

The Weekly Challenger

KEEPING YOU CONNECTED TO YOUR COMMUNITY

VOL. 52 NO. 50

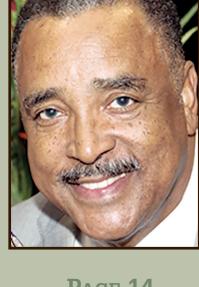
JULY 22 - AUGUST 4, 2021

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Bay News 9 reporter/anchor, Erica Riggins, had only intended on adopting one child but fell in love with three siblings. Riggins said she was "blessed" to have her three children come into her life.

Heart Gallery seeks homes for Black children

BY MARK PARKER
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — According to One Church One Child of Florida, on any given day, there are around 750 children in foster care in Florida; of those, more than 40 percent are African American, while making up only 17 percent of the state's population.

Patsy Stills, executive director for Heart Gallery of Pinellas & Pasco, said these numbers hold true locally. It is even worse if you are a teenager. Out of the last 10 Heart Gallery Children

adopted, just three were teens.

Stills said that coming from a big family with nine siblings gave her a passion for helping those growing up without that same sense of companionship.

"I just think how it would be awful if I was a 20-year-old kid and I had no family to go home to for the holidays," said Stills. "So that's my personal 'why.'

Heart Gallery began in 2001 when a professional photographer and adoption recruiter in New Mexico got the idea to use inspiring portraits of older children and sibling

groups to help aid in their chances of finding a forever family. It quickly spread and became a national organization to pool resources, share best practices, seek grants, and create corporate partnerships.

Stills said that the children referred to Heart Gallery have been in foster care for a while, many of them from two to five years. This is also after efforts to find a natural connection to adopt them have been exhausted. She said that most kids get put into temporary

See GALLERY, page 7

Rafael Robinson takes home Sunshine Ambassador Award, inspires City Council

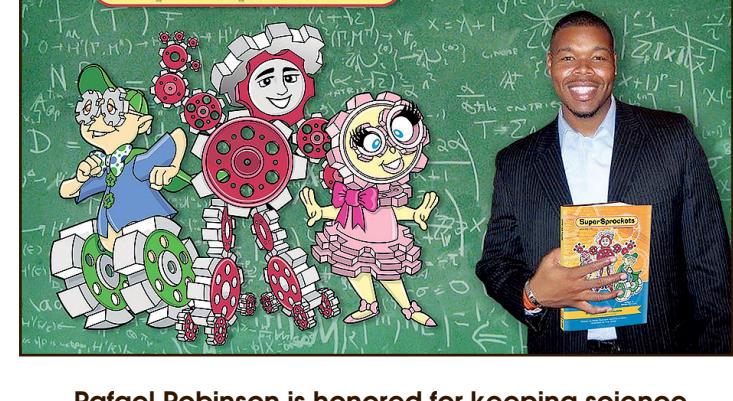
BY MARK PARKER
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — Rafael Robinson is a man of many talents — teacher, author, entrepreneur are just some of his titles, but his most important work may be what he is doing to instill the importance of STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) education in children throughout the community.

At a recent city council meeting, Robinson was recognized for his efforts, all of which are self-funded. There, councilmember Deborah Figgs-Sanders was honored to present him and his team with the Sunshine Ambassador Award.

"We always hear about what is wrong, what is wrong, what is wrong. I'm so honored to share something that is right," said Figgs-Sanders. "And the city provides the opportunity to do just that."

Figgs-Sanders said that the education system has come up short in hiring Black male role models to help close the educational gap, and that is why



Rafael Robinson is honored for keeping science at the forefront of children's minds.

the ongoing efforts of people like Robinson are so needed and valued. She added that less than two percent of the county's teachers are Black males.

She recalled a shirt one of Robinson's two daughters were wearing at a recent STEM Saturday event that he hosts. It read: "Forget being a princess; I want to be an engineer." Figgs-Sanders said that mindset is exactly what needs to be instilled in children.

"Especially from areas that we call challenged," said the councilwoman. "But we know those babies can learn. There's nothing challenging about it other than them being afforded the resources."

Figgs-Sanders then said that she would like to step out of her city council role and presented Robinson with a \$500 donation from her and her husband.

Robinson said that he feels

See ROBINSON, page 12

Essence of Ebony Pearls 2021 Debutante Cotillion



Kennedy Gray — Miss Debutante 2021

ST. PETERSBURG — Last month, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®, Zeta Upsilon Omega Chapter, in partnership with the Youth Development Foundation of Pinellas County, Inc., hosted their 11th Biennial Essence of Ebony Pearls Debutante Cotillion. Six beautiful young ladies were virtually presented into society.

The purpose of the cotillion is to promote the achievements of young ladies, inspiring educational and cultural growth, encourage personal development, and promote community service. The cotillion was the culminating activity for the 2020-21 Essence of Ebony Pearls Scholarship Program.

Even though this season was interrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, the young ladies quickly pivoted to adapt to online activities. The debutantes participated in various virtual workshops, beginning last fall. Lessons were taught in mental health and wellness, fashion and beauty, professional networking, etiquette, and leadership and advocacy.

The young ladies also planned and implemented a community service project where they hosted a virtual read-aloud for elementary school-aged students. Other activities included a mother-daughter tea, which celebrated women of the Harlem Renaissance, and a virtual painting party.

The debutantes were recognized for their academic achievements, church, community, and civic involvement. City Councilwoman Deborah Figgs-Sanders played the role of mistress of ceremony, and as the immediate past chairwoman of the cotillion, she narrated the memorable evening as the debutantes dressed impeccably in all white graced the stage and waltzed with their fathers.

Cassandra Williams and Madge Cooks served as the chairwoman and co-chair of the event. More than \$13,000 in scholarships were awarded.

The following outstanding debutantes were recognized for their achievements:

Miss Debutante 2021 — Miss

Kennedy Gray

First Attendant 2021 — Miss Serena Vazquez

Second Attendant 2021 — Miss

Richelle Still

Third Attendant 2021 — Miss Janae Terrell

See DEBUTANTE, page 6

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MEDIA PUBLISHING SPECIALIST

Department Name/Number: 0-0662-000 / WUSF-FM

College/Division: UCM-Broadcasting

Salary Plan: Staff

Hiring Salary/Salary Range: \$33,000 - \$39,500

Organizational Summary: WUSF Public Media is a comprehensive public media organization that operates an NPR news and jazz radio station and an all-classical music radio station, and provides digital content online, through newsletters, podcasts and social media and serves a weekly audience of greater than 350,000. It is a department of the University of South Florida, with 70 employees and a budget of \$11 million and provides internships to students. WUSF Public Media's main studios are on the USF Tampa campus, with a broadcast and music performance studio on the USFMSM campus and an office and news production studio on the USFSP campus.

Position Summary: This position is responsible for content creation, graphic design and updating of WUSF Public Media's Websites. It also requires writing and editing content. This position will assist the Webmaster with the creation of graphics used on the websites and marketing campaigns. This position will be responsible for coordinating social media marketing and promotional efforts for WUSF and Digital Services. This position will also assist the Manager of Digital Services in the development of new ideas and technical solutions that will increase the traffic to WUSF's websites and social media channels and also support the multiple Brands within our organization.

Responsibilities:

- Assists the Digital Services (DS) Department in receiving, editing, maintaining and updating the data on the WUSF Public Media Websites to ensure that information is accurate and up to date from all sources.
- Assists the Digital Services Department with creative interpretation for graphic design and graphic elements of digital media for the newsletter layout and content.
- Assists the Digital Services Department by constructing the weekly newsletter to include creating original content, editing content and making recommendations on the final composition.
- Assists the Digital Services Department in posting materials to multiple platforms of Social Media sites to include updating the layout and imagery required for WUSF's social media sites.
- Ensures that all data required by regulatory agencies are posted and removed on time.
- Performs other duties as assigned.

Minimum Qualifications: This position requires a high school diploma or equivalent, with at least four years of experience in an office or administrative support position requiring use of desktop publishing applications. Appropriate additional education may be substituted for this experience requirement.

How to Claim Veteran's Preference: This position allows eligible veterans and their spouses to claim Veterans' Preference pursuant to Florida Statute 295.

For information on obtaining a DD 214 visit <http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/> or call 1-866-272-6272.

USF Tampa

Information for Applicants

This position is subject to a Level I criminal background check.

Job Opening Number: 27063

Location: Tampa, Florida

Posting Date: 06/29/2021

Posting End Date: 07/13/2021

For full description and to apply, please go to Access Careers@USF at <https://www.usf.edu/work-at-usf/careers/> and enter 27063 under Search Jobs.



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The following vehicle will be sold at public auction, free of all prior liens, per Fla. Stat. 713.78 at 9:00am on August 5, 2021 and August 9, 2021 at leinor's address. No titles AS IS, Cash Only. Oasis Towing & Recovery, LLC 4020 8th Ave S; St. Petersburg, FL 33711. Phone 727-623-1341

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2014 Chevy Vin#1G1155S38EU125704

08/09/2021

2003 Dodge Vin#1D7FL16X13S257212

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DEADLINES

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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The views expressed by The Weekly Challenger columnists/advice columnists do not necessarily reflect the views of The Weekly Challenger. By publishing such columns, The Challenger is not advocating the following of any advice or suggestion expressed.

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Submissions to The Weekly Challenger may be edited for reasons of space, clarity or for considerations of liability. All submissions become the sole property of The Weekly Challenger.

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believes that America can best lead the world from racial antagonism when it accords to every man, regardless of race, creed or color, his human and legal rights. Hating no man, fearing no man... the Black Press strives to help every man in the firm belief that all men are hurt as long as anyone is held back.



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RATE REDUCTION SPECIAL!



PICK OF THE WEEK!

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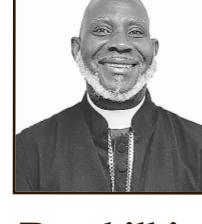
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Breaking the Cycle

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

Bishop Buzzkill is Back!

DEBUNKING INCLUSIVE

Praise the Lord.

Yes I'm back and Yes I'm finna deal with this so-called ministry of inclusion where it's being taught that it doesn't matter anymore how you live because there is no more sin and hell and we all will enter into paradise or heaven.

This lie started years ago by a mega church pastor who was later removed and stripped of his position and he lost his church and before that even had the nerve to go to the headship which elevated him and tried to convince them that God had come to him and him alone and told of this "new gospel" and that the centuries old teaching that you will have to repent or face judgment by God is no longer valid and God Himself made a mistake.

Oh, I know you reading this and thinking this sounds crazy and far-fetched but go look at "Come Sunday" on Netflix. Since that "MOVIE" came out there were some of the characters in that movie that came forward and clarified some of the scenes or corrected some of the events, remember, it was a movie and we all know most times things have to be sensationalized to sell.

Now, to this day, several other well known pastors have clung to this heresy and its spread throughout the nation, EVEN lil ol south St Pete. Yes I know personally of pastors that are pushing it like the "new crack" and those that remain in their church are reluctantly staying hoping their leader comes back to himself and back to the scriptures and back to God. But let me assure you of this one thing, once satan has his hooks in you, especially if you are the headship of the church, not God's church, he will not let go so easily. As the head goes so goes the body and if the head is poisoned, polluted and beguiled, so will the saints that remain under him.

I preached this last week on my Facebook Live that God is not gonna grant you an exemption if you knowingly or not knowingly stay under someone

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I preached this last

COMMUNITY NEWS

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WE NEED YOUR HELP!

RACISM IN SCHOOL EXCLUSIONARY SUSPENSIONS:

Through the lens of African American middle and high school students, and their families, and community members.

A Research Study on School Suspensions // Study# 002217

WHAT? //

A Study on African American middle and high school students with multiple school suspensions.

WHY? //

We need YOUR help to better understand your beliefs about school suspensions and recommendations.

HOW? //

You can participate in a virtual survey, a virtual focus group and/or a virtual individual interview to discuss your experiences with out of school suspensions. The survey will take no more than 1 hour . The focus group will take 1 hour and the individual interview will take 1 hour. You will spend a total of 1-3 hours depending on whether you participated in the survey, the focus group, and/or the individual interview.

WHEN? //

We will conduct the student survey, focus groups, and individual interviews from July, 2021 through August, 2021.

WHO? //

We are looking for: **African American middle and/or high school students** who have had more than one school suspension from August, 2018 to August, 2021.

RISKS? //

No known additional risks to those who take part in this study. Even though the study is virtual, there is a risk of transmission of the novel coronavirus from these procedures if you take part in the study at one of our community sites. While precautions will be taken, we cannot guarantee that participants will not be exposed to the virus.

INCENTIVE //

A \$25 gift card for participating in the survey, a \$25 gift card for participating in a focus group, and a \$25 gift card if you also participate in an individual interview.

