by Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg, sharing how the pandemic has caused an evolution in her work process:

"The pandemic in 2020 changed the way I communicate with the public. I have now learned to communicate with my customers virtually through Zoom meetings, webinars, social media, and text messaging rather than in person. I made business connections, gained new customers, acquired contracts, did interviews and group lectures without having to leave my home."

She said the pandemic slowed her business down but didn't stop it. Weaver plans to continue using those platforms of communication and others even after the pandemic is over.

Offering on-site classes at her home studio, as well as traveling class and cultural events, her Facebook page states,



"Enjoy a fun and entertaining evening with friends in our Safari Garden. Cultural Art Parties will have you creating art like a pro ... with no artistic experience necessary! Step-by-step art Instructions will help you finish a beautiful work of art in just two hours."

Weaver describes her business with the line, "Uniquely Original: Where We Dare to Be Different."

To learn more about Uniquely Original Art Studio, visit the Instagram page, and for more of Weaver's original work and Afrocentric collectibles, follow her on Facebook at facebook.com/originallyartbycatherine.



Catherine Weaver



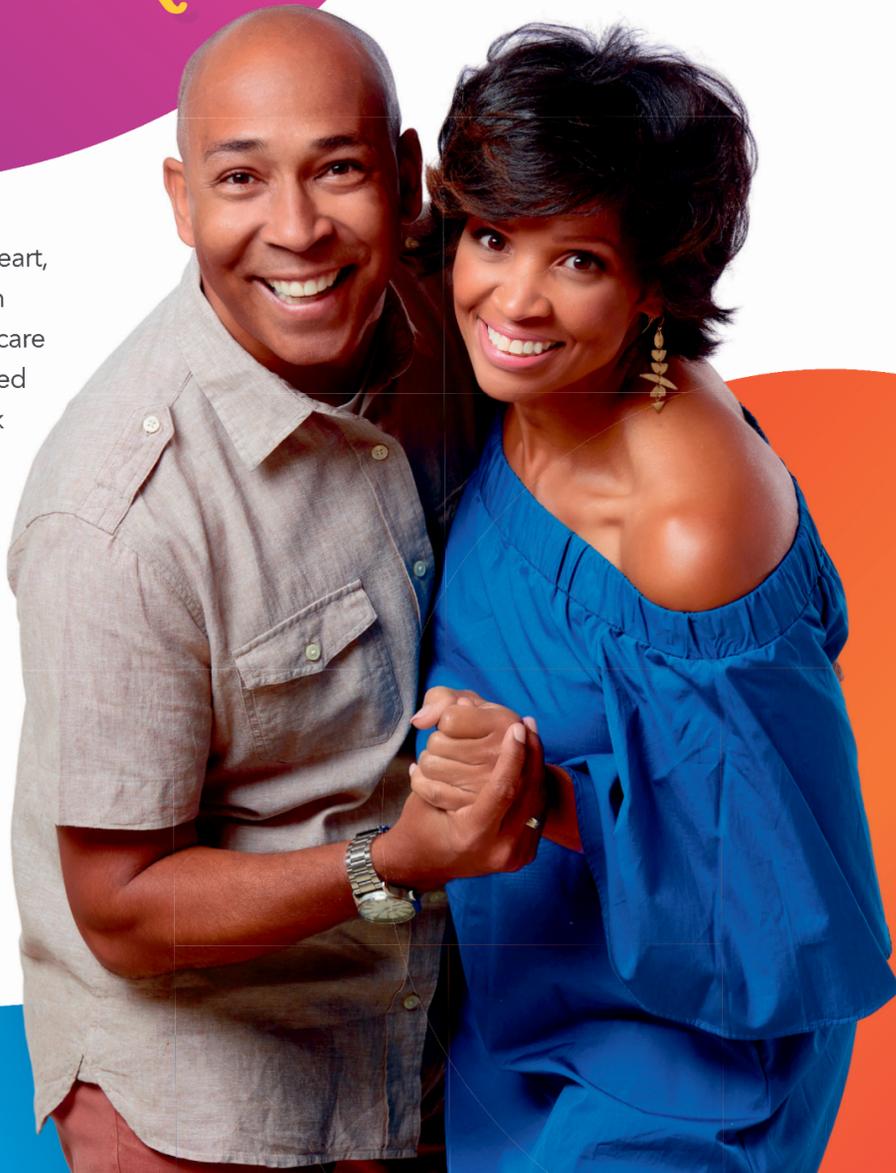
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BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Business Spotlight Sponsored by:  Green Book of Tampa Bay

Sister Skin Beauty

Owner: Lisa Freeman

Years in Business: 9 years

Location: Tampa
On Green Book: greenbooktampabay.org/listing/sister-skin-healing-butters/

Lisa Freeman is the owner of Sister Skin Beauty, offering 100 percent all-natural plant-based skin therapy, whipped body butters, men's skincare, hand-crafted soaps, and serums.

"What started as a humble idea born between two sisters sharing their knowledge of natural skincare grew into the lovingly crafted skincare products that are available nationwide," said Freeman.

A busy entrepreneur and healthy lifestyle advo-

cate who also engages in making her own vegan meals and health drinks, Freeman is also a yoga practitioner who shares her health journey online.

Her Sister Skin products are handmade and packaged in the United States, and Freeman writes, "these all-natural products provide tons of nutrients that promote natural healing and a healthy glow."

Sister Skin products are made with a proprietary blend of different kinds of butter and oil rich in anti-inflammatory properties, vitamins, and antioxidants. The result is butters and skincare products that encourage all-day hydration and healthier skin.

When asked what users will love about her products, Freeman

shared, "Our products are non-toxic so that you can feel confident that your skin is getting everything it needs without harsh, skin-drying chemicals. We believe in providing luxury skincare at affordable costs."

To learn more about Sister Skin Beauty, visit the Instagram page, or visit their website at www.sisterskin.net.



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THE PUBLIC SCHOOLS Where equality Begins

Rebecca Forbes-Levy thought school vouchers would deliver a better education for her child. But it was the worst. The colleges would not accept the credits from the pop up school. The child started all over again in a public school. Like thousands of our families, Rebecca's was the victim of a scam that exploits hope for the future. Laws drain billions of tax dollars from public schools and hand it over to substandard and unregulated pop-up schools. Voucher schools are getting ready to cash in again with more state laws hurting your neighborhood public schools.

Don't let it happen. If you have a story, tell it at info@flnaACP.com



Writing in the park

BY DEXTER MCCREE
Feature Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – Oh, what an enjoyable feeling to see children playing in the park, twirling on the merry-go-round, and swaying from the chain bench swing set. There is something magical about children's development when they grow up spending time at the neighborhood park. Youth learn people skills and foster coping aptitudes, which they will use throughout their lives.

Educator Natalie El Amrani added cleverness

and writing to the park experience for her students. She used this past spring break to open the young minds of fourth-graders from Melrose Elementary to adventure, exploring foreign countries and cultures they have never experienced.

El Amrani teaches English and Language Arts to about 60 students between her three classes. She started at Melrose after graduating from St. Petersburg College in December of 2019.

"I was originally hired as the journalism teacher, running the magnet multi-media and journalism program at Melrose until spring 2020," stated El Amrani. "In summer of 2020, I asked principal Donnika Jones if I could have my own classroom and teach language arts."

El Amrani decided to make this change because of her passion for expressing herself through words. She wanted to bring this same love for literacy to her students. Upon taking the

job last fall, she sought to instill a passion for creative writing in her scholars, promoting a message that writing is simply thoughts put down on paper.

"Nobody is a bad writer, and nobody is incapable of writing," exclaimed El Amrani.

Through the months, she taught students how to write an opinion, narrative and informational essay. The writing is rigorous, but the scholars are rising to the occasion.

Students take the annual Florida Standards Assessment test, and El Amrani realized the pint-sized pupils could benefit from more practice. During this spring break, she decided to try out her own writing workshop.

The teacher invited fourth graders to meet at Campbell Park to engage in fun writing activities. The event had no affiliation with the school or the school board.

One scholar, David Gamble, expressed that he felt excited about the



writing workshop. He stated the workshop was helpful and that he learned new transition words.

"I decided to come because I wanted to learn more. I love writing," said David.

Zariah Tisdale said he feels smarter from the extra help, and Jah'mes Atibel expressed how the teacher made writing fun by explaining everything in a way that he can understand.

Zi'yana Ingram's favorite part of the writing workshop was constructing her essay. She had a fantastic time and embraced the excitement.

"My motivation was showing students that true writers don't only write during class time, but that real writers pen regardless if in a classroom, park or home. Parents immediately jumped on board in support of the workshop," explained El Amrani.

