

# The Weekly Challenger

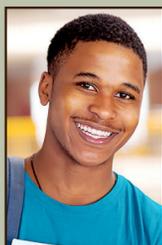
KEEPING YOU CONNECTED TO YOUR COMMUNITY

VOL. 53 NO. 07

NOVEMBER 25 - DECEMBER 9, 2021

50¢

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Help shape city's future



St. Pete-based filmmaker, director, and educator Erica Sutherland makes her directorial debut with Lifetime Television's 'Kirk Franklin's A Gospel Christmas' on Dec. 4, starring Demetria McKinney and Chaz Lamar Shepherd with a cameo appearance by Kirk Franklin.

## St. Pete-based filmmaker directs 'Kirk Franklin's A Gospel Christmas'

BY J.A. JONES  
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – When the Lifetime Television movie Kirk Franklin's A Gospel Christmas airs on Saturday, Dec. 4, St. Pete-based filmmaker, director, and educator Erica Sutherland hopes as many homes as possible will tune in. "In television, for the Nielsen ratings, the first night that a show airs, the more eyes you have on it — the more devices turned on to that channel — the higher rating number is, and the more successful the movie is, according to the net-

work," said the former Pinellas County Center for the Arts (PCCA) at Gibb High School instructor.

"So, if you want your movie to be successful, you want a lot of people watching it at the time it airs."

Audiences are in for a feel-good Christmas movie with a twist, said Sutherland, a multi-hyphenate in the show business realm.

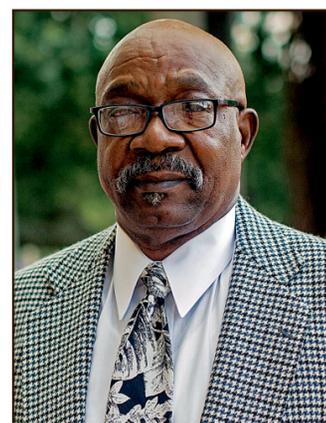
While she's spent the last 20 years acting, writing, directing, as well as educating a new generation of theater artists (nationally and internationally), she's making her directorial debut with A Gospel Christmas, which she calls "magical."

"When we first had the initial idea for this project, we wanted to take Kirk Franklin's 'Christmas' album and use that music in the story. He came on board and agreed to do that, and we rearranged about eight songs on that album so that they would work inside our story," shared Sutherland.

The story centers on Olivia, a young pastor trying to find "her voice as a woman, a pastor, a leader, and ultimately

See **FILM**, page 13

## Ben Shirley Sr. honored with building name



The City of St. Petersburg honored the late Ben Shirley Sr. on Saturday, Nov. 13, when they dedicated the sanitation department building in his memory — the Ben F. Shirley Administration Building.

BY FRANK DROUZAS  
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – A fixture in St. Pete for nearly five decades, Ben Shirley Sr. will be missed by many, but his name will live on as the city dedicated the Ben F. Shirley Administration Building in his memory.

Known affectionately as "Uncle Ben," he received many accolades for his tireless work in the city's sanitation department, where he worked from 1970 until he died in 2018 in a car accident at the age of 68.

Local dignitaries, friends and family of Shirley Sr. gathered for the Nov. 13 dedication while others watched virtually. Pastor Kelvin L. Jackson Sr. served as emcee and opened the ceremony with his rendition of "Amazing Grace," which he and Shirley Sr. would sometimes sing together during emotional moments, the pastor confided.

Willie Joseph, the city's current sanitation director who worked with Shirley Sr. for 23 years, thanked the entire Shirley family for "sharing Ben with us."

"And what I mean by 'with us,' I'm talking about the sanitation department, the industry, the community. We just want to say, 'Thank you!'" he said.

Joseph noted that Shirley Sr. was the first city employee to receive a key to the city and, in 2006, became the first Black City of St. Petersburg sanitation director.

"His strong leadership and innovation in the solid waste industry advanced the city and his colleagues that worked with him," he recalled fondly, adding that there was nothing about the industry that Shirley Sr. didn't know.

"Ben was like the Google of solid waste," he chuckled. "There was no question you could ask Ben that he didn't know."