For more information, please contact:

If you live in Hillsborough County
Dr. Brenda L. Walker
[\(brendawalker@usf.edu\)](mailto:brendawalker@usf.edu)
(813) 974-1385

If you live in Hillsborough or Pinellas County
Dr. Saundra Johnson Austin
johnsonaustin@usf.edu
(574) 261-5876

If you live in Pinellas County
Dr. LaSonya L. Moore
lmoore@usf.edu
(727) 873-4153

To **REGISTER** send us your name, phone number, and note whether you are a student, parent, grandparent, guardian or member of the community to projectrises@usf.edu.



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HIV Housing Summit

9 a.m.-3 p.m., July 28
9 a.m.-Noon, July 29

Join us as we work together to give HIV-positive Pinellas County residents better access to affordable housing. **Meet online or in-person** at EPIC's St. Petersburg office, 3050 1st Ave. South. All attendees receive a \$10 Publix gift card to purchase lunch.

Topics include

- Local and state housing updates using important information from other community housing initiatives
- HIV housing solutions
- Panel discussions with clients, landlords and social service providers
- Engaging our collaborative network

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Please Note: Registration information is being collected by Collaborative Labs.

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EPC-21-0345

Healing While Black 2021: 'We are the One'

BY J.A. JONES
Staff Writer

ST PETERSBURG — In its fourth year, The Well for Life's fourth annual BIPOC mental health awareness summit, 2021 Healing While Black, returns this week, offering an array of powerful speakers, presentations, community gatherings, and experiences.

Registration for events from Friday, July 23 to Sunday, July 25 is open online now — while a last-minute slot has been added for Thursday, July 22, at 2:30 p.m. with Bob Devin Jones hosting a conversation on healing through art with local artists at Studio@620.

Participants who are fully vaccinated and "feeling well" — as well as those viewing online — will experience events at SPC's Allstate Center at 3200 34th St. S, with additional outdoor events happening at Boyd Hill Nature Preserve, the Deuces Corridor, the Dr. Carter G. Woodson African American Museum, and other location.

Dr. LaDonna Butler, founder of The Well, said the conference was built around the theme "We are the One" and noted many reasons for imbuing this year's conference with the empowering and uplifting theme.

"It was important for us to focus on our ability to show up as a people. This year is really a celebration of resiliency and a celebration of our strength," she shared.

Noting that the past year had been a difficult one, inspiring the desire to "celebrate the power of collective healing, and well-being," coming through a global pandemic, social and racial unrest, as well as an economic shift in our country."

Butler noted that the theme is inclusive of not just health care practitioners but also the wider community. "We're the ones that show up — we're the ones to take care of our neighbors. We're the ones that have the solution and strategy embedded in us."

She also acknowledged that the theme also takes into account the hardships facing our community. "We also are the ones that are showing up at number one for some of the greatest health disparities, including asthma, diabetes, COVID, HIV."

But, she added, while we are facing these dis-

parities, "We also are the ones that have the capacity to be resilient, and to restore, and to be able to respond to one another in ways that are restorative."

On Friday, the conference focuses on community and professional development, with virtual training in topics, including Applicable Strategies for supporting BIPOC mental health and collaborative learning to aid in long-term solutions for healing communities by leveraging collective power.

On Friday evening, the offerings shift to the James Museum, at 150 Central Ave., for an evening of "artist conversation and poetic expression," including artist Nick Davis and a DJ spinning music.

Saturday — Deconstructed Series

- Melanated Movement: several physical activities, including yoga and mindfulness with Clayton Sizemore, a basketball tournament, an Outdoor Afro Hike, Kickball, and a water aerobics session with Dr. Natasha Rubie

- Nourish and Reflect: "Family Picnic," "Brown Girl Brunch," and "Brothers and BBQ"

- Textured Conversations: with events at Divine Textures in Gulfport and Central Station Barberhop and Grooming in St. Pete.

Saturday's water aerobics facilitator, Dr. Natasha Rubie, shared how her work contributed to healing. "I got involved with Dr. Butler because I first started out with what she was doing on gun violence in the neighborhood in St. Petersburg. And from there, we realized that a lot of those neighboring environments were not allowed to use certain pools. They weren't to allow to be able to get in there and do water aerobics, or anything that's exercise-driven."

Rubie has taught water aerobics for the last seven years and spoke passionately about its restorative power.

"I've seen people able to have movement in their lives. A lot of people don't have a starting point. And so, at least in the water, even if you can't walk, if you're wheelchair-bound, in the water you're able to have water-legs. It's the most amazing thing — I've watched people cry because they didn't realize the power of water."



Dr. LaDonna Butler's Healing While Black 2021 mental health awareness summit gets underway this weekend. Registration for events from Friday, July 23 to Sunday, July 25 is open online now at thewellforlife.squarespace.com.

Sunday, the conference wraps up with "A Celebration of Us" — including painting in the park led by artist Catherine E Weaver, an early morning photo walk conducted by Boyzell Hosey, and the Community Festival featuring local vendors, a food court, two live music areas, and local artists.

Other guest speakers and presenters include Corey B. Best, Rochelle Ritchie, Dr. S. Kent Butler, Dr. Shamariel Roberson, Josh Odom, and Kempis "Ghani" Songster.

Butler noted that "We are the Ones" brings the entire community into the act of self-care — including, in her case, a neighbor who found a family member with dimension wandering the streets and brought her home to stay with her until Butler was contacted.

"It's also our healthcare practitioners who sacrificed their own families, their own time and respond to some of the most dangerous and critical places in our health," said Butler. It's our organizers who are helping us to stay focused, vocal, and active around the things that keep our communities safe; our media, where we have the power to direct the story in a way that highlights and affirms the truth about our community.

"So, when I say, 'we are the ones,' I'm talking about the collective we."

To register for this week's 2021 Healing While Black Summit, go to thewellforlife.squarespace.com.

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Parental wellness respite program celebrates inaugural Baby Jordan Belliveau Community Bash

BY J.A. JONES
Staff Writer

DUNEDIN — When two-year-old Jordan Belliveau was found lifeless in Largo Park in 2018, his life snuffed out at the hands of his 21-year-old mother, Charisse Stinson, the blame game immediately began. Media pointed to flaws in the foster care system, family pathology, and negative influences surrounding Stinson and the baby's father, Jordan Belliveau Sr.

The tragedy prompted systemic reviews and a new bill, Jordan's Law, to improve communication between child welfare agencies and law enforcement.

On the local level, the Belliveau case stirred a grandmother to become an activist for parental wellness. Chantala Davis founded the nonprofit A Mother's Arms (AMA) in response to the incidents leading up to Jordan's death and response to experiences closer to home.

Davis, a Clearwater native, was moved by both the unnecessary and horrendous death of the infant, and the no-win situation Stinson, a young mother under stress, with an unstable upbringing and no support system, found herself in. Once a teenaged mother herself, Davis decided to act when her own daughter began to cry out for support.

"People fail to realize — yes, the children are an asset in our lives, and they are our future — but what about the parents? Some

of them are broken, some of them have not learned things, some of them don't even know themselves," shared Davis.

A graduate of Eckerd College with a Bachelor's of Arts degree in Human Service, Davis held positions as a program facilitator, youth support, and outreach worker and participated in various local groups and organizations as a community advocate before founding AMA. She is also a member of the National Black Child Development Institute.

But Davis said it's her life experiences and those of family, friends, and community members like Stinson that informed her decision to start A Mother's Arms (riving to r(elieve a) m(other's) s(tress). Davis had the opportunity to speak with Stinson after she caused her son's death.

"The one thing she kept saying is that it didn't come with instructions on how to be a parent. And she said she didn't have any backbone. She didn't have the village."

And it is that exact lack of support that Davis is targeting.

"It is a village effect that I'm trying to bring back — helping us to understand one another and support and empower through strength, not the weaknesses. That's what we're not concentrating on."

Davis has completed two sessions of her eight-week program, servicing intimate groups of mothers who have met weekly

online to work through the curriculum Davis provides, along with presentations by online guest speakers.

"Of course, an eight week-curriculum is not going to teach someone everything about themselves. But I bring in guest speakers and the expertise that they will normally not seek out," acknowledged Davis, who noted that many women don't go to workshops — or even read books.

Various life topics are presented, such as balancing a budget, saving money, and financial issues, that are often difficult to discuss.

"Some of them have not even learned but had to be taught how to be an adult or how to manage their bills. These are

stress triggers — when a single mother is sitting there, and they're trying to figure out OK, how do I get this bill paid?"

The curriculum also reviews parenting styles. Davis recalled a class she had at Eckerd that revealed to her that she had issues stemming from her own upbringing that needed addressing.

"Obtaining my degree from Eckerd College had me looking in a mirror. I'm sitting there, and I'm going through everything in class, and I'm reading up on some things, and I'm like: 'Oh my God; that's me. That's why I do things like I do.' That's something that it took me until I got into college as an adult to understand. So, just imagine how many adults are walking

around here who don't even know themselves?" mused Davis.

Recalling how, as a young pregnant teen mom, she skipped over a lot of childhood and went straight into adulthood, Davis said there's a lot of things she missed.

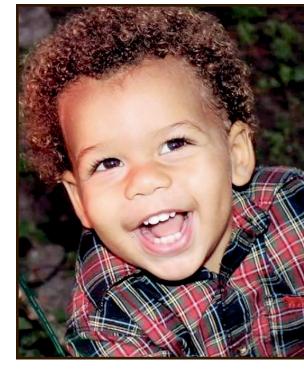
"I wasn't taught how to be a woman; I wasn't taught any kind of childcare skills." Most importantly, shared Davis. "I wasn't taught how strong the mind is over everything else within you."

The curriculum goes into problematic habits inherited from childhood — yelling, shaming, and demeaning children — all behaviors Davis noted that negatively impact a child's sense of self. Sometimes they touch on complex topics that might cause shame if Davis didn't handle the discussions as gently as she does.

"Sometimes they're embarrassed; we'll have sessions called 'peel the onion,'" said Davis, who encourages her participants to share anonymous questions or topics that she addresses without stating anyone's name.

"She teaches you self-evaluation," said Davis's daughter, 31-year-old Chanteia Simmons, who has gone through the program. "It's good for mothers or parents because it takes you back kind of to the basics of yourself and teaches you how to re-evaluate how you're thinking."

Maranda Douglas shared, "I think it's a much-needed program



Jordan Belliveau was found lifeless in Largo Park in 2018. His mother admitted she hit him and left him there.

for first-time parents or mothers or any mothers that are in distress. It was really nice to be able to just take a minute to really think about myself and my personal wellness and then how that reflects into my parenting style. That was useful."

Nicole, a 46-year-old mother, shared, "It helps you with a lot of things you go through in life. You learn that things we were taught growing up are not always right."

Board member LaTisha Bell has been a case manager and child and family consultant. She believes in AMA's mission and its supportive work to bring about more safety for young children.

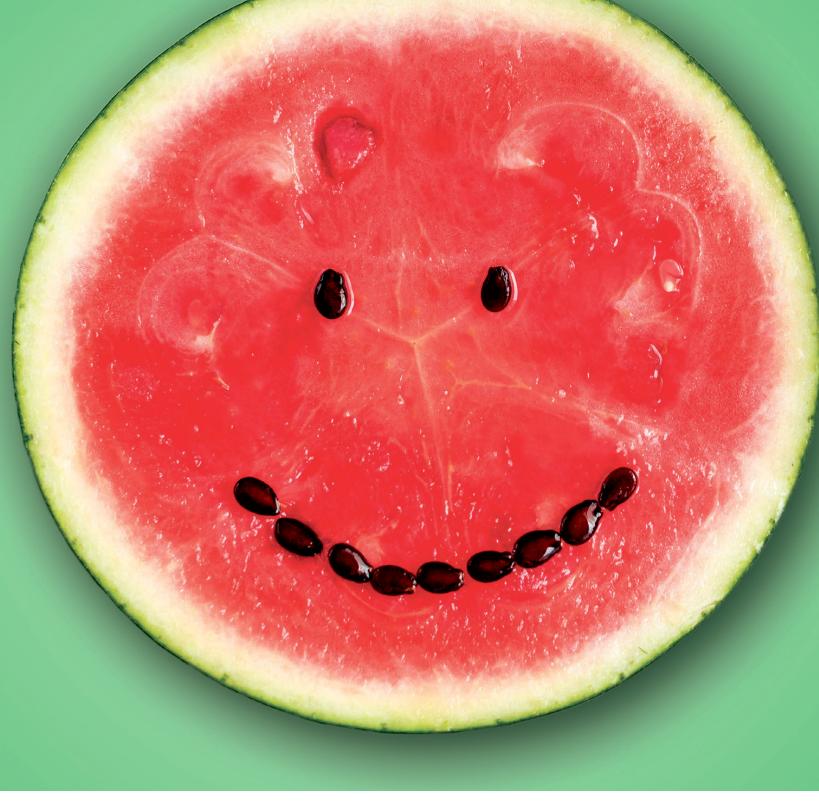
"Our children will have a better chance of not being abused when they have these types of services — resources like AMA — in place."

AMA's upcoming Saturday, July 25, inaugural Baby Jordan Belliveau Community Bash will take place from 12-3 p.m. at Eli's Bar-B-Que, 360 Skinner Blvd., Dunedin. For more information, call 727-815-6399, and follow AMA on Facebook.