With the help and support of coworker Delia Doss, Success Squad teacher at Melrose, eight

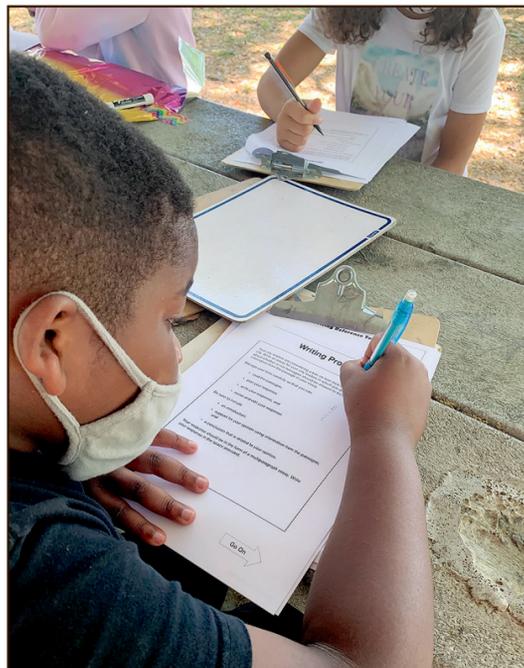
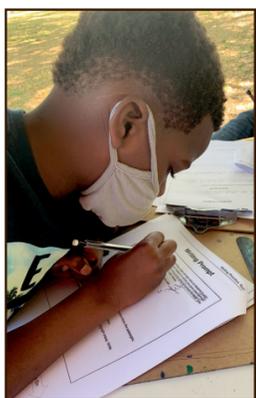
students showed up for two days from noon until 3 p.m. El Amrani provided lunch, and parents donated water and snacks.

Writing in the park was a huge success, and El Amrani looks forward to doing more outreach in

the future.

"Ms. E, can we please do this again next break?" asked Zariah, a pleased workshop participant.

To reach Dexter McCree, email dmcree@theweeklychallenger.com



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Florida Crime Survivors urge state lawmakers to pass reforms

TALLAHASSEE – More than 200 Florida crime victims have come together to urge the state legislature and Gov. Ron DeSantis to prioritize the needs of crime victims. In a letter to state lawmakers, victims urged the need to pass a slate of reforms that would stop the cycle of violence impacting communities across the state.

The request focused on three key bills in the state legislature. In recent weeks, lawmakers have introduced HB 1467 and companion bill SB 1838, which extend critical workplace protections to victims and witnesses in the wake of violent crimes. The third bill, HB 799, builds on previous reforms of the probation system by expanding the Alternative Sanctions programs to improve community safety while wasting fewer prison resources.

Altogether, these bills adopt proven solutions that focus on rehabilitation tackling the root causes of crime – an approach strongly supported by crime victims as they seek to create safer communities and prevent people from ever being victimized again.

“Very often, public safety policies fail to incorporate the voices and needs of crime victims – all of whom want what happened to them never

to happen to anybody else,” said Aswad Thomas, national director of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. “The Florida legislature has an opportunity to build on previous accomplishments and further improve public safety so that all communities can be safer.

“These proposed bills have overwhelming support from crime victims in Florida who, like me, know that the best way to save lives is to address the causes of crime and the trauma that impacts so many communities. We urge Florida’s elected officials to stand behind these bills because lives depend on it.”

Currently, employment protections extend only to victims of domestic violence. But HB 1467 and SB 1838 – introduced by Representative Felicia Robinson and Senator Shevrin Jones – extend unpaid leave to victims and witnesses of violent crime and household family members for certain crimes, including homicide. By extending this coverage, victims would receive the support needed to address trauma and heal, which reduces the likelihood of re-victimization.

“Florida has an opportunity to lead the nation in implementing public safety policies and a vic-

tim’s agenda that truly makes our communities safer; I hope legislative leaders are listening,” said Beverly McClain, Jacksonville crime survivor and member of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. “Far too many victims lack the job protections needed to protect ourselves, mourn the loss of loved ones, or apply for victim services.

“Crime victims should not have to choose between financial stability or personal safety. They shouldn’t fear losing their job after experiencing traumatic violence. We’ve made progress in the past, and I hope our elected officials listen once more and take one more step towards ending the cycle of violence and trauma in our communities.”

HB 799, sponsored by Rep. Michele Saltzman, would make probation more effective by expanding the Alternative Sanctions Program. The legislature strengthened 2019 to more people who have committed non-violent and non-serious offenses, wasting fewer prison resources. This bill broadens the use of non-prison sanctions when those on probation commit technical violations or low-level misdemeanors and provides better options for holding people accountable who have caused no harm.

These reforms will ensure greater accountability, providing more practical and cost-effective options than incarceration. This approach ensures more people are rehabilitated and successfully become productive members of society while also saving taxpayer dollars.

“In 2019, the legislature overwhelmingly committed to creating a better criminal justice system where preserving public safety meant more than just incarcerating our way to a safer Florida. Let us continue with that commitment,” said Dr. LaDonna Butler, Florida crime survivor, and senior manager of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice.

“Reforming Florida’s probation system is a critical step towards ensuring people are held accountable and remain productive members of society. Reducing recidivism creates safer communities – which is why so many crime survivors like me support these reforms. We must rethink how we approach public safety if we are to end the cycle of crime and invest in real crime prevention.”

View the full text of the bills:

SB 1838: Employee Protections

HB 1467: Employment Benefits and Accommoda-



“We know what reduces violence — it is investments in our communities, prevention, rehabilitation, drug treatment, and mental health services — not longer prison terms,” Dr. LaDonna Butler, Florida crime survivor, and senior manager of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice. These investments are essential for our communities and our children’s health and well-being.”

tions for Crime Victims and Witnesses

HB 799 - Criminal Sentencing

About the Alliance for Safety and Justice

The Alliance for Safety and Justice is a national organization aiming to win new safety priorities in states across the country. It partners with leaders to advance state reform through networking, coalition building, research,

education and advocacy.

It also brings together diverse crime survivors to advance policies that help communities most harmed by crime and violence, as part of Crime Survivors for Safety and Justice – its national network of over 42,000 crime survivors with thousands of members in Florida. For more information, visit allianceforsafetyandjustice.org or cssj.org.



Experts In Life-Changing Care

By Karen Davis-Pritchett M.Ed., Empath Health Vice President of Access and Inclusion

Empath Health is ensuring access to care

Finding a sense of belonging is an essential part of life and something everyone strives to reach on some level. Empath Health recognizes this need within our community, our employees, our patients, families, and its critical role in advancing our mission.

Within Pinellas County and nationally, communities of color and other diverse groups face unique challenges to accessing end-of-life care. Empath Health is working to build both formal and informal local partnerships to deconstruct and remove these barriers.

Since joining Empath Health five years ago as a community partnership specialist, I’ve been work-

ing to ensure all people understand what Suncoast Hospice, a member of Empath Health, can provide for end-of-life care. Everyone should have access to quality care when living with a chronic or advanced illness, regardless of their race, ethnicity, zip code, gender identity, or religion.

I have been able to experience the extraordinary support of Suncoast Hospice as they supported my loved one’s journey. It is important to me that all communities have accurate information about hospice care for them to make informed decisions for themselves, a family member, or a friend.

As a National Diversity Council Certified Diversity

professional, I am dedicated to understanding the various communities present in our county to provide leadership to our organization that will result in being culturally responsive.

A commonly-seen barrier is a fear that the family will have no control over the care of their loved one once they enroll in hospice care. We are here to walk alongside each family, honoring their cultural differences and choices for care.

Empath Health is proud to have earned the SAGE-Care Platinum Credential through SAGE (Services and Advocacy for GLBT Elders), a national advocacy and services organization providing training and consulting on LGBT aging

issues. Suncoast Hospice also holds a Jewish Hospice Certification through the National Institute for Jewish Hospice.

Part of our onboarding process for new employees is a full day dedicated to understanding diversity, equity and inclusion and how it informs the care we provide. We are continually providing training to ensure our staff has the knowledge and cultural responsiveness needed at such a vulnerable time for patients.

Our full-time community partnership specialists ensure we are creating programming and outreach that is relevant and responsive to specific needs. They lead care councils comprised of community mem-

bers who act as an advisory board and share their insight and feedback regarding our community engagement. As we continue to have a presence and collaborate with other community organizations, it helps ensure inclusivity, amplifies diverse voices, and helps remove access barriers.

Volunteers also play an essential part in reaching our diverse community. Whether providing companionship to patients or calling bereaved families, volunteers help provide a comforting connection. Additionally, community groups are essential to meaningful conversations through hosting presentations and workshops or co-



facilitating these programs with us.

Engaging volunteers is another component of our outreach. Our volunteers provide important services to our patients and families. They are part of increasing access by helping us expand our care, message and mission.

I recognize the power of community and the essential roles that various organizations, faith leaders, volunteers, community members and our care councils play in helping everyone access Suncoast Hospice care.

Learn more about services offered by Empath Health or volunteer opportunities by visiting Empath-Health.org

Deiondrick Moultrie making history

BY DEXTER MCCREE
Feature Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – There are always special times throughout the year to recognize distinctive moments and achievements. The month of February is designated as Black History Month when the accomplishments of African Americans are front and center in the country’s consciousness.