Joseph said Shirley Sr. freely passed on his knowledge, but with a catch.

See **SHIRLEY**, page 12

## The African American Heritage Trail moved into the 21st-century

BY FRANK DROUZAS  
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – Traversing a trail of Black historical and cultural landmarks and neighborhoods in St. Pete can soon be done without even stepping outside your home. Since the pandemic, in-person tours were canceled, but that didn't stop the African American Heritage Association.

In partnership with the African American Heritage Association, Tombolo Books hosted the African American Heritage Trail Digitization Project Preview event on Nov. 16, also steamed virtually.

Gwendolyn Reese and Jon Wilson, president and vice president of the AAHA, respectively, presented a "sneak preview" of the digitized trail, which will be completed in December. Photos, documents, and moving stories from community members all went into creating this project, which has been years in the mak-



Reese and Jon Wilson, president and vice president of the AAHA, respectively, presented a "sneak preview" of the digitized trail on Nov. 16.

ing. "Our community is full of these incredible, rich, and robust stories," Reese said, adding that "we're moving into the 21st century" with the digitized trail.

Reese and Wilson handed out

certificates of appreciation to those who shared priceless anecdotes and experiences for the trail through interviews.

Mayor Rick Kriseman was on hand, stating that the project of

See **HISTORY**, page 2

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COMMUNITY NEWS

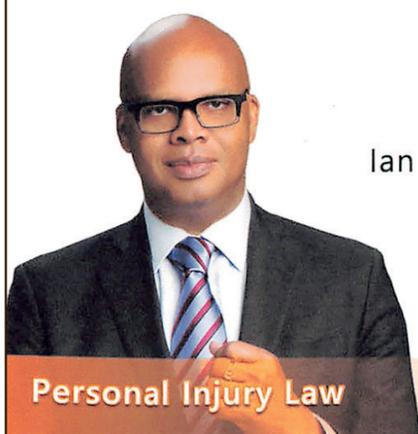
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### Are you interested in being a radio guest?

Radio Personality Princess Denise Wright of Matters of the Heart Radio Ministry is looking forward to you being a guest on her global radio broadcasting network on 99.1 FM JAMS. Matters of the Heart Radio Ministry has been broadcasting for the past 16 years locally and internationally, all the way into Jamaica. For additional information about scheduling a guest interview or promoting your business, book, music CD or non-profit organization, please call 727-488-8818 or email princessdenise.8818@yahoo.com

## Request for Subcontractor Bids Mary Bethune Apartments Renovation

Hennessy Construction Services is requesting bids for the Mary Bethune Apartments Renovation located at 1515 West Union Street. We are accepting proposals for the following:

- Sitework, landscaping, fencing & furnishings
- Membrane roofing
- Casework, doors, windows, storefront
- Stucco, drywall, flooring, painting
- Toilet accessories
- Mechanical/Electrical/Plumbing

Pre-qualification forms can be found at [www.hcsfl.com](http://www.hcsfl.com).

Bids due 4:00 PM February 4, 2019. Submit bids to [kstalker@hcsfl.com](mailto:kstalker@hcsfl.com) or fax to (727) 822-5726 to the attention of Kevin Stalker.

Construction Manager reserves the right to accept or reject any bids upon review of bidder's qualifications.

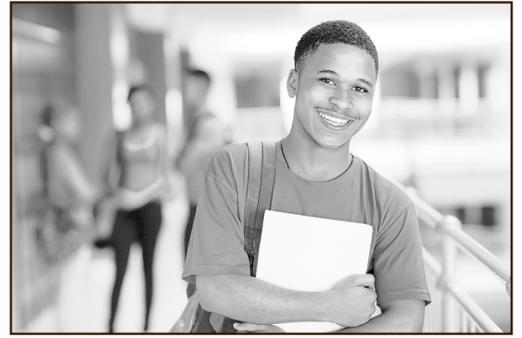
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## Free college for Pinellas County sophomores or juniors

PINELLAS COUNTY – If you are a Pinellas County resident and have a rising sophomore or junior, there are still several opportunities coming up to learn about St. Petersburg Collegiate High Schools' award-winning programs.