Chantala Davis (right) posing with one of her A Mother's Arms program participants.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

6 THURSDAY, JULY 22, 2021

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The Weekly Challenger

Essence of Ebony Pearls 2021 Debutante Cotillion

DEBUTANTE , from front page

Miss Supreme Spirit – Miss Kennedy Gray

Miss Community Service – Miss Kennedy Gray

Miss Congeniality – Miss Richelle Still

About Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®

Founded in 1908, Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated® is the oldest Greek-letter organization established by African-American women. Sorority members are committed to cultivating and encouraging high scholastic and ethical standards, promoting unity and friendship, alleviating social issues that affect girls and women, maintaining a progressive interest in college life, and serving all humankind.

The Zeta Upsilon Omega Chapter was chartered on December 15, 1955, where Lisa Brody presides as chapter president today.

About Youth Development Foundation of Pinellas County, Inc.

The Youth Development Foundation of Pinellas County, Inc. is the 501(c) 3 nonprofit designated entity. Established in 1998, the purpose of the Foundation is to enhance the quality of life for targeted youth and families in Pinellas County by securing funds to provide program activities and services, which focus on education and scholarships, health, the arts, the family unit as well as foster economic and community development within our community.

To learn more about Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Incorporated®, Zeta Upsilon Omega Chapter, visit www.zuochapter.org.

Kennedy Gray was a Junior at Boca Ciega High School where she was a member of Pirates Debate Club, Color Guard Co-Cap-

tain, the Fundamental Program, the St. Pete Aquatics Swim Team, the NAACP Youth Council, Black Girls Lead, Black Girls Venture, Community Youth Literacy Advocates and a member of the AKA AKAdemy Exquisite Gems program. After graduation, she plans to attend Bethune-Cookman University and Howard University School of Law and major in Communications & Pre-Law. Her career goal is to practice family law and become a judge. She enjoys reading, writing poetry and cooking with her grandmother. Debutante Kennedy Gray was introduced to society by her parents, Kendrick and Donnebra Gray.



Debutante Kennedy Gray



Debutante London Starks

London Starks was a junior at Lakewood High

School and in the St. Petersburg College Early Learning Program. She was the Captain of the Girls Varsity Soccer Team, member of the Girls Varsity Swimming Team, Girls Varsity Track team and Strictly Soccer Futball Club. Her other activities and honors include being a Campus Ambassador and Volunteer with Feeding Tampa Bay, Assistant Nursery Leader at Pinellas Community Church, Spelman College Prep Institute, AKA AKAdemy Exquisite Gems program and she received the Dr. Mac J. Williams Academic Excellence Award. After graduation, London plans to attend Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University to major in Physics & Astronomy. Her career goal is to earn her Ph.D. & become a NASA researcher. Her hobbies and interests include art, soccer, swimming and reading. Debutante London Starks was presented to society by her parents, Patrick Tyler and Oneika Tyler.



Debutante Richelle Still

Richelle Still was a senior at Boca Ciega High School where she was involved in various programs and activities. She was a member of the Center for Wellness & Medical Professions, the Na-

tional Honor Society, the Science National Honor Society, Mu Alpha Theta Honor Society, Recycling Club, Youth in Government, President of Rho Kappa Honor Society, and the Health Occupations Students of America. Her awards include the Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Leadership Award, Vyrle Davis Award, and the Dr. Mac J. Williams Award. She was also a Woodson Warrior Scholarship Recipient and a member of the AKA AKAdemy Exquisite Gems program. After graduation, Miss Still plans to attend the University of Miami to major in International Studies. Her career goal is to become a political advocate & travel the world. Her hobbies include reading, creating art, being in nature, working with children, traveling and spending time with friends & family. Debutante Richelle Still was presented to society by her parents, Clifford and Arilee Still.



Debutante Janae Terrell

Janae Terrell was a senior at Boca Ciega High School where she is the Senior Class Vice-President and is in the Top 20% of the Senior Class. She is a member of the National Honor Society, Rho Kappa Spanish Honor Society and the Varsity Softball Team. She is also a member

of the AKA AKAdemy Exquisite Gems program. Miss Terrell was a recipient of the Terri Murph Scholarship and a Woodson Warrior Scholarship Recipient. After graduation, she plans to attend Tennessee State University to major in Biology or Physical Therapy. Her career goal is to become a General Dentist or a Physical Therapist. Her hobbies and interests include softball, cleaning, watching Netflix, hanging out with friends, swimming, going to the beach and traveling. Debutante Janae Terrell was presented to society by her parents, Grady and Debbie Terrell.



Debutante Serena Vazquez

Serena Vazquez was a junior at Admiral Farragut Academy High School where she was the Girls Varsity Track & Field Captain, Girls Varsity Soccer Captain, a member of the Diversity Club, and a member of the Drama Club. Miss Vazquez is a member of the AKA AKAdemy Exquisite Gems program and volunteers with Community Action Stops Abuse (CASA). After graduation, she plans to attend Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University to major in Sports Medicine. Her career goal is to become an athletic trainer. Her interests and hobbies include running

track, playing soccer, spending time with family & friends and cooking. Debutante Serena Vazquez was presented to society by her parents, Francisco and Sandra Vazquez.



Debutante Bree Wilson

Bree Wilson was a senior at St. Petersburg High School where she was the National Honor Society Secretary, the Girls Varsity Basketball Team Captain, she had a 4.0 weighted GPA, and was on the Principal's List during 2020-21 school year. Miss Wilson is a member of the Greater Mt. Zion African Methodist Episcopal Church where she serves as an officer of the Young Peoples Division (YPD), she was a Woodson Warrior Scholarship Recipient and a member of AKA AKAdemy Exquisite Gems program. After graduation, Miss Wilson plans to attend the University of North Florida where she plans to major in Marine Biology. Her career goal is to become a Marine Biologist and discover unknown parts of the ocean. Her hobbies and interests include playing basketball, watching CoryxKenshin on YouTube, hanging out with friends, and baking desserts. Debutante Bree Wilson was presented to society by her parents, Darryl and Cherita Wilson.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

The Weekly Challenger

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THURSDAY, JULY 22, 2021 7

Leisha McKinley-Beach's 30-year battle against AIDS, racism in the South, part 2

BY J.A. JONES
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — Leisha McKinley-Beach, a national HIV consultant involved in Pinellas County's Ending the HIV Epidemic initiative, has been at the forefront of Florida's battle against AIDS for 30 years. Originally from DeFuniak Springs in northwest Florida, she recalled that when she returned to northwest Florida to work as an AIDS advocate after graduating from the University of Florida, it was "one of the darkest periods of HIV for me."

At the time, said McKinley Beach, there weren't any Black HIV/AIDS organizations in the region; it was "a white gay male movement." As she began to try to build support for offering HIV services to Black people, McKinley-Beach said the amount of resistance she encountered was such that, before long, she was ready to throw the towel in.

"I had resistance from the health department; I had resistance from the AIDS service organizations; if I didn't believe in something greater than me, you and I would not be sitting here doing this story," she averred.

McKinley-Beach said that when she started discussing AIDS impacting Black and Brown communities, it became a problem for the agencies she dealt with. While more and more Black people were being diagnosed, there were no programs centered around them and no initiatives to reach Black people.

"They didn't want to hear that; they wanted me to remain with the AIDS service organization that was there, where the board was all white, the leadership was all white."

McKinley-Beach was one of a handful of Blacks in lower level, non-decision-making roles. The year was 1997, a year before Congress set aside funds through the Minority AIDS Initiative to address HIV among Black and Brown people.

At the time, McKinley-Beach was working under an HIV/AIDS program coordinator who was an older white male who tried to "smooth things over with me" by suggesting new "language" for discussing HIV in minority communities.

But McKinley-Beach knew it was time to change the infrastructure and framework. She proposed forming a minority advisory board able to

strategize and plan from a culturally relevant perspective.

"He and I went back and forth," McKinley-Beach remembered, "and he got so angry, he said, 'Fine, invite them all to come, get some chicken and some watermelon for dinner, and you will find that when they finish eating, and they leave, you will be here left by yourself to do this work.'"

This would have been upsetting for a seasoned professional to hear, but McKinley-Beach was only in her early 20s at that point.

"I had to pick my jaw up off the floor first. Then I said to him, 'I think you need to prepare for your next job.' I didn't know how I was gonna do it. But I knew that he would be the biggest barrier to us getting the services that Black people need."

Through the help of a community business owner, McKinley-Beach was able to gain the support of the NAACP presidents of four northwest Florida counties, and ultimately the man was removed from his position.

"I considered that a win. We got him out of that position, and the people who came after him, at least during my tenure there, were very cog-

nizant of the need to be inclusive and to look at the landscape and ensure that minority folks were in positions of influence."

McKinley-Beach went on to start the first Minority AIDS organization in Pensacola and then moved to work for the Florida Department of Health in the Bureau of HIV and AIDS. Unfortunately, they didn't have any Black same-gender-loving men in the program, and they were the group most impacted.

Her tenure taught her that she needed to be a voice and champion for the larger Black community.

"When I walked into the room, I had to bring Black women; I had to bring Black teens, I had to bring Black men, regardless of their sexual orientation — I was their voice. And that was something that I did not take lightly."

Today, McKinley-Beach sees Black women and Black same-gender-loving men in key positions throughout the state of Florida and as HIV/AIDS program coordinators throughout the state health department.

"I like to believe that all of those things are part of my legacy; when you see progress, you know your work is not in vain."



Keisha McKinley-Beach, a national HIV consultant, is involved in Pinellas County's Ending the HIV Epidemic initiative.

medical mistrust.

"It really is a thing, and it did not start with COVID-19, and there is so much more than just what happened in Tuskegee, Ala."

McKinley-Beach pointed to the Mississippi appendectomies, where Black women went to the hospital needing any type of procedure such as her tonsils removed and ended up being involuntary sterilized, which was a way to control the Black population.

Read Part One of this article here.

To learn more about Leisha McKinley-Beach and her work, visit Leisha.org.

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

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Heart Gallery puts heart and soul into finding forever homes for local kids

GALLERY, from front page

foster care and then return to their parents after meeting the court's requirements.

While temporary foster care is supposed to last for 12 months or less, sometimes a judge will give the parents up to two years to get their life together. Sometimes that is still not enough.

"Substance abuse with parents and domestic violence are the hardest things to kind of come back and help the families with to get their children back," said Stills, noting that many times they wind up getting their rights terminated as parents.

Once those children get referred to Heart Gallery, they have their pictures taken with local professional photographers who donate their time and talent. The photos are displayed throughout galleries in the community and on their website and social media sites. Small biographies of the children are written, and Stills said that she likes to get a video of the kids so that their personalities can better shine through.

"They're our kids; they're our community," remarked Stills. "They need a home, and they

don't have one. It's not their fault they're in foster care, and they're living in foster care until they are adopted or age-out."

Stills said that she has a particular issue watching teenagers of color linger in foster care and that Heart Gallery does not get a lot of interest or inquiries into these children. She believes there is a general stigma surrounding teens that they are hard to manage, and when a child is traumatized, they will often put up a wall or test potential parents to see if they will just let them go or leave them.

At the end of the day, she said they are mainly just teens being teens in the same way everyone once was. Stills adds that once they find their forever homes, parents are surprised at how well they were able to work through it and are happy they did.

"They want to spend time with you; they want that parent figure," said Stills. "They want to have that connection when they go off to college; they want that advice."

"I just don't want to see any more kids age out of foster care with no family to call home."

Adopting a child

under 18 is state-sponsored, meaning that potential parents do not have to pay for training, certifications, background checks, or court costs up to \$1,000. Their college education is also paid for, potentially saving their forever families tens of thousands of dollars. If someone adopts a child over 16 years old, their health insurance is covered for a more extended period than someone younger.

Stills said that the state tries to set these kids up for success, but success is fleeting when they do not have a family to support them as they make their way into adulthood.

On average, Heart Gallery also features four of five sets of siblings. They present their own set of challenges, as they can be in different age groups, and when many people consider adopting, they do not anticipate bringing home more than one child.

These children want and need to be adopted together, as losing the only family they still have would be devastating for them.

Bay News 9 reporter/anchor Erica Riggins is a recent success story.

As a single mother, when she started the adoption process, Riggins had only intended on adopting one child but fell in love with three siblings. The boys, ages 3, 4, and 5, were adopted last June. They recently went on their first airplane ride to Texas to visit extended members of their forever family.

If a single mom...

Bio: Jamal, 17, is in the 10th grade and describes himself as very chill. That is also what he is looking for in a family — to just be chill. He thinks the best family would be a mom and dad, with an older sister and younger brother. He said that having an older sister seems normal, and he has always wanted to be a big brother. A single mom would be ok too, as Jamal would embrace being the man of the house. Any race or ethnicity is fine, and he does not mind

doing chores. He would like a family that will hang out with him — play video games, shoot hoops with, or even just a game of monopoly would make him happy.