Unfortunately, African-American history has been relegated to that one month out of the year, leaving 11 months of Black achievement to languish until the following year. Many achievements go unnoticed for years, although they impact the daily lives of people.

Take, for instance, a butterfly garden or handrails added to a church that helps the elderly feel safe. These types of projects are little-known

events that take place in the Black community daily.

Meet Deiondrick Moultrie, a member of Boy Scouts of America. Deiondrick, known as DJ, organized and facilitated a project that earned him the highest rank and honor in the Boy Scouts: the Eagle Scout Award. Only six percent of all Boy Scouts nationwide earn such high achievement.

“Deiondrick is my first Eagle Scout in 20-something years of being a scoutmaster,” said William Gravely, scoutmaster of Troop 295 at New Faith Free Methodist Church. “This young man came to me wanting to quit every week. He was always doubting himself and his interest in scouting, but he kept on coming, making progress, and always having fun.”

Deiondrick got inspira-

tion when he saw his cousin get his lifeguarding certification. Not to be outdone, he wanted to do it too, but he wasn’t a strong enough swimmer. He never gave up trying and reached the milestone the following year.

By the time he obtained his lifeguard certification, Deiondrick had advanced rank to Life Scout, one step before Eagle. His time clock was ticking, though. Once scouts are 18 years old, they can’t start an Eagle project.

Deiondrick needed to earn several more merit badges. Through the help of Darryl McDonal, Tim Bulu, Michael, and Becky McBride, along with their son Lewis, he persevered.

Along the path, Deiondrick had to face his fears and himself. For instance, he had to meet a requirement of repelling down a wall, which made him apprehensive because he was afraid of heights.

However, he got up the courage to strap himself into the gear, climbed up the ladder to the platform, and waited his turn. He overcame his fear and descended the wall.

“There were times when I wanted to give up right along with DJ, but the late Pastor Curtis Long encouraged me to hang in there. He said it was my job to take it all in stride and continue to grow myself and my boys in their ability,” explained Gravely.

For a scoutmaster, there is nothing like seeing your charges accomplish what seem to be unattainable goals and have them to look back in awe. Scouting is a journey and experience that opens an opportunity to befriend people from different backgrounds and walks of life.

Since becoming an Eagle Scout, Deiondrick is a student at Talladega Col-



lege in Alabama. He is majoring in business and marketing and plans to return to St. Pete as a Real Estate agent and open his own business.

“My hope and prayer are that DJ will climb to high heights in all his endeavors,” said scoutmaster

Gravely. “I want to thank his mom, Sharee Moultrie, for keeping him in scouting. He’s done well, and the gratification is beyond measure.”

To reach Dexter McCree, email dmccree@theweeklychallenger.com

Student Life & Engagement director receives Legacy Leader Award from national college union association

ST. PETERSBURG — Dwayne Isaacs, director of Student Life & Engagement at the University of South Florida's St. Petersburg campus, has received the 2021 Legacy Leader Award from the Association of College Unions International (ACUI).

The award, which fellow ACUI members vote on, recognizes individuals who have been instrumental leaders in building community by promoting the role of the college union and student activities on campus.

"I am so appreciative of this award, especially because my fellow colleagues who I hold in such esteem saw fit to recognize me," said Isaacs. "What also makes this special is that there was a fundraising component behind my nomination, which goes to student

scholarships, and that goal was met."

Isaacs, who is a USF alum, has been with the university since 2000. He was part of the student affairs team that helped open the Marshall Student Center at USF Tampa in 2008. He moved over to the St. Petersburg campus in 2012, where he oversaw the newly opened University Student Center.

Isaacs is currently the director of Student Life & Engagement. In this role, he oversees student affairs programming and initiatives such as Multicultural Affairs and Harborside Activities Board while mentoring students involved in Student Government, the Crow's Nest student newspaper, and more.

Throughout his time, Isaacs has been an advocate for other USF staff in the student affairs profes-

sion.

"Dwayne has been a tremendous supporter throughout my career and had a big influence on my choice to enter the field of student affairs in the first place," said Anthony Carinci, director of student success resource management on USF's St. Petersburg campus.

Isaacs has also played an active role in advancing the college union profession and the mission of ACUI. For more than a decade, he has served in various roles for the organization, including educational programs coordinator, web and social media coordinator, the 2017 regional conference coordinator, and most recently regional director.

He has helped plan conferences and programs in these roles while connecting members from different institutions

to advance the college union field. He also served as an I-LEAD facilitator, ACUI's premier student leadership and community building program.

"Dwayne is a natural leader because he cares for others and has a passion for mentoring young professionals and guiding them in building a stronger campus community," said Alison Ward, assistant director of the student union at the University of Tennessee Knoxville and ACUI Region III director. "He serves as a role model to other young men of color, and the connections he has made across the association have made him a colleague to all."

The award was announced at the annual ACUI conference that was held virtually. ACUI is the professional home to



Dwayne Isaacs, director of Student Life & Engagement at the University of South Florida's St. Petersburg campus

thousands in the college union and student activities field, with the mission of developing community through education, advocacy, and the delivery of services.

"ACUI has been extremely instrumental in

my career development and making me the person that I am," said Isaacs. "This association has not only introduced me to fellow colleagues who I can ask for advice and lean on, but it has also given me a community."

Islamic community begins Ramadan on the steps of City Hall

BY FRANK DROUZAS
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — The City of St. Petersburg ushered in the holy month of Ramadan with a proclamation from Mayor Rick Kriseman speaking from the steps of City Hall on Tuesday, April 6.

Ramadan, celebrated by those of the Islamic faith the world over, is a month of fasting, prayer and reflection, and lasts from one crescent moon sighting to the next.

Surrounded by Muslim community leaders, the mayor said one of the things the city has always strived to do is recognize the importance of diversity, tolerance, love and compassion.

"The City of St. Petersburg celebrates this month of Ramadan, the month of fasting, along with our friends, family and neighbors who are

Muslim and are practicing one of the criteria of the religion of Al-Islam," said Kriseman, who acknowledged this is the last time he will be issuing the proclamation as mayor.

He formally proclaimed the months of April and May 2021—coordinated with the Hijri calendar year of 1442—as the month of Ramadan in St. Pete.

"We extend our best wishes for a very successful fast and celebration," Kriseman said.

Saad Rahamouni, a leader with the Islamic Society of St. Petersburg, noted that Muslims evaluate their way of life through introspection during this month.

"We are called upon to retain and reinforce those aspects which are found to be positive and change those which are not," he said. "We are called upon



The City of St. Petersburg ushered in the holy month of Ramadan with a proclamation from Mayor Rick Kriseman speaking from the steps of City Hall on Tuesday, April 6.

Photo courtesy of Skyla Luckey

we will be leaving behind so that when we are no longer here, the world will be a better place because of us, not in spite of us."

On behalf of the Muslim community, Imam Abdul Karim Ali person-

ally thanked Mayor Kriseman for his support and for being a part of the city's annual Iftar Dinner since 2017, when the event began. The dinner, which welcomes residents of all faiths to celebrate the holy month, is the evening



Imam Abdul Karim Ali encourages the next mayor to continue the yearly proclamations and Iftar dinners.

Photo courtesy of Skyla Luckey

meal when Muslims end their daily Ramadan fast at sunset. The end of the fast is known as Eid-al-Fitr, or "Festival of Breaking the Fast" in Arabic.

Due to COVID-19, there will be no dinner this year, but a commu-

nity-wide food drive was held on April 10 instead.

Ali expressed a hope for the continuation of the proclamation and Iftar dinners every year.

To reach Frank Drouzas, email fdrouzas@theweekly-challenger.com

10 year old raises money for women and families in crisis pregnancies

BY MARK PARKER
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — Rebecca Duverlus, 10, is like many kids her age — she enjoys math at St. Jude Elementary, running (she wants to be a professional track athlete when she grows up), and practicing ballet.

What separates her from many kids her age is her passion for giving. When asked what she would do if someone handed her \$500 to spend on whatever she liked, she did not hesitate to answer.

"Well, I would donate \$250 to a local charity, and the rest I would give to my parents for all they do for me," Rebecca said.

Rebecca was inspired

by her mother, Nkechi M. Duverlus, and father, local pastor Diems Duverlus, who have instilled the value of helping others in her and her brother Nathanael. When her school began collecting donations for those who had been hit hard by the pandemic, Rebecca was an active participant but wanted to do more.

She and her friends originally wanted to start a lemonade stand but realized that might not be the best idea during a pandemic. That night, Rebecca's dad told her about the ALPHA House of Pinellas, which provides housing and support services to homeless pregnant women and teens, new mothers with infants, and families experiencing crisis pregnan-

cies.

Diems Duverlus had been to the ALPHA House for his job, bringing the unfortunate news that their fire prevention system needed to be replaced. While speaking to the assistant director, he offered a bit of a silver lining. His daughter was looking to raise money for local charities, and he thought that ALPHA House would be a great choice.

After speaking with her father, Rebecca was sure this was who she wanted to help, and he hatched a plan to raise the money.