These programs offer students the opportunity to simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an Associate in Arts degree – all at no cost to the family. Parents and students can learn more about the program in upcoming virtual or in-person information sessions. See session options and times and register here.

The application dead-



Learn how your child can simultaneously earn a high school diploma and an Associate in Art degree at St. Petersburg College High School.

line is 3:30 p.m. on Jan. 7, 2022. Visit [spchs.spcollege.edu](http://spchs.spcollege.edu), or contact SPC to learn more:

- St. Petersburg/Gibbs: Raquel Giles at

727-341-4610 or [Giles.Raquel@spcollege.edu](mailto:Giles.Raquel@spcollege.edu)

• Tarpon Springs: Dr. Ian Call at 727-712-5891 or [call.ian@spcollege.edu](mailto:call.ian@spcollege.edu)

## The African American Heritage Trail moved into the 21st century

**HISTORY, from front page**

digitizing the trail “fits perfectly within our vision of who we want to be as a city.”

“The African American Heritage Trail is so important to our community because it tells the history and emphasizes the importance and the impact of the African-American community in and on our city,” he said, adding that by digitizing the trail, “we are preserving that message for generations to come.”

Through some of the short videos shown in Tombolo Books, the cultural significance of areas such as the Deuces and Jordan Park came alive through the interviews, pictures, and graphics. In these segments, community members also discussed the role schools, businesses, churches, hospitals, and community events played in the lives of

African Americans living in St. Pete.

Sponsors of the project included the Florida Holocaust Museum, the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg, and Lorna Taylor, president and CEO of Premier Eye Care.

“African-American history and culture are an integral part of the ecosystem of our community,” Taylor said in a virtual call. “It’s essential that these stories are available for everyone to hear, celebrate, and take to heart.”

Once the project is complete, viewers can watch interviews by community members such as Paul Stewart, Lucinda Grant, Mattie Bennett, Thelma Bruce, Betty Harden, and so many more.

Visit [TheWeeklyChallenger.com](http://TheWeeklyChallenger.com) for a sneak peek of a few of the videos.

### Video/creative team

Nicole Slaughter  
Graham  
Boyzell Hosey  
Chris Zuppa

### Project sponsors

The Foundation for a Healthy St. Pete  
The Florida Holocaust Museum  
Lorna Taylor/  
Premier Eye Care

### AAHA partners

Tombolo Books  
SPC Foundation  
Visit  
St. Pete-Clearwater  
The Woodson African American Museum of Florida  
Bill Foster

### News organizations

WUSF News  
Tampa Bay Times  
The Weekly Challenger

<p><b>PICK OF THE WEEK!</b> <b>18 55 20</b></p> <p><b>CASH 3</b> <b>502 388 139</b></p>	<p><b>DOG DAYS</b></p>	2-7	1-8
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## Veterans Affairs Department of Elks Veterans Open House



**When:** December 4 from 10 – 2 p.m.

**Where:** The Sunshine City Elks Lodge, 1331 18th Ave. S.

Veterans and the community are invited  
Information on benefits and more will be provided.  
Cash breakfast available until 11:30 a.m.

The public invited during regular business hours  
(Fridays & Sundays 6 p.m. to Midnight)  
For more information, contact Mae Butler at 727-698-1261

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Gwendolyn Reese and creative team member Nicole Slaughter Graham

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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.

### COLUMNIST'S DISCLAIMER

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.

### SUBMISSIONS POLICY

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. The Weekly Challenger reserves the right to run all or part of any submission at a later time. Some submissions may take precedence due to timeliness or newsworthiness.

### THE BLACK PRESS

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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November 25, 2021  
18 pages • 1 section

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## Gas Plant/Laurel Park Reunion: Making it happen

BY JEFFERY L. PEATEN III  
Contributor

ST. PETERSBURG – Next month, a reunion will be held for former residents and their descendants of the Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods. Both neighborhoods were razed to make way for what some called progress, and others called a broken promise. The Dec. 12 celebration of the past is for former residents and their direct descendants.