Pinellas-Pasco Heart Gallery A Program of Gulf Coast JFCSC

Jamal LSF- 10469419

Photos courtesy of Marina B. Photos

who works full-time can do it, anyone can do it," said Stills. "She found room in her heart and home for these children, and their lives are forever changed because of it."

Just as Stills keeps in touch with and offers support to Riggins, all the families who adopt through Heart Gallery are provided with an extensive network of people to help along the way. Corporate sponsorships also lend a helping hand, such as the Tampa Bay Rays. A special suite is dedicated to these adopted families at Tropicana Field, which provides them with a free, fun night out at a baseball game.

The process for adopting a child through Heart Gallery takes time so case managers can make sure the family and child are a good match for each other. After all, the idea is to find them a forever home.

Once someone shows

interest in a child from the website, more background information is given. Case managers will then ask both the child and potential parent if they would like to meet for a short introduction.

From there, it goes to supervised visits, unsupervised visits, and then to overnight stays. Finally, there is a 90 day period where they will live together in the same house.

"The last thing we want to see is someone make a quick decision, and it wasn't a good one," said Stills.

Most of all, Stills wants people to visit the website, see the kids, read their biographies, and see their lives without any preconceived notions of what it means to adopt a teenager, a kid with special needs, or a child of a different race.

"We want people to look and say, 'Hey, the state pays for everything.'

It costs you your heart

and a little bit of your soul," said Stills with a chuckle. "But it's like anything else worth loving, you put your heart and soul into it, and you get back way more than you put in."

The Heart Gallery is always looking for professional photographers and videographers to donate their time and service. Businesses and high-traffic locations can also help by hosting a gallery, asking representatives to speak at peer and civic groups, and helping to raise money and spread the word that families are needed for the community's most vulnerable children.

For more information on adoption or to aid in Heart Gallery's mission, please visit HeartGalleryKids.org.

To reach Mark Parker, email mparker@theweeklychallenger.com



CHURCH NEWS

8 THURSDAY, JULY 22, 2021

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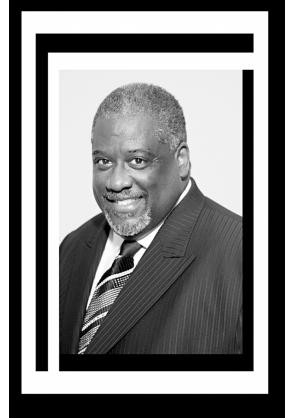
Sunday Worship Services 7:45 a.m. & 10:00 a.m.
Sunday School 9:00 a.m.
Wednesday Mid-Day Bible Study Noon - 12:30 p.m.
Wednesday Prayer Service 6:00 p.m.
Wednesday Bible Study 6:30 p.m.
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Wednesday Small Group Bible Study 6:30 p.m.

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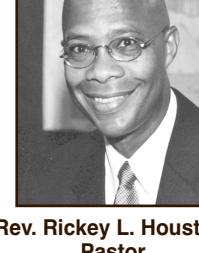
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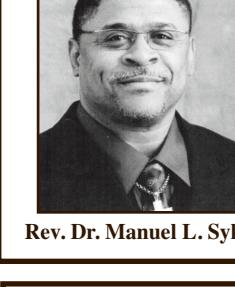
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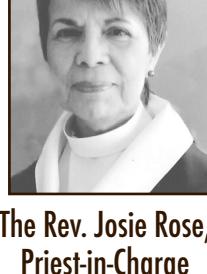
Sunday School: 9:00 a.m.

Sunday Worship Service: 10:00 a.m.

Mid-Week Worship: Wednesday 7:00 p.m.



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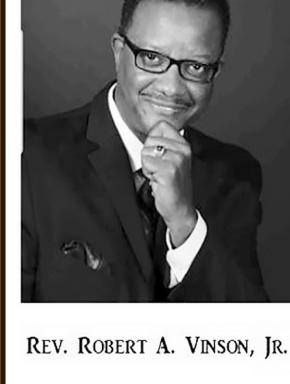


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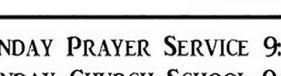
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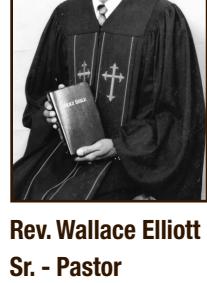
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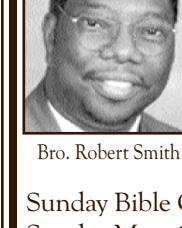
www.Victorychristiancenterchurch.org

Schedule of Services

Sunday Worship*
10:30 a.m.
Wednesday Bible Study* -7:00 p.m.
Friday Prayer -7:00 p.m.
Intercessory Prayer - 9:00 a.m.
(except Wednesdays)

Victory Christian Center is a Word of Faith Church.
For more information about the other services and
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*Nursery and Youth Services Available



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Monday Evening Bible Class 7:00 p.m.
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INSPIRATIONS

BY DIERDRE DOWNING-JACKSON

GOD's Restorative Sleep

"...He makes me to lie down in green pastures... He restores my soul.. Psalm 23:2-3

While listening to a beautiful song, "Here Comes the Glory of the LORD", it was a blessing to be reminded that JESUS is coming with freedom, healing, power and peace. It is good to be reminded that in this season of unprecedented challenges and uncertainty we are assured in the coming of the Glory of the LORD JESUS!

In this season we are hearing from so many loved ones, family members and friends requesting prayer and truly in need of GOD's blessed assurance. We all seem to be eating and sleeping more than ever due to this global unrest, and experiencing the fear of yet another threatening of the reality of death in the midst of a global viral pandemic.

Holy Spirit we thank you for blessing us with GOD's restorative HEALING sleep. A restorative sleep that only GOD can give to prepare His people for what He has in store for "the ear that has not heard nor for the eye that hath not seen" what GOD has prepared

for him that waits on Him.

When we continue to lean on GOD, He promises to deliver and HEAL us. With our minds stayed on JESUS, we will receive His perfect peace AND COMPLETE HEALING.

As we wait on GOD, this season of restorative sleep HEALS our minds, our spirits, and GIVES our bodies the strength to go through these extreme trials and tribulations.

GOD will not forsake us and HE will comfort our hearts. HE will restore our joy. HE will protect, heal and provide all that we need. Remember the LORD JESUS CHRIST is the same yesterday, and today and forever. We must TRUST IN GOD's Healing and rest in GOD's blessed assurance.

AMEN

"For since the beginning of the world men have not heard, nor perceived by the ear, neither hath the eye seen, O GOD, beside thee, what He hath prepared for him that waiteth for Him."

"JESUS CHRIST the same yesterday, and today, and forever."



Dear Reader: Find the new when there's nothing normal to get back to

THE WRITER, SENECA HOWARD

A measure of hope

Dear Reader,

I'm not sure how my words will find you when you read them, but I pray that they bring you peace, encouragement, and a measure of hope.

I have known the darkest valleys of grief and have felt the deep depths of its darkest chambers.

The anxiety and the panic can be relentless, and the heaviness of its depression can be overwhelming. Grief feels like a journey without an ending, and the terrain of its paths can seem untraversable at times. It often leaves us stranded without any hope of being able to move forward. But my prayer for you today is that you will find rest in the green pastures and peace beside the quiet streams.

May you lack nothing of substance, and may the resources of the Lord continue to sustain you. May your cup overflow as He anoints your head with oil, and

may His goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your life as you dwell in His house forever.

Dear reader, may you know the comfort, strength, and reassurance of the Lord's peace as you travel through your valleys of grief, and may you know a measure of hope when all hope seems to be lost (reference, Psalm 23).

My dear reader, I want you to know that you are not alone, and it is my prayer that this column will make you feel as though you have a place to belong and somewhere to call home.

P.S., Yours Truly, The Writer, Seneca Howard www.SenecaHoward.com

About Seneca Howard

Seneca Howard is a pastor, author, mentor, and motivational speaker who inspires the lives of others through crisis ministry, counsel, and personal development.

CHURCH NEWS

The Weekly Challenger

www.theweeklychallenger.com

THURSDAY, JULY 22, 2021 9

ST. MARK MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

1301 - 37th Street South, St. Petersburg, FL
(727) 321-6631 • www.stmarkch.org

Schedule of Services

- Church School 9:30 a.m.
Morning Worship 10:45 a.m.
Baptist Training Union 5:00 p.m.
Prayer Meeting and Bible Study
Wednesday 7:00 p.m.



Rev. Brian K. Brown

THE ROCK OF JESUS MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

SUNDAY SERVICES/WEEKLY ACTIVITIES

- 10:30 a.m. Worship Service
9:00 a.m. Breakfast (First Sunday only)
9:30 a.m. Sunday School (First Sunday Only)
Sunday School 9:15 a.m. / Devotion 10:15 a.m.
Praise & Worship 10:20 a.m. / Worship Services 10:30 a.m.
Saints of Prayer - Monday 12:00 noon
Weekly Bible Study - Tuesday 6:30 p.m.
Adult Choir Rehearsals - Thursday 6:30 p.m.

Van service is available by calling: (727) 327-0015

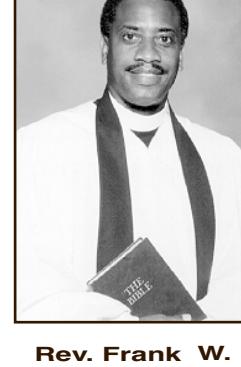
THE ROCK OF JESUS IS LOCATED AT:

3940 - 18th AVE. S., St. Petersburg, Florida

Telephone: 727-327-0015 • Fax: 727-327-0021

Email: rojmbe@knology.net

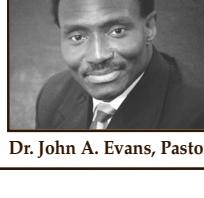
Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.



Rev. Frank W. Peterman, Jr.
Pastor

Friendship Missionary Baptist Church

3300 31st St. S., St. Petersburg, FL 33712
(727) 906-8300 www.friendshipstpetersburg.org
Email: fmbc3300@outlook.com
YouTube: FMBC The Ship



Dr. John A. Evans, Pastor

WORSHIP EXPERIENCES

- Sunday Worship 8:45 a.m. "The Hour of Power"
Sunday School 8:00 a.m.
Wednesday in the Word
12:30 p.m. via ZOOM - ACCESS CODE: 599-819-6863 PASSWORD: 778769
7:00 p.m. via ZOOM - ACCESS CODE: 509-102-8823 PASSWORD: THESHIP

Our Mission: Friendship Missionary Baptist Church is a family of believers in Christ, reaching out to the world, preaching the gospel to the unsaved and teaching the saved to serve by demonstrating the Love of Christ.

TODAY'S CHURCH TAMPA BAY

ST. PETERSBURG
2114 54th Avenue North

TAMPA
5107 N Central Avenue

SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP
8:45AM Drive In Centering Service

SUNDAY AFTERNOON WORSHIP
2pm Cultural Integration Worship Experience

10:30AM CREATIVE EXPRESSION WORSHIP EXPERIENCE
WEDNESDAY NIGHT WORD 6:30 PM - COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS PRAYER
7 PM - BIBLE STUDY

ZOOM: MEETING ID 375 007 212 PASSWORD 5107

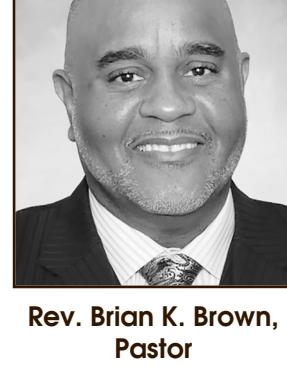
CHURCH NEWS

St. Mark M.B. Church

Believer, Beware on Your Return – Genesis 9:18-22

God has spared our lives in this pandemic that we may do something in service to him. Remember that the one worthy of praise is God. As we start to do things that we haven't for over a year, we should be careful, cautious, and concerned because it's not over just yet and we shouldn't be careless.

As we look at the text, Pastor Brown pointed out that there was some carelessness on Noah's and one of his son's part that caused problems for all. In chapter 8 and verse 20 one of the first things Noah did as the waters had receded and they emerged into normalcy again was Noah marked the moment with praise. But here in chapter 9, we don't see praise, instead Noah started working, growing crops, tending the beast, planting grapes, harvesting them, and creating wine from the grapes. The first point offer is from this, Believer, Be Careful with Your Time. It's not for us to spend all our time in worship or working but have good time management, spending time worshipping God while we spend time working for God. The question to ask is, how am I managing my time.



Rev. Brian K. Brown,
Pastor

The final point from verse 22 & 23, Believer, Be Considerate with Your Team. What can you handle that might cause someone else to trip is the question we should ask. Noah could handle his own nakedness, but his son could not. This changed the dynamics between father and son. We must be considerate of others. Many times, we display things we can handle but others can't. If they saw, they might not be able to handle it like us. There are things God knows that we will never know, and he is always considerate about the team and does not put us in a space for us to know some things that will trip us up. Be considerate to others and let others see good by modeling good before them.