"He went and bought me a TV, a 55-inch, and then he bought me these little raffle tickets so everyone could buy some," said Rebecca.

Things started off slow initially, which coincided with Christmas break, and some of her friends gave up. However, Rebecca stayed with it and eventually surpassed her goal of \$400. When it was all said and done, they would raise \$500 in raffle tickets for the 55-inch smart TV with built-in Roku.

"My favorite part was walking around with my dad," Rebecca said. "We would walk around my neighborhood seeing if people wanted to buy, and they were saying yes, so I liked that."

The ALPHA House is Pinellas County's only residential maternity program and has provided housing and support to more than 3,000 women, teens, and infants. Almost 90 percent of those who have gone through the ALPHA House program have successfully transitioned into permanent housing and independent living. Their community outreach program has distributed childcare items to more than 30,000 families in need.

They can house 16 women at a time, not including the babies, and help with everything from securing a high school diploma to making sure they are employable and have money saved when they leave the

program. While most shelters have transitioned to rapid rehousing, around 90 days, women at ALPHA House can stay for up to two years after the baby is born.

Julie Swigon, director of operations at ALPHA House, stresses the importance of people like the Duverlus family.

"A lot of our program is dependent on individual funding and donations," Swigon said. "It's especially nice to see younger people and schools do drives ... to take that time personally out of their busy schedules to think about others that are less fortunate and things they might need that a lot of us may take for granted."

Swigon said the money goes to operating costs, but specifically things such as diapers. They currently have a couple of highly allergic children, and they have to procure specialty brands of diapers and particular foods for them.

"You meet the general needs, first and foremost," she said. "But when there are donations like this, sometimes we can go above and beyond and take them to McDonald's or something. Get the specialty diapers, lotions, and wipes. Those things don't factor into the budget."

Swigon said that due to COVID-19, they cannot have volunteers in the building, and now they have to do most of the things they usually would rely on volunteers to handle. Right now, they need supplies and money more than anything.

"Please remember these little agencies that are trying to get by in a pandemic," she said. "There are also more and more people that need our services because of the pandemic as well."

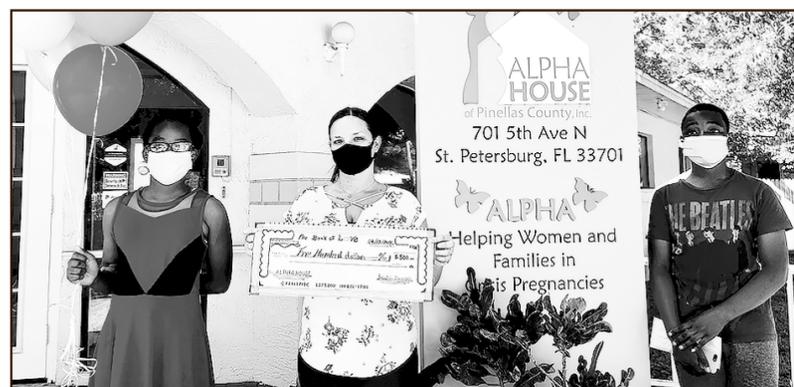
Rebecca wishes the best for the women at ALPHA House.

"I'm hoping they will be happy with everything they get, and they are able to move on," she said. "If they need anything, I hope they are able to use this money to get all the supplies they need."

Diems Duverlus also wanted to leave an important message for the women at ALPHA House.

"This is just a gesture to remind them that they are valued," he said. "A lot of people are thinking about them, and they should know that we are in this together."

If you would like to learn more or donate to the ALPHA House, please visit them at alphahouse-pinellas.org.



Left, Rebecca Duverlus, Mckenzie Bressett, ALPHA House of Pinellas, and Nathanael Duverlus

Our Stories Matter

THE voices of our youth

A conversation with a Black student in a majority white school, part 1

BY YAMIRA PETERSON
St. Petersburg High School student

Ja'Kaylah Danford is a senior at St. Petersburg High School in the International Baccalaureate Program.

Yamira: What are some of your experiences with racism and anti-Blackness in your school or past schools? How have your experiences affected your mental health?

Ja'Kaylah: I have not had any direct experiences with racism or anti-Blackness within my school. However, I know that it exists both within the students and the curriculum that we are taught. My personal experience with such has primarily manifested in internalized racism, primarily from being in predominantly white schools and programs since first grade.

This disproportion ruined my mental health and self-worth, especially in middle school. I felt an inexplicable need to prove myself as a Black student. My perception of myself was intensely warped, and I feared others would see me as inferior simply because I differed from the majority.

While I could not place

my feelings then, I can now say that I was not ashamed of being Black, but I was ashamed of standing out. Thus, I became incredibly conscious about how I presented myself to the world.

Yamira: What are some examples of microaggression that you have experienced from teachers or peers? How have these microaggressions influenced your relationships with them?

Ja'Kaylah: I have heard the phrases "you don't act Black" or "you're not really Black" more times than I could ever count. It has always come from my peers, and every time it was meant as a compliment of sorts. Even though the notion of being different from "other" Black people is built upon racist stereotypes, I regard these instances as microaggressions simply because I know they were meant to be harmless.

However, they have affected me deeply to this day. I have always felt alienated from my white peers, knowing that I would always be seen as "other". Being told that I wasn't "really Black" insisted that being Black was a bad thing, and the fact that I didn't act that way put me



Ja'Kaylah Danford

above others.

Yamira: Discuss a time where you felt like your teacher(s) made an effort to be intentional with their language about racism in their class? If so, how did that make you feel?

Ja'Kaylah: Earlier this year, before we began studying August Wilson's "Fences," we had a brief discussion about the use of the N-word within the play. While I certainly do trust my English teacher, I felt apprehensive listening to my white peers discussing a topic so sensitive, not having nearly as personal of a relationship to it as I did. In the end, I appreciated the effort, as it seemed more effective than just ignoring the word altogether and the connota-

tion it has within the story.

Yamira: What are your thoughts on "controversial" language like the term "minorities" and "illegals?" How has this language affected your experience in your school community?

Ja'Kaylah: Hearing this kind of language makes me very upset, especially within my predominately white school community, because there are so many alternative phrases that are not insensitive. Also, people who use this kind of language often try to justify it by saying that it is "accurate" or by accusing everyone else of being too "politically correct," which goes to show the lengths they will go to avoid being respectful to others.

It is not hard to be respectful to others. For some odd reason, I still hear people use the phrase "Blacks" in reference to Black people in history, and it makes me incredibly uncomfortable and conscious of the fact that I differ from the majority. It makes me ask myself if they are comfortable enough to reduce a group of people in history to such a term then, what is stopping them from doing the same to me?

Yamira: When was the

first time you had a teacher who looked like you? What did they teach? How have they affected you?

Ja'Kaylah: The first time I had a Black teacher was my eighth-grade algebra teacher. Looking back on this, it baffles me how I went through almost a decade of schooling before having a teacher that looked like me. In all honesty, I did not enjoy the class for personal reasons. However, I did like my teacher as a person, and she instilled a lot of confidence into me that year - some of which I still carry to this day.

Yamira: How has your relationship with BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) teachers affected your experiences in the classroom?

Ja'Kaylah: To be fair, I have only had three BIPOC teachers in eighth, ninth, and tenth grades. The most influential of those would be my eighth-grade algebra teacher. Being one of the very few Black students in the gifted program, it felt good to finally have a teacher that looked like me, allowing me to feel less out of place.

Yamira: In your experience, what have teachers and administrators done that have proven to be effective



or harmful in approaching BIPOC students about combating racism in your school community?

Ja'Kaylah: When approaching BIPOC students about combating racism within the community, I believe there is a fine line between valuing individual perspectives and tokenism. Of course, the latter is harmful. Any time I have been singled out to provide my insight, it has proved to be counterproductive.

Rather than feeling like my voice is being heard, I feel like a token of sorts, being used to prove that a specific person is "inclusive" enough. Thus, an effective way to do so would be approaching BIPOC students with respect and respecting their boundaries within such conversations.

Yamira Patterson is a junior at St. Petersburg High School in the International Baccalaureate Program. She is a student activist coordinator with Amnesty International USA and involved in various youth-led advocacy organizations.

She is also the SPHS Black Students Association's co-president and the SPHS Amnesty International Club president.

Unthinkable: Lawmakers looking to cut CNA jobs

BY JEFF JOHNSON
Director, AARP Florida

STATEWIDE – Thanks to COVID-19, this session of the Florida Legislature looks and sounds different. With social distancing, on-line testimony, and streaming committee meetings, the Florida Capitol seems quiet compared to past sessions. And, as is true in so many horror movies, the quiet is foreboding.

Just as the invisible coronavirus victimized nursing home residents during the lockdown of the last year, so they are being victimized by the heavy-hitting industry lobbyists for nursing homes and health-care executives in the

locked-down capitol.