Voices Heard, Voices Matter (VHVM) of the Bloomberg Harvard Group, the African American Heritage Association, Institute on Black Life at the University of South Florida the City of St. Petersburg, and now The Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg (FHSP) has now joined the effort.

The Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg (FHSP), a private foundation formed in 2013 following the sale of the nonprofit Bayfront Health St. Petersburg, is partially funding the event. Carl Lavender, FSHP chief equity officer, believes the timing of the reunion, which takes place as the debate surrounding the

Tropicana Redevelopment Plan continues, is impeccable.

“Timing was divine,” said Lavender. “With the new mayor coming in with an understanding of the legacy. It is perfect.”

When construction began on the Florida Suncoast Dome, now known as Tropicana Field, more than 30 years ago, hundreds of Black families were displaced. The Gas Plant neighborhood was the second African-American neighborhood formed in St. Petersburg between 1890-1900 and Laurel Park, which was acquired by the city in 1988 and would ultimately be demolished so the land could be used as a parking lot for the stadium, was a public housing complex built in the 1940s.

Needless to say, the demolition of these neighborhoods to make way for a baseball stadium was a devastating blow to St. Petersburg’s Black community.

The Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods were filled with homes, churches, businesses, a library, a theater, schools, and playgrounds. They were thriving communities with rich histories. Many hope that redevelopment

will include plans that will usher in a new era of prosperity in the city’s African-American community.

“This event is important because we cannot go deeper into the century without recognizing the history,” continued Lavender. “It is time to celebrate those impacted and their ability to sustain.”

Voices Heard, Voices Matter (VHVM) is one of several groups involved in organizing the reunion. Jason Mathis, CEO of the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership, and a member of VHVM, agrees with Lavender.

“The reunion is a way to memorialize their narratives and incorporate their lives, histories and stories into our future,” said Mathis. “These neighborhoods had a rich history of businesses, residents, families, restaurants, bars, churches and community. It wasn’t just the physical buildings that were removed, it was a sense of community and the social, financial, cultural and familial ties that brought people together.”

The reunion will celebrate the rich history of these two African-American neighborhoods, and provide a forum for former residents ousted from their homes to make way for the construction of the baseball stadium. They’ll be able to share their thoughts and ideas on how to move forward with redevelopment plans for the area.

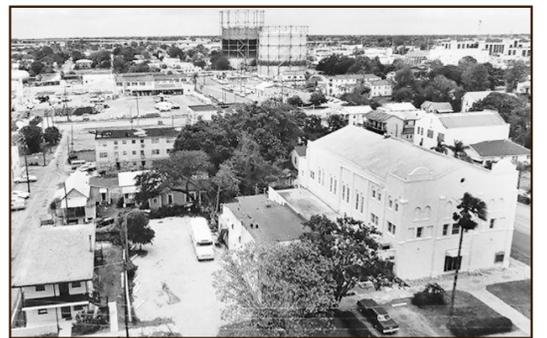
Perhaps most importantly, the Gas Plant/Laurel Park Reunion will ensure an important part of the city’s history is not lost or forgotten.

In addition to celebrating the past, the reunion will serve to remind the city of the promises that still need to be fulfilled to those who were displaced and the city’s entire African American commu-

nity. The Gas Plant/Laurel Park Reunion offers a unique opportunity to do so, while also celebrating the history and shared experiences of those who lived in these neighborhoods.

“Why is it important for FHSP to be involved,” asked Lavender. “The reunion gives the foundation a chance to listen, reflect on, and coalition build with VHVM and others dedicated to equity to focus on what happens next.”

Activities are scheduled from noon until 3 p.m. Participants will have the option to attend in person or virtually via Zoom and Facebook livestream. Onsite activities will take place at Tropicana Field



The Gas Plant and Laurel Park neighborhoods were filled with homes, churches, businesses, a library, a theater, schools, and playgrounds. They were thriving communities with rich histories.

in Parking Lot 4.

Those who wish to attend, please visit [bit.ly/GasPlantReunion](https://bit.ly/GasPlantReunion) or call (727) 371-6153 for

more information. The registration deadline is Nov. 30. There is no cost to attend the reunion.