Live stream services are on YouTube @ St Mark MBC at 10:20 for Sunday School, worship service at 10:45 a.m. each Sunday and bible study on Wednesdays @ 7:00 p.m.

On Your Return – Genesis 8:15-22

This section of the bible is the story of God's decision, after man's sinfulness, to destroy everything and recreate everything.

Noah had been challenged to build an ark that was not near a body of water, but somehow it would float on water because God was going to send rain for 40 days and nights so the whole of the earth would be flooded, and the only ones to survive would be those in the ark. Noah and his family meandered on the water for more than a year, longed for the day that the water would stop, recede and the ground would be dry up. Perhaps we are like Noah, we longed for the day, after a year and a half, that we would be able to get back to the sanctuary of God and offer him praise. We've come through a lot with COVID 19, but God has brought us in spite of losing some things and through it all God has been good to us.

For St. Mark, Sunday was the day appointed that we could leave our homes and worship in the sanctuary. The nation and the world is starting to go back to its routines of old. While we celebrate what the world is doing, we draw caution that we are not out of the storm. Everything is not back to normal just yet, there are variants of COVID 19 sweeping over sections of our nation. We are in a space where we should be celebrating, while being sober and serious to recognize that not all have been vaccinated and safe-guarded. We are not all in the same space, but God has still

been good.

While we are in our return

there are some things to consider. First, from verses 15 and 16, we should Remember to Wait on God. These verses reveal Noah, his family, and the animals had permission from God to return. There had been other attempts to return by Noah when he released a raven and a dove which reaffirms that our return must be as the Lord guides. What God does for one is not necessarily the same for all. We must follow his direction, do only that which he says to do, and not allow the world to drive us. It may not be everyone's season to return but it is still our season to give God the glory. In everything we do, we should wait on God's directions. When God directs, he will also deliver.

The second consideration from verse 17 is Remember to Work for God. Do not allow our return to be a missed moment to do something for God. We should ask ourselves what are we doing for God that makes him joyful, expands his agenda and reaches God's people. God allowed Noah and all on the ark to return but they had to do something for him. The text tells us that God gave instructions for the animals to multiply and replenish the earth. God has brought us this far through Covid 19 and we owe him for what he's done for us and to us. If we return and forget God, he will not favor our return. As helps us, we should help others, love others, be kind to others

and direct others to the saving knowledge of God. God has done all that he has for us so we can demonstrate and duplicate it in helping others.

The final consideration from verses 20-21 is Remember to Worship Only God. After a year in the ark and God let them return, the first thing Noah did for God was make a sacrifice unto him of the clean animals on the ark. Noah knew had his family to help him while on the ark, but they were not the reason he made it through. Noah praised God for bringing them through. Praise is the act of worship, but worship is an inward mental understanding about how and who we view God to be. Worship is acknowledging that God is superior in all things and over all things. Worship is an acknowledgment that God is big, and we are small; that God has everything, and we have nothing; that God has all power, and we have no power; that God is creator, and we are his creation; and affirming that he is almighty, and we can do nothing without his might. Noah wanted God to know he knew his place in him. He acknowledged God and we too should acknowledged that if it had not been for God, we never would have made it and he is the only one to whom we owe praise and worship to.

We are back in the sanctuary, and live streamed services are still on YouTube @ St Mark MBC at 10:45 a.m. each Sunday and bible study on Wednesdays @ 7:00 p.m.



TODAY'S CHURCH
TAMPA BAY
Dr. Doral R. Pulley, Spiritual Leader

WHERE ALL THE PIECES COME TOGETHER!

SAVE THE DATE

SEPTEMBER 11, 2021

12NOON - 4PM

Grand OPENING
& Building Dedication

2114 54TH AVENUE NORTH ST. PETERSBURG, FLORIDA



Pastor's Corner
BY REV. DR. DORAL R. PULLEY,
SPIRITUAL LEADER
TODAY'S CHURCH Tampa Bay

Have Several Seats

"And Jesus closed the book, and he gave it again to the minister, and sat down (Luke 4:20)."

Jesus, our example of what it means to fully human and fully divine, went to a physical place of worship regularly. The synagogue was his church. When I visited Capernaum, I had the opportunity to see just how close the synagogue was to where Jesus and his disciples spent most of their time.

Not only was Jesus a regular attendee of the synagogue, but he was an active participant in the worship experience (Luke 4:15-21). He was on the program and read the scriptures. Following Jesus' example leads us to regular and active participation in a local assembly so that we can fellowship with others.

After doing his part in the service, Jesus closed the book of the Prophet Isaiah, gave it to the presider, and sat down in his seat. Sitting is an appropriate posture for prayer. Sitting is not any less sacred than kneeling, bowing, or standing.

When you sit in a church service or your personal space, sit consciously with intention. Give your sitting meaning. Sitting symbolizes resting in the consciousness that all is well. Understanding the Kingdom Principle of Divine Order brings you to the awareness of your internal peace and empowers you to sit and rest in that place of

peace.

Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, in his epistles to the churches, often referenced Jesus being seated at the right hand of God (Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 12:2). After his resurrection and ascension, Jesus sat in his power and authority. Paul built upon this idea and taught that Jesus does not sit alone as you are seated in heavenly places with Christ Jesus (Ephesians 1:20, 2:6).

Make practical application of this posture and sit with people as Jesus sat in the congregation. The next time that you are sitting at home, work, school, church, community and hold the consciousness of peace for the people with you wherever you are.

COMMUNITY NEWS

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www.theweeklychallenger.com

The Weekly Challenger

Local support for families enrolling in the Emergency Broadband Benefit

ST. PETERSBURG — Digital Inclusion St. Pete announced it is working to help build consumer awareness about the Emergency Broadband Benefit, a Federal Communications Commission (FCC) program. The temporary benefit will help to lower the cost of broadband service for eligible households during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

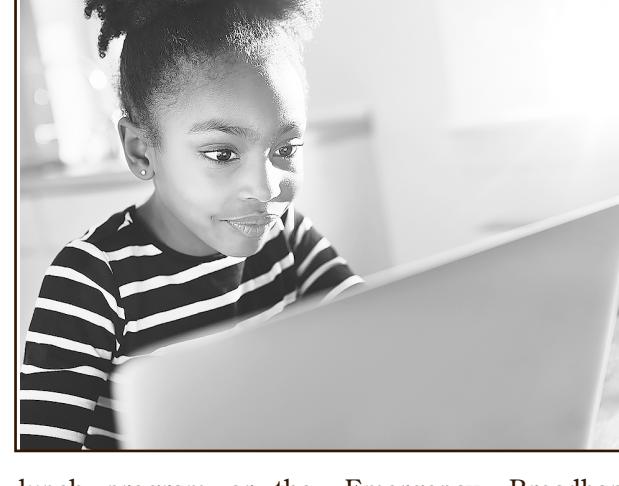
Partners of Digital Inclusion St. Pete are also available to assist households in navigating the application process.

What is the emergency broadband benefit?

The \$3.2B Emergency Broadband Benefit program provides a discount of up to a \$50 per month toward broadband service for eligible households. The benefit also provides up to a \$100 per household discount toward a one-time purchase of a computer, laptop, or tablet if the household contributes more than \$10 and less than \$50 toward the purchase through a participating broadband provider.

A household is eligible if one member of the household meets at least one of the criteria below:

- Has an income that is at or below 135 percent of the Federal Poverty Guidelines or participates in certain assistance programs, such as SNAP, Medicaid or the FCC's Lifeline program
- Approved to receive benefits under the free and reduced-price school



lunch program or the school breakfast program, including through the USDA Community Eligibility Provision, in the 2019-20 or 2020-21 school year

- Received a Federal Pell Grant during the current award year

- Experienced a substantial loss of income through job loss or furlough since Feb. 29, 2020, and the household had a total income in 2020 at or below \$99,000 for single filers and \$198,000 for joint filers

- Meets the eligibility criteria for a participating provider's existing low-income or COVID-19 program.

How do households apply?

Emergency Broadband Benefit enrollment opened on May 12. Eligible households can enroll through a participating broadband provider or directly with the Universal Service Administrative Company (USAC) using an online or mail-in application. Additional information about the

Emergency Broadband Benefit is available at www.fcc.gov/broadbandbenefit, or by calling 833-511-0311 between 9-9 p.m. any day of the week

What local assistance is available?

The Digital Inclusion St. Pete team is offering assistance to households in navigating the application process. To schedule an appointment, call 727-851-6723 or email emergencybroadbenefits@gma il.com.

About Digital Inclusion St. Petersburg

Digital Inclusion St. Pete is a collaboration of over 28 organizations. Its mission is to eliminate the digital inclusion gap in St Petersburg and Pinellas County. The group's vision is that St. Petersburg is a digitally inclusive city where all individuals have access to online resources, as well as the skills to use them meaningfully.

For additional information visit digitalstpete.com.

City asking for feedback on spending \$45 million

ST. PETERSBURG —

The City of St. Petersburg is expected to receive approximately \$45 million from President Biden's American Rescue Plan Act. The American Rescue Plan is delivering direct relief to the American people, rescuing the American economy, and starting to beat the virus.

Mayor Rick Kriseman and his administration, with the support of City Council, have developed a series of workshops for community feedback to help prioritize which areas of impact receive funds. Feedback collected during these workshops will be aggregated and directly influence the ranking of priorities for receiving funds.

The City has outlined eight areas of impact eligible for the funds: infrastructure, housing affordability, health equity, economic development, leisure services, public safety, transportation, and resilience & sustainability.



Each workshop will include opening statements and presentations outlining the state of affairs for each area of impact by subject matter experts, followed by breakout sessions where participants will rank the areas for funding prioritization.

In-Person Workshop Dates & Locations

- Monday, July 26, 6-8 p.m. at Enoch Davis Center (1111 18th Ave. S.) (Register here)

- Tuesday, July 27, 6-8 p.m. at JW Cate Rec Center (5801 22nd Ave. N.) (Register here)

N.) (Register here)

- Wednesday, July 28, 6-8 p.m. at Willis S. Johns Rec Center (6635 Dr. MLK Jr. St. N.) (Register here)

NOTE: Registration is required to participate.

Virtual Participation

A recording of the presentations and online form is available for those interested in participating but are unable to attend the in-person workshop dates. The online form will be available after the conclusion of the first workshop by Tuesday, July 27.

Lost, but not forgotten

BY COREY GIVENS JR.

Contributor

ST. PETERSBURG — All across the country, lost graves sites are being discovered.

A few months back, archaeologists in St. Petersburg began surveying parking lots 1 and 2 at the Tropicana Field using ground-penetrating radar. Many believe that there is a strong possibility that graves may rest underneath the parking lot where three cemeteries once stood in what was once the Gas Plant District, a predominantly African-American community in St. Petersburg during most of the 20th century.

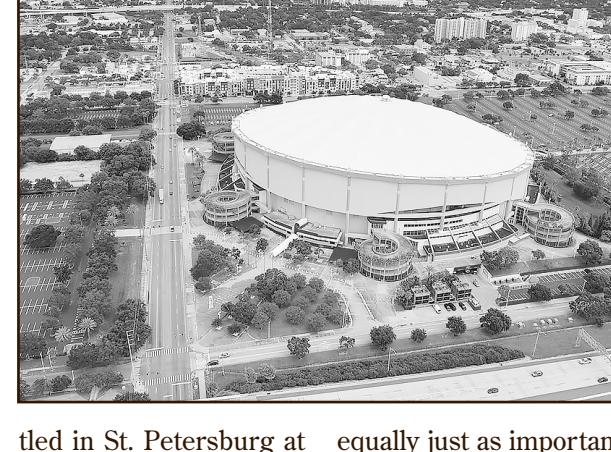
The site was previously a thriving black cultural hub for some of St. Petersburg's early pioneers and their families. The Gas Plant District was home to multiple churches, black-owned businesses, and three cemeteries that housed the graves of the neighborhood's black residents.

The burial grounds were known as Oaklawn, Moffitt Cemetery, and Evergreen Cemeteries. After decades of decay and neglect, the city could no longer afford to maintain the property. Once the cemetery was sold, most of the graves were moved to Lincoln Cemetery in nearby Gulfport. As a result of eminent domain and the urban housing boom, the Gas Plant neighborhood was bulldozed, making way for Major League Baseball in the 1980s.

For many years it has been rumored that an unknown number of bodies were left behind during the site's first redevelopment phase in the 1960s because many graves in the cemeteries were unmarked. Some headstones were damaged or lost over time; others never existed due to family financial constraints.

Candidates will receive the questions a few days in advance because the consortium wants the most specific responses possible.

Please register for the free in-person event at <https://bit.ly/36Ts2X2> or stream it live at <https://bit.ly/3x1TEng>.



led in St. Petersburg at the turn of the century.

Her grandfather, Will Williams, helped paved the first streets and built the first seawall. Born a slave, he never got the respect he deserved in life or death. A fact remained evident when the city began exhaling bodies from Oaklawn Cemetery for relocation over 70 years ago. My family, like many others, was never notified if or where his remains had been reinterred. To this day, our family still wonders where his remains lie.