Not only have lawmakers fast-tracked bills that give nursing homes immunity from COVID-19-related lawsuits (SB 72), now they're fast-tracking cuts to the quality of care in Florida nursing homes. Letting these facilities off the hook by making it nearly impossible for residents and families to seek resolution through the court system is shameful.

Piling on proposals that cut the quality of care for nursing home residents is unthinkable – proof that the industry's self-serving, aggressive push for less accountability and more profit is being fulfilled at the expense of resident safety.

Currently, nursing home residents receive most of their care from certified nursing assistants (CNAs), who must have 120 hours of training before being certified. Two bills in the Florida Legislature, by northeast Florida legislators Sen. Aaron Bean (R-Fernandina Beach) and Rep. Sam Garrison (R-Orange Park), SB 1132/HB 485 would allow nursing homes to substitute personal care attendants (PCAs), who only receive 16 hours of classroom training and no mandatory directly supervised clinical experience, for CNA care.

While industry lobbyists have sold legislators the line that this is an apprenticeship program, they have made it clear that their real intent is to substitute lower-cost, lesser-trained PCAs for more qualified caregivers.

AARP continues to believe that PCAs should be able to supplement CNA care but should not substitute for CNA care. Unless the requirements for PCA trainees align with the level

of training and supervision that current CNA trainees must meet before they serve on the floor of Florida nursing homes, residents will be at risk of poor care from undertrained staff.

We all know that the pandemic has spotlighted the difficulty nursing homes have to attract and retain CNAs for employment. What the nursing home industry operators and executives choose to keep in the shadows is their failure to pay and provide adequate benefits to CNAs.

Most nursing home CNAs are paid less than what many people pay their pet sitters. Yet, anyone who has been in a nursing home knows that the CNAs are the heart of nursing care. Rather than push for fair pay for this challenging and essential CNA work, Florida is positioned to allow poorly trained substitutes to take their place.

It's not just AARP Florida that believes quality care for nursing home residents is essential. A new AARP report shows overwhelming bipartisan voter

agreement (96 percent) that quality of care for nursing home residents is critical.

Additionally, 71 percent of Florida voters oppose replacing CNAs with lesser-trained PCAs in nursing homes, and 80% strongly support providing a living wage to paid staff who care for nursing home residents.

Let's be clear that replacing CNAs with PCAs is a bad idea, ignoring the will of Florida residents. It is no coincidence that Floridians hesitate or refuse to put themselves, family members, or loved ones into Florida's nursing homes.

Even before the pandemic, Floridians have far preferred to age at home rather than in nursing homes; the combination of isolation and infection wrought by COVID-19 has only made that preference more pronounced.

Retiring in Florida should come with a warning label.

Florida's policymakers and the for-profit and not-for-profit nursing homes should learn from the past



Jeff Johnson

year and act on changes that would help our older loved ones receive the best care possible. Instead, they are delivering nothing but a gut punch to long-term care residents and their families.

With 11,000 plus resident and staff deaths in Florida's long-term care facilities due to the pandemic, it is unconscionable that Florida's lawmakers are focusing on the welfare of nursing home operators and executives rather than the care and wellbeing of residents.



CONNECTIONS

Ann Sherman-White, M.Ed.
Business Community Liaison and Student Government Association Advisor

Another first for the Pinellas County Job Corps Center

Last month, the Pinellas County Job Corps Center (PCJCC) held the first-ever virtual Job Corps Student Government Association (SGA) installation of executive officers. Since March of 2020, the vast majority of PCJCC students have participated in distance learning due to COVID-19.

Although students were off-campus, student-centered activities still took place under the direction of the SGA. The SGA executive board continued to meet virtu-

ally and conduct campus business according to its constitution.

It became a challenge for some Job Corps Centers to organize and discuss SGA-related ideas with students off-campus, but the PCJCC SGA executive board never faltered. In fact, they came together virtually and voted to ensure all students on campus during the holiday break had gifts waiting for them on Christmas morning.

So when it was time to elect new SGA officers, as a result of those

graduating from the program and those entering the workforce, the

PCJCC team did not miss a beat. Students that were interested in joining

the executive board submitted the necessary paperwork by email or fax.

All aspiring officers read the SGA constitution and became familiar with its content. On March 15, in front of their peers, each new member took the oath of office virtually as the audience watched from home.

No event this important would be complete with an official welcome message. At the request of the SGA advisor, County Commissioner Rene Flowers delivered

a powerful message to the incoming board. She challenged the emerging young leaders to make decisions that would impact the culture and climate of their campus while helping to inspire unity in the community.

What a true thrill it was having Commissioner Flowers take time out of her busy schedule to greet and inspire the students of the PCJCC! It was a perfect ending to the SGA executive officers' installation ceremony.



Vaccine open for 16 and older

PINELLAS COUNTY – Governor Ron DeSantis announced that Floridians 16 and older can receive the COVID-19 vaccine beginning on Monday.

To register and book, go to www.patientportalfl.com. A parent or caretaker must create an account with their own information and then select their minor child when prompted to start a vaccine appointment booking on their behalf.

The Patient Portal's call center is at (844) 770-8548. The website and phone number are available 24/7.

Minors under 18 must be accompanied at appointments

The only vaccine approved by the FDA for those under 18 is the two-

dose Pfizer-BioNTech, which is offered at all sites booked through the Patient Portal. Minors under 18 must be accompanied by an adult or caretaker during their appointment.

Public sites operated by the Florida Department of Health in Pinellas County (DOH-Pinellas) and Pinellas County Government are adding appointments to the Patient Portal as additional shipments are received from the state. Identification and proof of eligibility required at all sites.

Keep your vaccine card safe

Those who receive the vaccine should keep their vaccination record card in a safe place and take a photo of it for safekeeping. Laminating the card is not

recommended as the heat from the process may cause the ink to bleed, making the card illegible.

A replacement card may be requested at the site where the vaccine was given but is not guaranteed.

Other ways to get the vaccine

To date, more than 300,000 people have received at least one dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in Pinellas County, nearly a third of the population.

DOH-Pinellas manages vaccines booked through the CDR Health Patient Portal while the federal government, State of Florida and numerous pharmacies and health centers manage their own distribution operations.



There are also DOH-Pinellas outreach events to vaccinate underserved populations throughout

Pinellas. Eligible groups should check around the county for the availability.

For the latest informa-

tion about all vaccine options countywide, go to covid19.pinellascounty.org/vaccines.

Some Dems help GOP push voucher funding draining public schools

BY JODI YONDER
Contributor

TALLAHASSEE — Four House Democrats joined the Republican majority in pushing through a voucher expansion bill in the appropriations committee.

Representatives James Bush (D) Opa Locka, Amika Omphroy, (D) Sunrise, Patricia Williams (D) Ft. Lauderdale, and

Nicholas Duran (D) Miami, approved legislation that not only allowed higher-income families to participate but grows students carved out of public school funding formulas.

Critics said this rush to fund the “hollowing out” of public schools loads education funding accounts that parents can spend as they wish without enrolling their children in school.

“This is not to move money from the left pocket to the right pocket. It’s putting more money in the beneficiaries’ pocket,” according to bill sponsor Rep. Randy Fine, (R) Palm Bay.

It is a veritable free for all that pays short-lived profit schools with tax dollars.

According to critics, more than \$1,500,000 is slated for allocation this

year alone. They add that the House and Senate bills fuel the cottage industry surrounding the unregulated vouchers and choice schools where 60 percent of the students, most African Americans, return to public schools in two years or less.

Step Up for Students is a one-stop shop for those interested in opening schools for profit or parents looking for vouchers

or school supplies like laptops and tablets. They can get it all online at Step Up for Students. The misinformation and damage are particularly onerous for families of color who suffer the brunt of the voucher profiteering.

Florida has the dubious distinction of having the most extensive voucher system in America. And despite the consistent barrage of

criticism, the intensified push to expand it has become a GOP obsession.

So much so that the naming of several merged scholarship programs is causing a contentious rift among Republicans. And public school advocates were disturbed by the Democrats joining the GOP quest that continues to drain public school coffers in the districts where their students attend.



James Bush (D) Opa Locka,



Amika Omphroy, (D) Sunrise



Patricia Williams (D) Ft. Lauderdale



Nicholas Duran (D) Miami

Artists, educators, health professionals discuss benefits of arts in mental health

ARTS, from front page

among males, this subject matter has been not really been a part of the conversation. We are not — it is not — celebrated ... to express our emotions,” Harris asserted.

He shared that the “hard questions” not dealt with are often internalized, leading to anger — questions such as, “Why dad may not be present or why mom left,” and other questions around loss.

Harris added that an inability to articulate or understand internalized trauma also stemmed from the lack of “equitable access to the knowledge that can help us to understand our own place in history.”

A psychotherapist working within BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, People of Color) communities and particularly youth, Shaw-Moss said part of her practice was making sure her clients are “not getting in their own way in terms of self-expression.”

“We are creative people, and we’ve been creative people,” she shared. “I think that it’s important that we continue to use our creativity to express ourselves. And in terms of mental health, it’s critical that we talk about how vi-

sual arts or music or dance or drama, allows for self-expression — but also allows for things like brain development, for regulating our emotions, and having conversations to articulate what’s happening internally.”