The impact of Laurel Park’s demolition was socially and economically devastating. Not only were residents forced to leave their homes, the jobs and affordable housing promised to the Black community never materialized. (Tampa Bay Times)

### GAS PLANT/ LAUREL PARK NEIGHBORHOOD REUNION

**CELEBRATING THE PAST,  
ENVISIONING THE FUTURE**  
SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12TH  
TROPICANA FIELD, LOT 4  
NOON - 3 P.M.

This reunion is for former residents and family members of both neighborhoods. It will be a fun time for all with free food, entertainment, opportunities to see old friends, and sharing of memories and photos of both neighborhoods.

Stay tuned for more information regarding registration and how you can get involved. There will also be scholarship opportunities for middle school and high school students.

SCAN TO REGISTER FOR THE EVENT



Email: [VoicesHeardVoicesMatter@gmail.com](mailto:VoicesHeardVoicesMatter@gmail.com)  
Phone Number: 727-371-6153

PRESENTED BY





Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg **VOICES HEARD VOICES MATTER**



## NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Florida Department of Transportation is hosting a statewide Toll Rate Rulemaking Public Hearing to provide the public an opportunity to review and comment on proposed amendments to Rule 14-15.0081, Florida Administrative Code. These amendments include the addition of two new facilities (Gateway Expressway and Suncoast Parkway between US 98 and CR 486) and five new interchanges: Braddock Road on the Polk Parkway, NW 8<sup>th</sup> Street on the Sawgrass Expressway, Ridge Road on the Suncoast Parkway, and at NW 170<sup>th</sup> Street and Sand Lake Road on the Turnpike Mainline.

The rule amendments set toll rates for the Ticket System upon conversion to All-Electronic Tolling (AET), consolidate the Northern Coin, Ticket System, Southern Coin, and Homestead Extension of Florida’s Turnpike systems into one “Turnpike Mainline” rate table and update the mileposts of toll gantries relocated due to AET conversion. The proposed amendments also include the addition of TOLL-BY-PLATE rates to the Alligator Alley, Pinellas Bayway System and Sunshine Skyway Bridge rate tables, and the new Winter Lake Plaza on Polk Parkway and updates the Beachline West Expressway plaza toll rate.

The hearing will be held on:

**DATE: Thursday, December 2, 2021**

**TIME: 6:00 p.m.**

The hearing will be conducted as a hybrid meeting, offering both remote (via webinar) and in-person attendance options. Registration for the webinar is required. Registration and additional information can be found at:

<https://floridasturnpike.com/toll-rate-rulemaking/>

A site access location is also available for those persons without computer and/or internet access at the following location:

**Florida Department of Transportation, District 7  
Auditorium  
11201 North Malcolm McKinley Drive  
Tampa, FL 33612**

Public participation is solicited without regard to race, color, national origin, age, sex, religion, disability or family status. If you have any questions, please contact Ivette Ruiz-Paz, Communications Manager, at Florida’s Turnpike Enterprise, 1-800-749-7453. Persons who require special accommodations for the meeting under the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1991 or who require translation services (free of charge) should contact Justin Hannah at Florida’s Turnpike Enterprise (407) 264-3822 at least seven calendar days prior to the meeting.

## 'You Belong Here:' Prioritizing diversity and inclusion at USF's St. Pete Campus

**BY MARTIN TADLOCK**  
Regional Chancellor of USF's St. Petersburg campus

Back in 2019, the student government leaders at USF's St. Petersburg campus launched a campaign they called "You belong here." It means that you are part of our family and are valued no matter your race, ethnicity, religious beliefs, gender identity, sexual orientation, ability, or age.

It's an initiative we continue today, and I love it because it embodies the core of who we are as a campus. I have watched students adhere to these principles in the way they stand up for each other, form clubs and organizations together, and reach out to be inclusive in hundreds of small acts every day.

We know that diversity enriches us as we learn and work side by side with those whose experiences, beliefs and perspectives are different than our own. It promotes critical thinking as we

confront preconceived stereotypes.