Land surveying for possible graves began earlier this summer. According to the City of St. Petersburg's Urban Planning and Historic Preservation Division Manager Derek Kilborn, survey results were due back to the mayor's office sometime last month. However, those results have yet to be released to the public.

The archaeology team conducting the survey has only examined a small portion of one out of three cemeteries — now covered by a paved parking lot — so there could very well be graves at the sites that have yet to be discovered. The Evergreen and Moffitt Cemeteries stretched further south down 16th Street South, near the present-day Fifth Avenue South overpass. Per city staff, only parking lots 1 and 2 at the Tropicana Field site were surveyed, primarily due to a lack of access to the other former cemeteries and budget limitations.

With the redevelopment of Tropicana Field on the horizon, it's important that we recognize this property for what it is — history. It's also

equally just as important that we do our due diligence and adequately fund a complete archeological survey of all three cemeteries.

Recently, efforts have grown by lawmakers and community leaders to search for Black graves that have become lost across the country due to a long history of racism perpetuated towards people of color in America.

Gov. Ron DeSantis signed into law a bill that went into effect on July 1 that will create a panel of researchers to study forgotten or abandoned cemeteries and burial grounds across the state. The bill (HB 37), introduced by Sen. Janet Cruz and Rep. Fentrice Driskell, identifies lost cemeteries by creating a Task Force on abandoned African-American cemeteries.

We must acknowledge our history and honor the memory of all those who were once buried in these forgotten cemeteries. We must work to ensure that justice is served, not just for our ancestors, but for the families they left behind who are boggling with many unanswered questions.

We need to make sure that we do everything in our power to commemorate their stories and honor their memory so that our history does not become forgotten again.

If you have any recollection of these former cemeteries or believe your loved one was once interred in one of the sites, please contact Dr. Julie Buckner Armstrong at the University of South Florida at 727-873-4061 or email her at jba@usf.edu.

Mayoral candidates to confront St. Pete's housing crisis

ST. PETERSBURG — All eight St. Petersburg mayoral candidates will participate in a first-time summit devoted entirely to solving the housing shortage that working families can afford.

"Zoning is the Answer: Mayoral Candidates Confront St. Pete's Housing Crisis" is Tuesday, July 27, at 5:30 p.m. at the St. Petersburg College Allstate Center, 3200 34th St. S. The event will be in person and also streamed live. Registration is free.

A consortium of 30 non-profits, associations, and individuals are partners in this event, all of them advocating for changes in the way zoning gets done in St. Petersburg.

They agree that a new zone, NTM-1, should be applied throughout the city. It expands the number of neighborhoods where duplexes, triplexes, and mother-in-law apartments can be built.

The summit partners believe increasing the supply of housing will decrease the prices.

St. Pete's housing shortage gets worse by the month.

From 2019 to 2021, our rents increased 15 percent. That puts St. Pete in fourth place out of the top 100 cities with rent increases.

In the past five years, St. Pete's housing prices have increased more than 60 percent and are predicted to rise significantly this year.

HOUSING SUMMIT

ZONING IS THE ANSWER

Mayoral Candidates Confront St. Pete's Housing Crisis

Tuesday, July 27, 5:30-7pm
St. Pete College Allstate Center
3200 34th Street South

Register here for this free in-person event:
<https://bit.ly/36Ts2X2>

- The price of homes in St. Pete rose 65% over the last five years.
- Rent increased 15% from 2019 to 2020.
- 40,000 St. Pete families pay more than a third of their income on housing alone.

In St. Pete, the mayor has more power than anyone to improve this picture. If they're elected, what will these potential mayors do to make change happen?

Zoning is the Answer is sponsored by the Council of Neighborhood Associations-CONA, Deuces Live, Faith and Strength Together-FAST, the St. Pete Chamber of Commerce, 22 South, Edge Central Partners, St. Pete College, Neighborhood Home Solutions, Bonds Construction, Habitat for Humanity, Bartlett Realty, One Community, Power Broker Magazine, YIMBY St. Pete-Yes In My Back Yard, CHAF Properties, Boley Centers, Bright Community Trust, Feldman Equities, Tampa Bay Builders Association, Florida Suncoast Sierra Club, Pinellas Realtors, St. Pete Catalyst, Old Southeast Neighborhood Association-OSNA, Grow Smarter St. Pete, Deborah F. Scanlon, St. Pete Rising, Tampa Bay Rays, Tampa Bay Rowdies

Florida's minimum wage will soon be \$10/hour. At that rate, two adults working full-time would earn about \$3,300 a month before taxes. Meanwhile, the low-end average rent for a two-bedroom apartment in St. Pete is \$1,200. So that family pays 36 percent of their before-tax income on housing alone, not including utilities.

Zoning is the answer. Allowing more residences on lots now zoned for single-family homes is the fastest, easiest first step in addressing our housing shortage.

There are many other ways to confront this cri-

sis, such as creating land trusts, subsidizing down payments, or paying residents to bring their properties up to code. Next Tuesday's summit, however, will not include those issues. It will focus just on zoning because that does not cost the city or taxpayers any money.

Candidates will receive the questions a few days in advance because the consortium wants the most specific responses possible.

Please register for the free in-person event at <https://bit.ly/36Ts2X2> or stream it live at <https://bit.ly/3x1TEng>.

COMMUNITY NEWS

The Weekly Challenger

www.theweeklychallenger.com

THURSDAY, JULY 22, 2021 **11**

Stigma and sexual health in our community, part 2

BY J.A. JONES
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG —Dr. Kemesha Gabbidon, a researcher at the University of South Florida who studies youth sexual health and HIV stigma, and Precshard Williams, Prevention and Sexual Health Program coordinator at Metro Inclusive Health, recently shared insights on HIV stigma and supporting sexual health in St. Petersburg on 99 Jamz WUJM, as part of the #PinellasEHE initiative.

Williams said that as Metro works to reach the Black and Brown communities targeted by high incidence of HIV diagnosis, the organization also joins with community partners to share information.

"A community partner again can be a church or a convenience store. It can be a gym, a local bar, a hair salon...anywhere we can start creating more conversations about sexual health and HIV prevention and education is a community partner for us," he noted.

Metro's mobile unit is a specific health unit equipped with a full exam room, enabling people to get a prescription for PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) on the spot if they're negative, and telehealth-visit with a doctor who can do an as-

essment and help provide information on next steps if necessary.

Williams acknowledged that while the mobile unit is usually received positively, in areas where there is little to no education or discussion about HIV, hesitation about entering the mobile unit is stronger.

"It's really about building those relationships, creating those courageous conversations," especially since medical mistrust is a real thing for many Black people, said Williams.

Those courageous conversations, added Gabbidon, need to start in the home. "Just looking at the state of Florida broadly, there is a disconnect between parents and teens, which is where I think a lot of the conversation needs to begin."

Gabbidon said parents have a perception that they are engaging in these rich conversations with their kids about sexual health and sexual decision-making. But if you ask the team's perspective, they don't view it that way.

When teens don't have those kinds of conversations with their parents, they are more likely to engage in higher-risk behaviors.

Because much of Florida's religious mores have led to abstinence-based curricu-

lum, Gabbidon added, "if those conversations are not happening within the home setting, when it comes to sex, there's not a lot of comprehensive discussions about sex in the classroom. We have a lot of gaps when it comes to just openly discussing our sexuality."

She believes this lack of knowledge has often led our culture to demonize sexuality and said there's a lot of room for improvement when it comes to openly having discussions about sexual health.

"Especially when we look at the parent, teen, and young adult kind of dynamics. Unfortunately, teens then reach out to their peers, and they use social media and other forms of media as a way to supplement the lack of knowledge."

Williams agreed. "When we're talking about sexual health, we would be completely remiss to not talk about how religion plays into the way we think about sexual behaviors and sexual practices and how religion can sometimes act as a barrier to us having those conversations."

Even though they might be very uncomfortable conversations, he reiterated Gabbidon's statement: "If we're not having those conversations, our teens are

having these conversations with somebody else."

Williams noted that "it gets tricky" when it comes to the role of religion. "Religion is where Black folks take everything; we take everything to the altar. That is where we get our redirection; we get our direction, we get recharged. However, when it comes to us talking about the things that are really happening within the community that we really don't want to unpack, that's where it gets foggy."

He acknowledged the work of those church leaders committed to making a difference, even by being willing to start the conversation somewhere. Williams said it's not about completely changing church culture, "But we're losing a lot of our folks to something that shouldn't be this way because if we're talking about religion, religion should be love. If we're talking about Christianity, Christianity is love."

Gabbidon shared that often parents who were raised in homes and churches that demonized sex passed that shame and negative feeling on to their children. "One of the things I noticed with parents who, when they were younger, sexuality was viewed as sinful—it really has a ripple effect, because then they're



Dr. Kemesha Gabbidon, a University of South Florida researcher and Precshard Williams, Prevention and Sexual Health Program coordinator at Metro Inclusive Health, are working to remove the stigma around HIV and AIDS.

not able to speak to their kids about sex."

Williams also said that coming up as a Black, same-gender-loving man in Volusia County, Daytona, and raised by a single mother deeply rooted in religion, "doing the best she could with a man child, without resources and support," he experienced an "info desert"—a lack of information.

There were no health centers or resources which supported his learning about himself or other same-gender-loving men.

Williams said he now realizes this led to him making decisions "that probably weren't the best decisions to make because I didn't know what I was doing."

He noted that this is in stark contrast to someone growing up in a wealthier environment, with access to

health centers where they would "see people like them; where they're going to get more information about the type of person they are going to be, and their parents probably more willing to access those types of spaces."

Williams feels these differences are social justice issues, even more than issues of religion or theology.

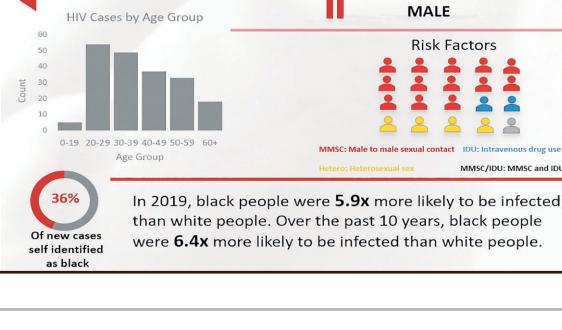
Gabbidon concurred, stating that health equity is about fairness and justice.

"When it comes to HIV, you're talking about populations that have been systematically stigmatized and discriminated against. So, when you look at how we can challenge those issues, it is a social justice problem."

She went on to say that by providing access to resources where people are, everyone can have the best possible health outcome.

Data Source: www.FLHEALTHCHARTS.com

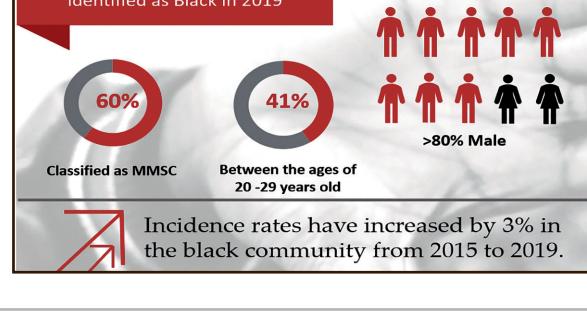
Pinellas County



2019 Data Summary

- 20-29 Age group continue to lead the new HIV cases.
- 86% of all new infections were Male.
- MMSC is the highest risk factor for new HIV cases.
- Black people made up 36% of new HIV cases in 2019.

Pinellas County



Could your child use \$200?

Bethel Community Foundation offers a 6 week summer program focused on preparing youth ages 14-17 for successful employment.

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COMMUNITY NEWS

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The Weekly Challenger



QUILTS & TEXTILES from AROUND THE WORLD

6 / 18 / 21 - 8 / 15 / 21

Tentmakers of Cairo

The Market of the Tentmakers is in the heart of Old Islamic Cairo. Tentmaker work is brilliantly colored appliqué and is historically made by men.



Social Justice Sewing Academy

Founded in 2017, the Social Justice Sewing Academy (SJS) is a youth education program that bridges artistic expression with activism to advocate for social justice. SJS empowers youth to use textile art as a vehicle for personal transformation and community cohesion and become agents of social change.



Cloth in Common

Personal projects + works on the theme of 'greenspaces' by this 12-person international invitational fiber arts collective representing artistic, soulful perspectives from around the globe.

Return of Velvet Elvis

Everyone got their feet wet painting on the daunting surface of velvet in Velvet Elvis 2020—Velvet Elvis is Back! The vintage chic of the genre has made them quite collectible!



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Rafael Robinson takes home Sunshine Ambassador Award, inspires City Council

ROBINSON, from front page

more comfortable talking in front of a room full of kids than adults, "but that's OK because I'm going to speak from the heart." He then went on to accept the award for the most important people in his life.

His mother, "who dedicated her life to educating our youth right here in Pinellas County," and his father, "who kept the community safe with the St. Petersburg Police Department."