Porter, a yoga instructor and college professor, stressed that it’s vital to understand “artistry” in terms of the many practices people do with attention, focus, and intention — and included teaching and engaging in yoga as art forms he personally engaged in and shared.

“We’re not only dealing with the trauma of this past year and the plague, we’re dealing with the trauma of leaders in power who have sown poison across the land through vitriol. We are in a civilization of trauma; we’ve dealt with a very violent past gets into the body.”

Porter asserted that moving past this trauma isn’t something that can be solved simply through the mind or education. “We have to move through the body and really get into a parasympathetic state, that rest and digest state, so that we can be creative.”

He noted that “the

times call for healers” due to the intense harm done to so many people. “That’s what I do in my work; I work with the energetic body. And when I think about mental wellness, I think about joy, and how you practice joy and bring that creativity into the world, and say, as James Baldwin said, ‘yes to life.’”

Lavender acknowledged that during the current trial of Derek Chauvin, the police officer who killed George Floyd, “We are reliving that moment; it is a powerful moment for us to have that process again, and the need for behavioral health guidance here is critical.”

Freeman-Foster, certified health education specialist and former project director for the Florida Healthy Transitions youth and mental health program, views art as a platform for young people to express themselves, whether through spoken word and poetry or through silent practices like drumming and painting.

“From the programs that we’ve had and the young people that we spoke with, art gives them their voice; art gives them



Top row left, Carl Lavender, Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg, Psychotherapist Amina Shaw-Moss, ACT co-founder Dr. Alex Harris, bottom row left, Dr. Tonicia Freeman-Foster, Kusudi Consulting Group, and Ronald K. Porter, Ph.D., Eckerd College

a platform where they’re able to communicate things that they may not be able to communicate to people because of fear of being stigmatized — or fear of being locked up in a crisis unit because they share things that they are thinking about,” Freeman-Foster asserted.

She feels it is incumbent upon educators, stakeholders, counselors, and practitioners to include art in their mental wellness toolkit and work to ensure there was flexible funding to support art as a modality to ensure people’s well-being and healing.

Lavender referred to the uptick in disciplining children and youth who

were expressing themselves in ways that were deemed as “behavioral issues” and asked Shaw-Moss what her thoughts were on the issue.

Shaw-Moss noted that while teachers are trying their best to manage classrooms, often students are going through various developmental stages. While teachers are trying to maintain the space and tell the students to sit down, “and don’t run around” — children learn through their bodies, through play, through creativity, and through expression, “so it’s very stifling to tell all these children not to do something.”

Understanding that

teachers are overwhelmed and often don’t know what to do, it is her work, she said, to work with the students in individually tailored ways.

A passionate advocate for youth, Harris stated that as the curriculum at ACT continues to expand, the goal is to acknowledge and reflect that the focus for their young adults “shouldn’t be confined to one idea of just stroking a brush, or writing a song or a poem, or learning an instrument ... but it’s the art of living; it’s the art of health and wellness.”

To reach J.A. Jones, email jjones@theweeklychallenger.com

CHURCH NEWS



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Website: www.mzprogressive.org

Sunday Worship Services.....7:45 a.m. & 10:00 a.m.
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Wednesday Prayer Service.....6:00 p.m.
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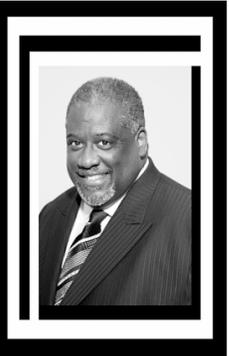


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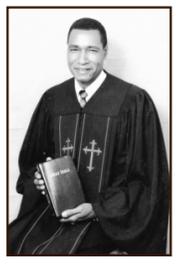
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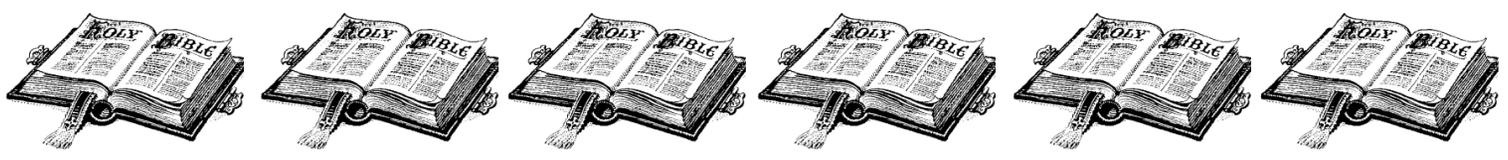
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COMMUNITY NEWS

A healthy taste of home at the new SPC Deuces Den

TASTE, from front page



desert. So we're hoping to showcase not only Black, small businesses, but also offer fresh food options."

The café incubator is a win-win for the community and start-up businesses, allowing owners to expand their businesses without the burden of a costly overhead. It will also provide residents another fresh food option in the neighborhood. Griffith hopes it will also plant the seed for visitors to imagine their educational futures.

"In an effort to serve the community, it's important for them to feel comfortable. Some people may feel intimidated about coming to college or believe it's not for them," Griffith said. "My hope is that, as individuals come into our doors, they can see themselves as students at SPC."

Dreams do come true

From the moment they first met, the Germanys always aspired to break generational boundaries in their family. They may not have expected that they would have a café on a college campus serving up a healthy taste of home one day. Now they do, and they are setting an entrepreneurial example in their family.

"I never thought for once in my life I would own a business," Omar Germany said. "But now, that's all our kids talk about — owning their own business."

Livy O's started as a



family-affair catering business, with the couple making meals and packing them in traditional to-go containers. Six and half years later, this power couple employs more than 20 families and specializes in private chef services, cooking classes, corporate and private catering, and so much more.

It's a full-circle moment for this dynamic duo. The Germanys are the first in their family to go to college, build a successful business, and now they are serving meals to SPC students as they pursue their dreams of economic prosperity.

Fostering economic mobility

Wealth inequities have affected both large and small businesses in Midtown and throughout

St. Petersburg. Since the closure of the local Walmart in 2017, Midtown has become a food desert once again, leaving residents without easy access to fresh, affordable and nutritious food. High poverty levels have deterred major retail grocers from opening stores in the area.

As a leader in engaging businesses, government, and the community, SPC's Deuces Den reinforces the college's commitment to investing in the economic growth and stability of south St. Petersburg by connecting with local businesses and the community to promote economic mobility for minority entrepreneurs.

Welcome to the Titan family, Livy O's!



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Class of 2019



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School vouchers: A parent's nightmare

BY JODI YONDER
Contributor

MIAMI – Rebecca Forbes-Levy is very passionate about education. Like many African-American parents, she wanted to make sure her only son received the best education available. Unfortunately, like many parents, she bought into the McKay Scholarship program, which is code for vouchers. It began a nightmarish journey that Forbes-Levy painfully recalls.

"I went to Tallahassee and spoke against these programs before the legislature for at least three years in a row," Forbes-Levy lamented. "I did not want anyone to go through what my family experienced. It was devastating."

Vouchers use Florida taxpayer dollars to pay for recipients to attend private schools. The pitch is always the same. For African Americans, the opportunity to send their child to a so-called private school is alluring. It is also



Left, Rebecca Forbes-Levy and Sen. Janet Cruz (D) Tampa

presented as an upscale alternative to public schools.

But the private school label cannot cover the inadequacy beneath. Forbes-Levy found that her son's time in a Homestead pop-up school cost thousands more than the vouchers covered and was a curriculum wasteland.

Her son graduated with worthless unacceptable credit hours. No col-

lege would accept him. He had to go back to public school to get the proper credits to attend college. Forbes-Levy quit her job to help guide her son through his two-year high school redo.

Forbes-Levy's son will graduate from Florida International University in June. The traumatic experience was not lost on a mother who knew that the voucher education came with a price. She is

still indignant when she tells the story of fraud. But sheer determination helped her realize the dream despite the bad experience.

But voucher advocates and their host schools are determined to boost the voucher budget share by another half a billion dollars this year. Education experts and numerous experts describe the effort as a "hollowing out" and resegregation of public

schools."

Now Florida Republicans are working at a fierce pace to pass their expansion effort. The plan's income threshold is middle income, and recipients have "education savings accounts" or debit cards to pretty much spend as they like. An extraordinary addition is legislation that includes students who have never enrolled in public school.

The controversy continues because voucher school records, curriculum, standards and regulations are lax. It's near impossible to find out how the money is spent and on what. Requests for public information on the for-profit schools or regulations go unanswered.

The schools rarely last long. Many African-American students and their parents are forced to return to public schools because the vouchers do not deliver on the better education promise. But the exploitation continues. School owners have received \$5.5 billion in state tax dollars since 2014.

The COVID-19 pandemic has not stopped lawmakers' efforts to funnel money out of public-school classrooms to voucher schools.