Being part of a diverse campus helps students learn to communicate with a variety of others, better preparing them for an increasingly diverse workforce that stretches around the globe. We know these things, and we value those things at USF St. Petersburg's campus.

That is our commitment to our community. I will also add that this is an issue that I personally care about very deeply.

I'm pleased to say we had the largest increase in enrollment of underrepresented students in the 52-year history of the USF St. Petersburg campus this past summer/fall, although we're still not where we want to be. Also, our student success numbers show that our African-American students have the highest retention rates across all racial groups on our campus.

In light of this, I

wanted to share with you some of the strides and investments in the area of diversity and inclusion we have made over the past five years. Here is just a quick overview of some of those initiatives.

### Expanding access to our campus

We are Pinellas County's only research university, and we are here to serve all members of our community. We take that commitment very seriously and have taken several notable steps to increase access to our campus.

In 2019, we launched the Pinellas Access to Higher Education or PATHe program. This provides a seamless transition and scholarship benefits for students who want to start their college career at St. Petersburg College and finish at USF's St. Petersburg campus. We currently have 59 students enrolled in this innovative program, which also places counselors in local high schools to guide students and parents through the complex journey toward higher education.

Last year, USF nearly doubled the size of a program that guarantees admission to any of its three campuses for students who attend local high schools serving historically underrepresented communities. Through the Guaranteed Admissions Pathway Program (GAPP), students at 17 Title I high schools can secure their place at USF by sustaining a 3.7 GPA by the end of their junior year and earning a score

of 1100 on the SAT or 22 on the ACT. This program includes Gibbs High School and Boca Ciega High School in Pinellas County.

### Prioritizing diversity and inclusion

Following the senseless murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and other innocent Black Americans, I knew our campus had to take action. So we developed a Campus/Community Task Force on Diversity, Inclusion and Equity, which resulted in creating a higher education consortium.

This group, which consists of USF's St. Petersburg Campus, Stetson University, Eckerd College, and St. Petersburg College, is working together to bring a Truth, Racial Healing, and Transformation Center to St. Petersburg. This center will implement an action plan to move toward the transformative goals of erasing structural barriers to equal treatment and opportunity on campus, in the community, and for the nation.

In addition, the consortium has created a Racial Justice Fellows program aimed at putting students at the center of creating systemic racial change. Two students from each institution were selected to participate in the pilot program and will receive up to \$2,000 in scholarship money. They will learn about shaping policy and systems through a racial justice lens and work on projects that support racial healing and transformation.



"Being part of a diverse campus helps students learn to communicate with a variety of others, better preparing them for an increasingly diverse workforce that stretches around the globe," said Martin Tadlock, Regional Chancellor of USF's St. Petersburg campus.

### Creating programs that celebrate diversity

In partnership with our Office of Multicultural Affairs (OMA), our Housing and Residential Education department created the King Suites Living/Learning community in our residence halls. King Suites is named for Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. and focuses on the lived and campus experience of our Black and African-American students. The students in this residential community live on the same floor and participate in programming developed with OMA.

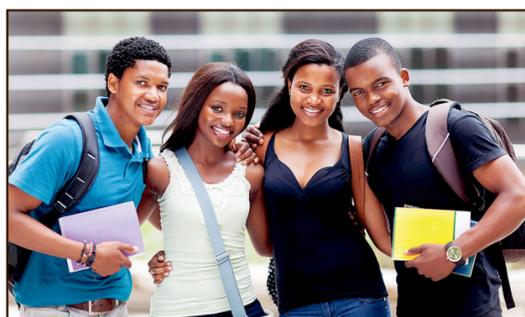
Also, this fall, our campus launched the Call Me MISTER program, which is designed to increase the number of male teachers of color in local elementary schools, particularly those with populations of poor or at-risk students. In exchange for mentoring opportunities, tuition assistance, and academic

support, participants in the program agree to teach at urban or low-income elementary school classrooms after graduation.

These are just a few of the many programs we have created to foster diversity at USF's St. Petersburg campus. You can read more by visiting our Diversity and Inclusion page at [stpetersburg.usf.edu/diversity-and-inclusion/](http://stpetersburg.usf.edu/diversity-and-inclusion/).