Robinson gave a special thanks to councilmember Figgs-Sanders for nominating him and recognizing the effort he puts into bridging the education gap for the youth. He said that people like her remind him that his work is necessary and relevant in the community.

Robinson took the opportunity to explain the importance of his mission. He said that it had reached a point where kids are no longer engaged and are barely getting by, a problem that extends to the "youngest learners." He added that it is now time to change the way educators approach these children, which is the focus of his Ituey venture.

"With children dying in the streets every day, we have to do something about it," said Robinson. "And this is what I'm

doing." He explained that his team has been able to accomplish so much over the last three years on a personally funded, shoestring budget, "but just imagine what we could do for our youth through true, authentic collaboration."

His wife Amber Robinson and brother-in-law Calvin Robinson took to the podium to give impassioned speeches on the importance of STEM learning and how America has fallen behind other countries such as China. Calvin Robinson became visibly emotional when describing how proud he was of his brother-in-law, and his words seemed to touch everyone in attendance.

"I've watched Rafael see problems and create solutions. "I've seen him and my sister take money out of their home to help this," said Calvin Robinson, his voice cracking. "I'm just really proud of them, and I hope our city can get behind them to help make changes. They continue on as teachers and give so much when educators get so little."

Councilmember Darden Rice called it "a great way to start this meeting, especially when we've been gone for a while... This is so inspiring." Rice also added that she



Rafael Robinson

would be willing to work on a partnership between the city and Raphael Robinson's programs.

Councilmember Robert Blackmon commended Calvin on his speech, saying that it made him tear up as well — a sentiment that was surely shared by others in the audience.

"There is a huge need, as we know," said Blackmon. "Especially, as you highlighted, in the African-American community where a lot of the kids don't have access to STEM technologies and STEM resources."

To learn more about Ituey, LLC and the Super Sprockets program and children's books, please visit thesuperspockets.com.

To reach Mark Parker, email mparker@theweeklychallenger.com

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ARTS & ENTERTAINMENT

The Weekly Challenger

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Artist layers ancestral wisdom and social commentary in multidisciplinary works at Studio@620

BY J.A. JONES
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG - When discussing her creative work, artist Saudade Toxosi speaks of the "meditative process" that guides her hand. A multidisciplinary artist and image curator who works in painting, charcoal drawings, photography, mixed media, sound design, and assemblage, several of Toxosi's works are now on display at Studio@620 through the end of the month.

The exhibition at Studio@620 displays more than 12 paintings and photographs, as well as her film Oyeku, a visually arresting experience that premiered in the Netherlands in 2018 as part of filmmaker Kahlil

Joseph's "New Suns" exhibit.

Toxosi's paintings are bold and evocative - hovering beyond representational and not entirely abstract. Faces send messages that illicit immediate reactions; bodies feel like birds or spirals lifting off their surfaces to head somewhere else.

While her paintings seethe with colorful, energetic lines, her photographs of young men are being caught within shadowy worlds of grays, blacks, and browns.

Her mixed media creations investigate themes of spiritual ills versus well-being, social dilemmas, and responsibility through assemblage, even incorporating technology (such as a QR code that you can hold

your phone to and hear author and filmmaker Darius James deliver Frederick Douglass' poem, "A Parody" from "The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass."

Toxosi shared that her curated media projects "explore and articulate my thoughts about the new indigenous African experience in the United States — as well as all people of color around the world."

A visit to her website, announced by the tagline "art inspired by ancestral wisdom and inner strength," reveals further explorations of curated images and their importance to her creative process.

The series "MONOCHROME" opens the site with densely populated images in black and white.

"All color is in these black and white moments; within it is a vastness which I feel does promote more expression and feeling; it tells the mind and the emotions that they have to work."

This demand to apply "work" to viewing black and white images is in opposition, said the artist, to using color, which gives one a "lackadaisical" viewing approach — an assumption that one already knows what is there.

The images in "MASK COMPLIANCE" come from a conceptual partnership between Toxosi (photographer) and artist and academic Cara Judea Alhadef, Ph.D. (model), and offer a meditation on masking in the age of COVID.

The film Oyeku offers an exciting, mystical view of the concept of transformation, beginnings, and endings.

Indie Reece, Ron Simmons, and Briauna Walker.

Composed of 273 images, the website provides a diagram of the original staging of the film, presented in a room with black mirrors, in which viewers became part of the installation, or "conjure."

Toxosi was born in Inglewood in Los Angeles and started drawing at the age of five with her mother before moving to Georgia in her teens. She's recently relocated to St. Petersburg, where 620's artistic director Bob Devin Jones immediately welcomed her to be part of the recent PRIDE show, which has been extended until Aug 1.

"Bob is great. He called me up and said, 'If you're thinking about being a part of the community, well come on, you know, this is what we're planning to do.'"

Toxosi was thrilled because she had already been in the space and had "loved the energy." Knowing that African drummers and dancers from Dundu Dole had christened the studio early on cemented her desire to show at the space.

"That really vibrated with me energetically and with the works that I desired to do. The works are always about my ancestors. They're always about me in relationship to my community."

Her inspiration comes from the American South and Black people. "Black Americans create the culture of the world — or at least carry the highest influence upon everything in the known universe. Our arts and sciences are phenomenal and unmatched."

She speaks of "African Vernacular Art" as a practice



of catharsis, meditation, found objects, and ancestral memory — as found in the works of Bill Traylor, Nellie Mae Rowe, Thornton Dial, and the Women of Gee's Bend — who wove works of "dynamic legacy" and beauty with simple tools and discarded objects.

Most importantly, said Toxosi, "It is the resilience of these artists that illuminate truth, ownership, and community that encouraged me to continue in the arts."

The multidisciplinary creator shared that she has also been inspired by the writings of Sonia Sanchez, Toni Cade Bambara, and Henry Dumas. "These three poets, writers, and teachers sculpted words for their

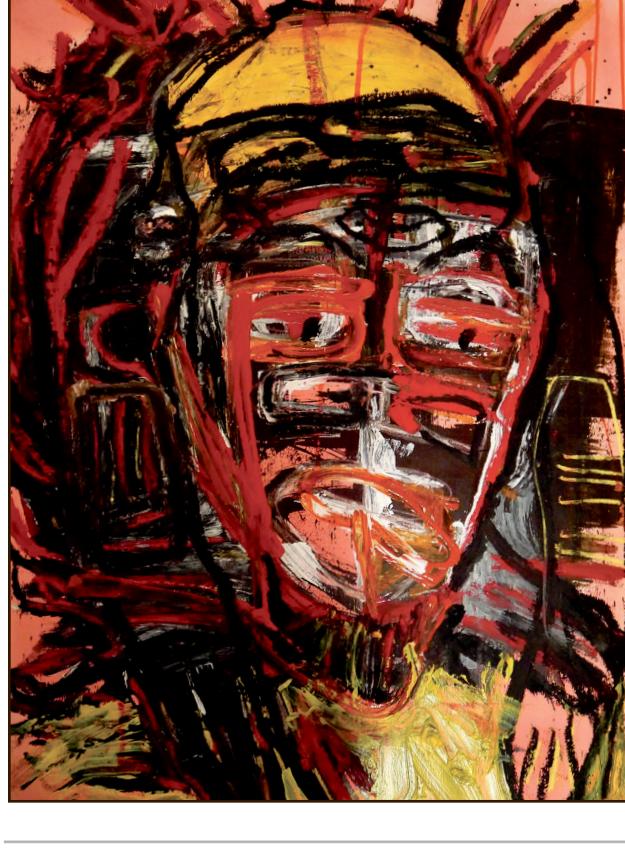
community and students, with hopes of expanding the Black imagination," noted Toxosi.

This 'expanding of imagination, she added, "gives one a great power to triumph in all areas, in love, and joy, regardless of their present circumstances."

Currently, Toxosi is part of the Friends of Salt Creek Friday Writing at the Creek project, supported by the Tampa Bay Estuary Grant.

You can follow Saudade Toxosi on Instagram and view her ongoing curatorial images project EQUINOX 1600 here.

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



Black Tampa-based artists New Roots Art Collective hold reception at HCC

BY J. S. COOPER

Contributor

TAMPA — Gallery 221 at Hillsborough Community College showcased young Black visual creators during an online talk and reception with the New Roots Art Collective last month. New Roots Art Collective (NRAC) is

made up of four Tampa-based artists committed to expanding the African-American voice within public and private art spaces.

Last summer, the collective was founded amidst a national groundswell of calls for racial justice and consists of artists Melvin "LANGSTN" Halsey Jr.,

Indie Reece, Ron Simmons, and Briauna Walker.

LANGSTN, an illustrator, graphic designer, and mixed-media artist, creates work influenced by his love for fashion, African cultures and traditions, cyberpunk, and anime.

Indie Reece is a self-taught painter, digital

artist, and muralist. His work ranges from geometric abstraction to figurative art, influenced by Africa's tribal cultures and masks.

Ron Simmons is a self-taught visual artist born and raised in Tampa, Florida. Inspired by the world around him, he creates characters from different backgrounds who

wear gas masks as a sign of resilience.

Briauna Walker is a self-taught artist whose work includes paintings on canvas as well as large-scale murals. Her art is inspired by the beauty of black women, the sky, and hues within the Black community.

The artists chose the

name "Root'd" because "each of us are rooted in our own way of creativity, and how we choose to show our creativity to the world," Walker explained.

Though all four artists have their own individual styles, they also share similarities in pieces featured in "Root'd." Afrofuturism



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Time for an agenda for Midtown

Dear Editor:

Last week *The Weekly Challenger* ran a series of articles where the candidates in the mayoral race were interviewed and asked about their agenda and plans for the city should they win the race. All of the candidates took care to use the right buzz words and signal their supporters and constituents on the issues they think their supporters wanted to hear about.

I read about affordable housing, crime, economic development, the environment, progressive values, conservative values, and a host of other things. What I did not read or see is exactly what the candidates really planned to do about any of these issues.

For example, affordable housing: Everybody

said they support affordable housing; they should. Affordable housing is a critical issue that is becoming more critical because the city does not, and has not, had a plan to fix the problem.

At this point, more than 40 percent of the residents of this city cannot afford the new market-rate housing that is being developed here. Affordable housing is not just a Midtown problem; it is a city-wide problem.

The current administration gathered a bunch of folks to stand behind them on the steps of City Hall when they announced a new affordable housing initiative a couple of years ago. They would build 2,300 units over the next 10 years.

That same administration had a representative tell a group of people who attended a meeting on the subject that the gap between affordable housing in the city and what was needed was 18,000 units. If the problem is 18,000 units, and you are adopting a plan designed to build 2,300 units, you do NOT have a plan to even put a dent in the problem. You merely have a plan to say you have a plan.

Guess what? They could not even get that plan initiated.

The fact is that this problem has been growing unabated for more than 40 years. Why? The answer to that one is easy. There has been no real desire on the part of city administrations to solve the problem.

The issue has been quietly cast as a Black people, low-income issue. Jordan Park has been vilified as the boogeyman to justify doing as little as possible. Forty percent of the people in this city are not all Black or low-income. However, the issue is still being viewed that way.

Even the Chamber of Commerce - that's right, the Chamber of Commerce, recognized the magnitude of the problem and recommended a robust plan to at least make a dent in it. This administration dismissed the chamber's proposal before coming up with their own insufficient plan, which they still could not get done. This city has always been interested in



Larry Newsome

talking about affordable housing but not really doing anything significant about it.

Take any of the other issues above. Crime, economic development, et al. What you will discover is a significant gap between the rhetoric and the action. You will find talk and vague plans but little desire for any substantive action to deal with any of them.

I used to wonder why there was so much apathy in Midtown. As time went on, I came to understand why. Politicians come, and they go. Many promises are made, a few dollars are thrown at issues, a few people make a few dollars or get jobs, but the underlying circumstances never change in any substantive way.

If ever there was a time to have a community plan and a fight for resources to make that agenda a reality, that time is now. Now that we have heard what the politicians have said, can we hear what the community groups have been working on for several years? Let's listen to what they have to say?

Larry Newsome

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Faith in Florida city council forum

BY FRANK DROUZAS
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG — Faith in Florida hosted a city council candidate forum at Bethel Community Baptist Church on July 12, where current District 6 City Councilwoman Gina Driscoll, Mharel Summers (District 6), Richie Floyd (District 8), Dane Kuplicki (District 8), and Jamie Mayo (District 8) fielded questions.

As to how the candidates can ensure how south St. Pete residents can benefit from the Tropicana site redevelopment, St. Pete native Summers said visible equity is part of her platform. She is partial to the Sugar Hill plan, as there is equity built into every level of their redevelopment strategy, she noted.

"From the construction workers to the development companies to the actual team themselves, equity's built all in," Summers said. Noting that it is a 10-year-plan, she said, "We need to make sure that the people we want to benefit from the Trop are prepared, so starting with the existing businesses and entrepreneurs, we need to make sure that we're breathing life into those Black firms to prepare them for this great opportunity of having their business there."