"Ninety percent of our students attend public schools, and we see school districts that are reeling from the increased economic burden of this (COVID-19) pandemic. The expansion of these education savings accounts as a backdoor to funnel these public dollars into private schools, in my opinion, is inexcusable," said Senator Janet Cruz (D-Tampa).

In the House, the bill sponsor speaks with pride about the impact of the law. "But again, the big picture is let's get something done that makes the world better for parents and students," said bill sponsor Rep. Randy Fine, a Palm Bay Republican.

Judging by the experiences of parents like Forbes-Levy, the voucher efforts keep hurting the families it is supposed to be helping.

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Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Inc. welcomes new members

ST. PETERSBURG — The members of Zeta Gamma Zeta Chapter of Zeta Phi Beta Sorority, Incorporated proudly presents two new members to the sorority. On Saturday, April 3, the virtual induction ceremony welcomed Marisha Jackson and Molly Brewster Giduz.

After the virtual ceremony, words of welcome and encouragement were given to the ladies. Pre-pandemic, the sorority would have had a welcome reception with family and friends of the new members. However, Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. recognizes the importance of being safe during this time and will celebrate the new sorority sisters at a more appropriate time.

Jackson earned a Bachelor of Science degree in Biology from St Petersburg College, and Brewster Giduz received a Bachelor of Arts from Eckerd College. Both ladies are proud to be members of the sorority.

Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. was founded by five women on Jan. 16, 1920, on the campus of Howard University. Zeta Phi Beta Sorority Inc. members focus on scholarship, service, sisterhood, and finer womanhood. This international sorority focuses on social causes, including the March of Dimes, Relay for Life, elder care, youth involvement, and many other worthy causes to aid our community, country, and the world.



Marisha Jackson



Molly Brewster Giduz

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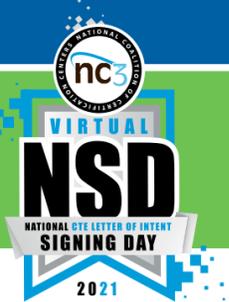
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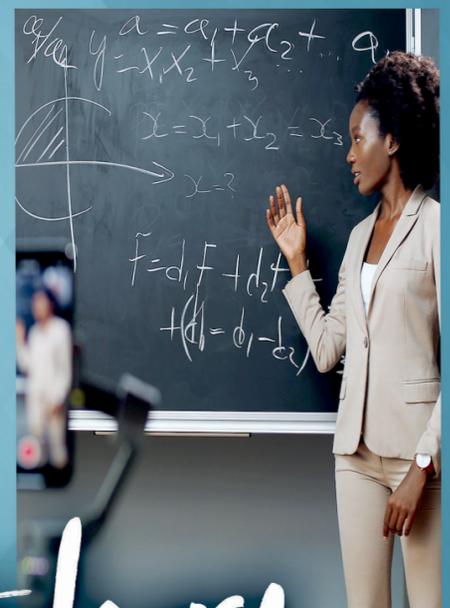
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Dr. LaDonna Butler, LMHC
Founder/Clinical Director, The Well for Life



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SPC'S RISE program offers boost to a better life

PINELLAS COUNTY – When Dr. Althea Blake began working in higher education, she encountered a student in tears one day. Blake learned that she was crying because she'd made a mistake that would cost her time, money, and possibly college credit. She also found out the young woman had just aged out of foster care and had no one to help her navigate college systems.

"She had received misleading information that had caused her to make a wrong decision, and it was hitting her hard," Blake said. "After meeting her and learning about her background, I became very interested in helping this type of student. They're the same as first-generation college students – but their problems are worse."

Blake is now the coordinator of St. Petersburg College's new RISE (Road to Independence, Success and Excellence) program. It is committed to providing a comprehensive support system for homeless or aging out students from the foster care system, all of whom attend college via the Department of Children and Families' Tuition and Fee Waiver.

Teens who have aged

out of the system have already lived through more traumatic events than many will ever face, including abuse and/or neglect, multiple foster placements, interrupted education, and possibly the loss of friends, family and siblings, according to the U.S. government's Interagency Working Group on Youth Programs. These challenges can create new ones for young adults trying to forge their path alone, including homelessness, health problems, and mental health issues.

"It's hard to focus when you're hungry or don't know if you'll have a place to live tomorrow," said Blake, who began her career as an investigator for Child Protective Services, then later worked as a case manager. "It's like trying to concentrate when you're stuck in survival mode."

Funded in part by the Educate Tomorrow – Helios Education Foundation grant and housed in SPC's Retention Services, RISE aims to increase the graduation rate of these unique student populations through advocacy, mentorship, extracurricular opportunities, and connections to resources.

Blake said RISE seeks

to create stability for these students in the areas of housing, food, as well as social and financial situations. She is planning a series of workshops highlighting campus and community resources to ensure that students are aware of the support opportunities available to them.

"Through SPC's Titans Care resources, the college already has many systems in place to address these needs, including food pantries, clothing closets, and free bus passes," Blake said. "I want to educate and encourage students to use the resources available to them. We don't have to create many new programs; we just need to teach students how to access these services and streamline the process for doing so."

Housing can be a big challenge. Those aging out of foster care can currently get extended foster care, but many don't find that appealing. After hearing a student say she wished that she had gone that route, Blake decided a little rebranding might be in order.

"I'm trying to present it as more like a host program that international students use," Blake said. "I've reached out to dis-

cuss this with outside agencies. The homeless students I'm working with now are living in shelters, but I'd like to offer education that teaches them how to attain housing. The homeless waiver is great, but I want to get them in a home where they can stay."

As many students who are currently homeless or aged out of the foster system lack the social connections that others rely on for support, the RISE program seeks to widen their support networks through professional and peer mentorship. Students will have the option to be matched with professional mentors in their fields of study and with students in their major, who will help them assimilate to campus life.

In Spring 2021, SPC had 21 students attending with homeless waivers and 155 with foster care waivers. Though the program is under construction, Blake said students are already asking for help. They want information about textbook assistance, affordable housing and tutoring. One student needed tutoring immediately, so Blake assisted herself.

The first cohort of RISE students will begin



Dr. Althea Blake

their studies together at SPC in the Fall 2021 Term. Students who apply to the program will have regular meetings and events, such as a series of field trips designed to facilitate relationship-building among the group, including recreational and service activities.

Blake says that, though the main goal is to get them through college and into a career that can sustain them financially, she also wants RISE stu-

dents to enjoy their time at SPC.

"We want to make sure that once they are in, everything is working for them," she said. "But I also want to provide them with relief after all they've been through. I want to introduce fun memories in college instead of just the struggle."

Are you interested in SPC's RISE program? Visit the spcollege.edu/rise or contact Dr. Blake via email at Blake.Althea@spcollege.edu.

W W W . T H E W E E K L Y C H A L L E N G E R . C O M

The future of the Tropicana Field site

FRANK DROUZAS
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — As the future of the Tropicana Field site is ready to take shape, four short-listed developers from across the country presented their distinct visions directly to the public last week.

Representatives from Midtown Development, Portman Holdings/Third Lake Partners, JMA Ventures/Sugar Hill Community Partners, and Unicorp National Developments were given 15 minutes to present their plans for the 86-acre property.

City Development Administrator Alan DeLisle facilitated the event, and Mayor Rick Kriseman provided opening remarks, noting that "this site has a long, deep history in this city," and this isn't the first time the public has been engaged regarding its future.

"Many promises were made — promises that remain unfulfilled," the mayor said.

Kriseman is referring to the Gas Plant neighborhood that was razed in the early 1980s with the promise of jobs and opportunity for the Black community. The Gas Plant redevelopment caused 285 buildings to be bulldozed; more than 500 households, nine churches had to be relocated, more than 30 businesses moved or closed, and even Davis Elementary School, the first black primary school in St. Pete.

"It is because of the history and unkept promises that the public, our residents, our business owners, and any other interested stakeholders must be involved every step of the way until the last ribbon is cut on this site," Kriseman explained.

The mayor said the re-



development is a generational endeavor that will take many years for the site to be fully developed, leading to jobs, housing, and green space.

Since it is still unclear if the Tampa Bay Rays will remain in St. Pete once their lease agreement expires in 2027, each developer had to submit two different plans — one with a stadium and without.

Midtown Development

"There are as many diverse neighborhoods in this city as any other really large city, and that diversity should be reflected at the Trop," said Randy Morton of the Midtown Development team.

He pointed out that as it sits amidst distinct neighborhoods, the Trop site is a place looking for an identity, and building parks and streets would be the place to start.

"First job is to take Booker Creek and make it magnificent and marry it with Campbell Park, and expand the influence of the creek," Morton said.

He plans to build a greenway east all the way to the waterfront, diagonally crisscross the creek, come through the Trop site, and extend west to the Deuces and the Warehouse Arts District, and 20 or 30 blocks to the south.

"When our streets are put in place, it's going to

be a little like mending nets," he said. "And we will knit back together the city, and there'll be a new neighborhood or three or four neighborhoods on the Trop site that will add to the inventory of all of these fantastic places."

Morton envisioned a neighborhood that's "very walkable with abundant open spaces" and planned to expand Booker Creek to include water terraces and even introduce retail and dining establishments on small islands in the middle of the creek. The greenway will have eight linked parks, including arts parks and dog parks.

"We intend on taking the Heritage Trail that's on 9th and 22nd and extending that throughout the entire Trop site, over the freeway and even through Campbell Park," he said, "and use that as a place to commemorate great people who have been in the district — events, places, buildings, churches."

The plan also included small businesses and networking areas, micro-retail for entrepreneurs and artists, popup retail, and affordable housing integrated into neighborhoods and not stand-alone. The design process will "never stop getting community outreach from tip to stern," he added.

"We'll use your history as a guide for our design of your future," Morton

said.

Portman Holdings/Third Lake Partners

Eric Antalek, an architect and principal at HKS, part of the Portman Holdings/Third Lake Partners team, put Booker Creek at the center of the plan, calling it the "catalyst for redevelopment of the street grid" and a viable entity.

"We also want to reinvent the street grid there to bring in some of the community from south St. Petersburg as well as from the Warehouse Arts District on the west," he said. "We believe that the reconnection there will help the community grow over time."

Shelby Morris of HKS said that his group wants to engage local artists to develop the history of St. Pete so that it can be part of the design.

"It's more than just the artwork on the streets," he said. "It's cultural programs, it's the event spaces, it's the entertainment, and truly creating a 24/7 live-work-play environment where everybody through St. Pete and the region will come."

The group's ballpark plan seamlessly integrates the stadium with retail, hotel, and residences, while the non-ballpark scenario includes an extended Warehouse Arts District with additional office and residential components.

JMA Ventures/Sugar Hill Community Partners

A history walk filled with memorials and historical markers that cuts diagonally through the site is part of the vision of JMA Ventures/Sugar Hill Community Partners. It would serve as a critical connection back to downtown, the Warehouse Arts District, Deuces Live, Campbell Park and Melrose. Anchored at either end of the history walk are two civic spaces, and development along Booker Creek is also key for this group.

David Carlock, development manager for JMA Ventures/Sugar Hill Community Partners, said the plan would create more than 30,000 construction jobs and wants to ensure that south St. Pete residents receive the maximum benefits of those jobs. In this plan, at least 35 percent of residential units would be affordable housing with a cap of 80 percent area medium income (AMI), at least 10 percent of residential units would be workforce housing at 100 percent to 120 percent AMI and 100 affordable condo homes would be for sale.

Unicorp National Developments

Chuck Whittall, president and CEO of Unicorp National Developments, said he believes communities come together through parks. His plan, nicknamed "Petersburg Park," calls for 37 acres of park space.

"What the park will do is not only benefit the 86 acres where the stadium currently sits, it's going to benefit the entire community," he said.

He added that, unlike other developers, he doesn't seek to create different districts. Even though his plan includes affordable housing, workforce housing, and luxury housing, "but we don't want it to be distinguished as that; we want it all to

mix in together."

"I've seen some of the proposals create a district for this and a district for that," Whittall said. "What we're trying to do is create a community where everybody is together; everybody participates together in the community."

Collaboration through the community is critical and creates the ideal vision, he said.

Make sure you have a chance to ask questions and voice your concerns by attending a meeting tonight or Thursday night at the Coliseum starting at 6 p.m.

There are two ways for residents to provide input regarding the proposals leading up to the final development partner being selected:

Visit a showroom. There are immersive showrooms located throughout the city that are equipped with executive summaries of the proposals, renderings, and the ability to leave your input.

- North Library: 861 70th Ave. N

- Mirror Lake Library: 280 5th St. N

- JW Cate Rec Center: 5801 22nd Ave. N

- Enoch Davis Rec Center: 1111 18th Ave. S

Submit a comment online. To submit your thoughts to the Economic Development team, visit stpete.org. Community feedback will be collected until the final ribbon is cut on the Tropicana Field redevelopment. Input collected during this shortlist period will be provided to Mayor Rick Kriseman to inform a final development partner selection later this year.

Kriseman plans to make his final selection as soon as next month. Visit stpete.org to read all four proposals in detail and view the timeline of events.

Julius Bradley: Montford Point Marine is finally honored

BRADLEY, from front page

treatment, demoralization, appalling conditions, and the U.S. Marines Corps was no different.

The first Black men recruited into the Marine Corps began on June 1, 1942. Between 1942 and 1949, nearly 20,000 African-American men completed recruit training and became known as the Montford Point Marines.

All but left out of American's "Greatest Generation" narrative, President Barack Obama signed into law the legislation to award the Congressional Gold Medal to the Montford Point Marines on Nov. 23, 2011. It took almost seven decades and the first Black president of the county to recognize the Montford Point Marines' contributions to the Marine Corps and the United States.

Bradley had passed away when the Congressional Gold Medal was presented collectively to the Montford Point Marines on June 7, 2012, at a ceremony held in the U.S. Capitol Rotunda. Many of the Montford Pointers were present for the ceremony.

emony.

Bradley was born on Dec. 1, 1912, in the Pass-a-Grille Beach area. His father, William Bradley, owned two houses and a rooming house he rented to Black workers from St. Petersburg to work in the hotels and kitchens. He also owned a concession that sold goodies and rented bathing suits to Black beachgoers.

In the early 1920s, Pass-a-Grille was becoming a beach town, and African Americans were no longer welcomed. "We had to leave, all Indians and all Blacks. It came down from city hall or somewhere. The mayor was named (J.J.) Duffy. We were the only ones left. What was happening was the city was expanding, and they were building on the bay side and Gulf side, and the city wasn't going to sandwich in one Black family," said Bradley in a 1990 article in the St. Petersburg Times.

Once again, eminent domain claimed the wealth of another Black family. William Bradley was the last African American to leave the area,

moving his family to St. Pete. The family moved to Sixth Avenue and 17th Street South in the Gas Plant area, which again was taken by eminent domain to build Tropicana Field in the 1980s.

The family was apprehensive about leaving Pass-a-Grille because of the racial terror lynchings that took place in St. Pete.

"One thing about this town ... They lynched Negroes in St. Petersburg, but nothing like that happened in Pass-a-Grille," said Bradley to the St. Petersburg Times.

After graduating from Gibbs High School, he attended Morris Brown College, majoring in biology and chemistry. Bradley decided to take a job at Gibbs as a math teacher. He then enlisted into the marines on Oct. 14, 1943, leaving his first wife (Alene Ivey Bradley) back in St. Pete. From that union, he produced Jacquilin Bradley Wallace and Rudolph Bradley.

"He just wanted to serve," said his first daughter Bradley Wallace, who could not attend the ceremony.

Bradley left the military in May of 1946 as a sergeant and went back to teaching at Gibbs. He married his second wife (Helen Bradley), and from that union came Cynthia McTier, Rosalyn Hunter, and Mary Bradley. Once their marriage dissolved, he moved to Philadelphia, eventually moving back to St. Pete before his death on Dec. 17, 1991.

"We honor these men ... because they served with dignity. They were pathfinders for the future of Black men and women in the United States," said Gillis.

At the ceremony, 95-year-old Montford Point Marine George McIvory made the trek from Jacksonville to meet Bradley's family and tell his story.

He entered the marines in January of 1944, right out of high school.

"Once I got in there and learned how tough it was and what the situation was, I resigned that ... I would never wash out. If I got out of the Marine Corps, it would be on my terms not that I was made to get out. Everything



Retired Marine Carlton Hooker with Master Gunnery Sgt. George Gillis, Retired

was segregated ... they really wanted to make sure that you didn't qualify," said McIvory.

The Bradley family would like to thank former Marine Carlton Hooker for alerting them to the fact their patriarch was due his Congressional Gold Medal. After attending a funeral for Bradley's sister, Hooker noticed that his grave marker had "U.S. Marine Corps World War II" on it. He knew right then that Bradley was a Montford Point Marine.

Hooker told Pringle, and the two called the National

Montford Point Marine Association, who in turn put them in contact with Chapter #29.

"That's what marines do — the brotherhood. They set the tone for us. I know, and every Black Marine knows what they went through was twice as hard as what we went through," said Hooker, who saw action in Vietnam.

If you know of a Montford Point Marine due his recognition, please contact George Gillis, president of the Montford Point Marine Association Inc. Chapter #29 at (904) 472-8536.



Master Gunnery Sgt. George Gillis, Retired, presents daughter Mary Bradley with Julius Bradley's recognition from President Barack Obama.



Members of the Montford Point Marine Association, Chapter #29 out of Jacksonville.



Julius Bradley's daughters Mary Bradley, Cynthia McTier, and Rosalyn Hunter with 95-year-old Montford Point Marine George McIvory

Our story in the Everglades.

We're supporting the National Audubon Society and the National Park Foundation to help protect, restore, and conserve water in the Everglades.

Learn more at publix.com/TheEverglades.