Floyd, a public-school teacher, said more important than what goes where in the future site, is a guarantee that living-wage jobs go to the South St. Petersburg Community Redevelopment Area (CRA) and affordable housing is a part of the site.

"We need to make sure that we're contractually obligating the people who are redeveloping Tropicana Field and the city itself to ensure that certain metrics are met when it comes to housing and jobs," he said. "And if they're not, there need to be penalties for it."

Kuplicki said we need to utilize the Community Benefits Agreement (CBA) as "a tool to benefit the south side" and believes homeownership on the site is going to be critical.

"Because whatever gets built on that Tropicana Field site, all of those buildings and all of the homes and the renters that are on the south side, they need to be able to take part of that equity boom," he said.

Mayo said though the



Dane Kuplicki



Gina Driscoll



Jamie Mayo



Mharel Summers



Richie Floyd

current redevelopment plans in consideration are an opportunity to create a "multi-use platform that could heal a community displacement years ago," she wants to wait for a new mayor and new policymakers to take office before proceeding with any definitive plans.

Driscoll said not only should the site offer affordable housing, but it should be affordable enough for the workers who are working on the site.

As St. Pete is receiving \$45 million as a part of the American Rescue Plan to help recover from the pandemic, the candidates made their cases about how they'll ensure the funds go to those who need it the most.

Floyd said it is imperative that the community offers direct input on how to spend the funds and advocates such groups as Pinellas Theory of Change Canvassing, who push for such community involvement.

"This money needs to be an investment into our future," he said. "It needs to be an investment into the working people and poor people's future of this city, the Black people's future of this city on the south side because those are the people that have been disproportionately affected."

Kuplicki said he would be a champion for "bridging the digital divide" and closing the nutritional equity gap.

"We hear the food deserts get brought up all the time, but if you don't have good food in your belly — or any food in your belly — you're not going to be able to work; you're not going to be able to go out and learn in school," he explained.

Mayo said that money needs to go where it's needed most, even though it might mean saying no to

some groups who want to hear yes.

Driscoll has not decided how the money should be spent because she hasn't heard from everyone yet but hopes to hear from more residents in upcoming scheduled meetings. As the pandemic has put a "spotlight" on disparities among communities, she is for closing the gap in health disparities — access to healthcare and nutritious food — and education disparities.

Summers said we "need to provide immediate relief to those who are suffering the most" and consider the mental health of the essential frontline workers.

"Maybe there's some way we can find a stipend to give these folks a break," she said.

To address the increase in gun violence deaths in the city, Kuplicki said the city needs to find out where the guns are coming from and stop them at the source. He noted that giving the city's youth opportunities through sports, jobs, and paid internships could help deter them from paths that end in violence or death.

Mayo agreed that the core issue is youth outreach.

"We really need to make our children understand that they matter, and they have a purpose, and they have a hope and a future," she said.

"When we can kind of reach in and grab them on that level, we'll make a big stride in gun violence."

Driscoll is supportive of Police Chief Anthony Holloway's efforts through initiatives that create better relationships between the community and the police and noted that she had been involved with the Not My Son program against gun violence.

Summers said she is no stranger to gun violence as she had a cousin "gunned

down in District 6" a few years ago, adding that poverty and hopelessness breed crime, no matter the race or the community. Economically empowering the Black entrepreneurs who live in a certain community would go a long way in curbing hopelessness, poverty, and ultimately crime.

Floyd maintained that young people in south St. Pete should be targeted for violence intervention programs and anti-gun violence programs, adding that he personally has organized for social services to be put in the community.

Concerning solutions to the affordable housing crisis the city is facing, Mayo would like to develop an affordable housing center that residents can visit to get the pertinent information and support they need.

Driscoll said we must look at changing our zoning to allow for small-scale increases in density in our neighborhoods where it makes sense to do that. We also need to focus on jobs and workforce development, she added, so more people have the necessary incomes to afford a moderately priced home in the city.

Kuplicki suggested bringing the Saturday Morning Market to Tangerine Plaza, complete with vendor booths.

"Let's get people to bring their food to that market so we can have food immediately," he said, adding that he's all for turning Tangerine Plaza into a "food oasis."

Summers is in support of looking at zoning laws and structures such as tiny homes and multi-family buildings. Floyd stressed that we need to invest in solutions that keep housing affordable over the long term, like community land trusts, and make sure that people have better job opportunities and economic conditions under which they live.

Kuplicki said in tackling the affordable housing issue, we need "to attack this through a zoning change," namely along high-density quarters, and upzoning will allow for multi-family units on a lot.

Driscoll said she has already voted in support for substantial funding and land for the museum's new vision regarding plans for economic development in areas south of Central Avenue and the future of the Carter G. Woodson African American Museum. She noted, however, that she is disappointed with the slow progress made in the development of Tangerine Plaza.

"It was vacant when I was elected," she said. "It still is. It has been extremely challenging to find a grocery store that is willing to come into that space."

Summers said it is a colossal failure that Tangerine Plaza has sat empty for so long, adding that we can do something about it "whether it's a co-op or smaller, grocery fresh food options." Floyd said he would push for a "Pier-sized investment" into south St. Pete, be it jobs programs, workforce development, housing, or economic development.

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Concerning whether taxpayer dollars should be used to build a baseball stadium, Summers and Floyd said they should not, while Kuplicki, Mayo and Driscoll said taxpayer dollars could play a role in developing a stadium that would benefit the city in the long run.

As for supporting an increase in the police department's budget if elected to office, Kuplicki, Mayo, Driscoll and Summers would be in favor of an increase, while Floyd said he would work on social services, so we don't need as big a police department as we have now.

To earn the city's Black and Brown votes, Kuplicki said he plans to develop innovative solutions, listen to residents, and take action for the south side. Mayo said she is a champion for marginalized people, while Driscoll said for years she had used her role on the council to advocate for and listen to Black and Brown folks in her district and throughout the city.

Summers pointed out she spent the last few years working in various neighborhoods in south St. Pete

and developed important connections with key African-American stakeholders. Floyd noted he has a history of organizing with this community to raise wages, increase criminal justice reform and increase social services for the community.

"I left my job as an electrical engineer to become a teacher in majority Black school and I'm going to take this same activist spirit to city hall with me," he said.

District 8 candidate Jeff Danner did not participate in the forum. Deadline to register to vote for the Aug. 24 St. Petersburg Primary Election is July 26. Visit votepinellas.com for more voting information.

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CONNECTIONS

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

Show your health some love

ST. PETERSBURG — As the nation prepared to brace for a potentially more aggressive strain of the COVID virus, Job Corps Centers across the nation prepared to hunker down and weather the next potential storm by ensuring every student and staff member had access to the vaccine and an opportunity to receive it within a safe environment.

Wanting to increase opportunities for those seeking to get vaccinated, Pinellas County Job Corps Center Director Omoniyi Amoran took matters into his own hand. During that same time, ODLE Management, which manages the PCJCC and is a subsidiary of Eckerd Connects, was in the process of launching its corporate initiative, "Show Your Health Some Love." Among a myriad of its many objectives, the initiative was designed to improve and enhance students and staff's physical, emotional, and mental health.

When the idea to offer vaccinations on-site was being tossed around during a discussion with campus leadership, Advance Training Coordinator Cory Givens Jr.

knew exactly which community partners would be able to galvanize the support needed to accomplish such an enormous task.

Leveraging his in-depth community ties and childhood friendships, Givens brought in the following:

- APRN and Infinity Health Consultants founder Daphne Gardner
- Limitless Leader, Inc. CEO Rebecca Watson
- Pinellas County Urban League
- HPV Ambassador Program Consultant with Disease Control & Health Protection of the Pinellas County Health Department Andrea Peaten
- Community Tech House founder Lynn Harrell Johnson

Together they discuss offering vaccinations to students and staff on the PCJCC campus. The collection of established and well-respected community partners made several visits to the campus to ensure all who wished to be vaccinated could do so.

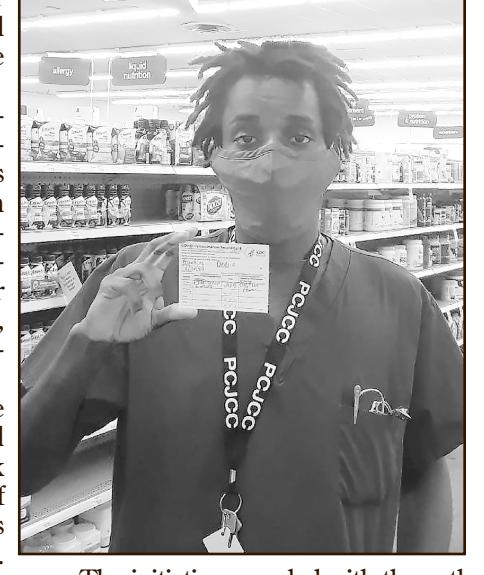
To further provide opportunities to be vaccinated, the center scheduled vaccina-

tions off-center with CVS drug store for students that were unable to be vaccinated on campus. The Show Your Health Some Love campaign was in full swing.

A committee of dedicated staff members created activities and events that promoted health awareness. Those activities included a campus 2K walk, having fresh coconuts delivered onto campus to provide authentic coconut water, weekly meditations in the gym, weekly drawings for prizes sponsored by ODLE Management, and finally, a Student Government Association sponsored basketball shoot-out!

As the campaign came to a close, the culmination of strategic planning, hard work, and well-executed activities took place on July 15. Students and staff proudly wore color-coordinated t-shirts that signified they had all been vaccinated.

The hard work that took place to help orchestrate the support needed for on-campus vaccination generate student and staff buy-in, and the willingness to "Show Their Health Some Love" was evident by the number of participants.



The initiative, coupled with those that took advantage of being vaccinated, will have a lasting effect as the more aggressive Delta variant sweeps the nation. The PCJCC will be highly prepared both mentally, physically, and emotionally!

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USF's St. Pete campus expanding services to help students from underserved communities

ST. PETERSBURG — Although he's full of anxiety, Shawn Lindsay is excited about being a new student at the USF St. Petersburg campus.

"At first, I was nervous because of the change. I'm not good with change," Lindsay said.

The Zephyrhills teen is getting a preview of what life will be like this fall through the Student Support Services (SSS) summer bridge experience. As one of 11 first-year students participating in SSS, Lindsay and the others got to experience the campus, the city of St. Pete, and learn how to get the most out of their financial aid during a series of week-long sessions before the start of the semester.

The program is designed for students who have been identified as needing per-

sonal support to help them meet their academic needs, and are either first-generation college students, come from low-income family status, or both.

"Originally, I thought I wanted to go to the USF Tampa campus, but the SSS program brought me to the St. Petersburg campus," Lindsay said. "It's smaller; it's better. I like having connections with teachers, and it's easier for me to learn that way."

The SSS program was introduced to the USF St. Petersburg campus in 2019 to ensure the campus was better serving all members of the community.

"We wanted to represent our community. We are committed to making sure that students from a variety of backgrounds have an opportunity to excel and shine,"

said Serge Desir, director of student access and support services.

Currently, the SSS program at the St. Petersburg campus is receiving traditional funding through USF. However, Desir hopes to secure federal grant money soon to accept more students into the program.

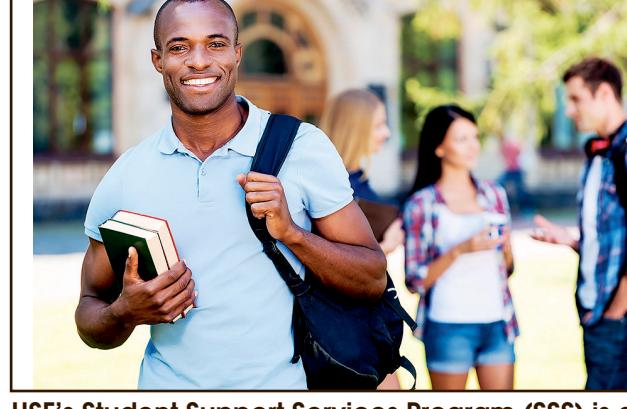
"Knowing that these students might not have all of the typical support structures in terms of their backgrounds, we want to make sure we're providing them with access to opportunities, resources, workshops and special advising," Desir said.

"To be successful academically, they need to have a sense of belonging and feel as though they have opportunities outside the classroom, with each other on campus and in the community."

The summer bridge ex-



Serge Desir, director of student access and support services



USF's Student Support Services Program (SSS) is a federally funded retention program that provides effective academic and personal support for a diverse student population.

perience gives SSS students a chance to get a head start on their college experience. During the week, students got to meet their residential assistants, academic advisors, applied for jobs on campus, and even got to take a boat tour around Tampa Bay.

The event culminated with a motivational speech from USF St. Petersburg

campus alumnus Ken Welch. The former Pinellas County commissioner and current St. Petersburg mayoral candidate urged students to learn how to collaborate with others, get past barriers, and not be afraid to ask for help.

It's advice incoming freshman Lindsay is taking seriously. As a biology major, he will be the first person in his family to pursue a bachelor's degree. During his week on campus, he secured a job as a lifeguard on campus.

He also already made new friends that he will live within the fall.

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