Though we are proud of our efforts and successes to this point, we recognize there is still more to be done. Community support is essential as we work to address these critical issues throughout the Tampa Bay region.

Stay engaged with us as we continue this vital work, and let us know how we can continue to improve. It will take our collective voices and sustained effort to advance this worthy cause and create a just and equitable society.



The Pinellas Access to Higher Education or PATHe program, Guaranteed Admissions Pathway Program (GAPP), the Campus/Community Task Force on Diversity, Inclusion and Equity, and the Call Me MISTER programs were all created to prioritize diversity and inclusion at USF St. Petersburg Campus.

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Get more for your Medicare dollar. Take advantage of Medicare plan choices that offer you flexibility in cost and benefits to fit your needs and your budget.

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<b>Clearwater</b> 11/30 & 12/7 10am-3pm Charles Lowe's Agy 615 S Missouri Ave	<b>Clearwater</b> 11/29, 12/3, 12/6 1pm-4pm Walgreens 1880 N Belcher Rd	<b>Dunedin</b> 12/1 10am-3pm Holiday Inn 975 Broadway	<b>Dunedin</b> 11/29, 12/2, 12/6 11am-1pm Walgreens 1477 Main Street
<b>Largo</b> 12/1 9:30am-1:30pm Largo Library 120 Central Park Dr	<b>South Pasadena</b> 11/29 & 12/6 9am-12pm Dunkin' Donuts 1200 Pasadena Ave	<b>Palm Harbor</b> 11/30 & 12/7 12pm-3pm Snappers Comedy 36657 US HWY 19N	<b>St Petersburg</b> 12/2/21 11:30am-1:30pm Panera Bread 1908 4th St N

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Plans are insured through UnitedHealthcare Insurance Company or one of its affiliated companies, a Medicare Advantage organization with a Medicare contract. Enrollment in the plan depends on the plan's contract renewal with Medicare. © 2021 United HealthCare Services, Inc. All Rights Reserved.

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## Gun violence: A new approach is needed

BY COREY GIVENS JR.  
Contributor

ST. PETERSBURG – Last month, 17-year-old Christopher Tonsel was shot by a St. Petersburg police officer after fleeing on foot from a domestic dispute at Wildwood Park. K-9 officer Leighton Williams was in the 2400 block of 13th Avenue South when he stepped out of his cruiser to try to locate Tonsel, who was seen running between two residences in an attempt to hide.

According to Sheriff Bob Gualtieri, Officer Leighton Williams and his K-9 pursued Tonsel, who allegedly had a revolver in his waistband. Williams said that despite his verbal requests for Tonsel to drop the firearm, Tonsel reached for it.

According to the sheriff, the officer fired one shot at Tonsel, striking him in the torso. The teen was immediately rushed to the hospital for emergency surgery.

Less than two weeks later, a man was killed, and four others were injured during a shooting at the Skyway Plaza where a “neighborhood boxing league” event was taking place. The event, which was not properly permitted or secured, was meant to address gun violence in the community.

These shootings are part of a bigger issue. While the City of St. Petersburg has seen a significant rise in gun violence this year, it is not alone. Experts predict that the United States will experi-

ence the highest spike in gun homicides in decades, based on statistics from the Federal Bureau of Investigation’s gun violence archive. Anti-gun violence prevention measures must foster intentional healing spaces to stop the proliferation of illegal guns and firearm fatalities.

Intentional healing spaces are virtual, social, and physical communities that encourage healthy and vibrant lifestyles. They’re intended to help those most impacted by racial and other forms of oppression by cultivating individual and community transfiguration while also addressing the root causes of inequalities and injustices.

Poverty, income inequality, delapidated public housing, deficient public services, underperforming schools, despair about the future, and easy access to weapons are all fundamental causes of gun violence, according to the non-profit Educational Fund to Stop Gun Violence. A multi-faceted situation necessitates and merits a multi-faceted solution.

Creating intentional healing spaces is that multi-faceted solution. It enables a more holistic approach to both the systemic causes of gun violence and the ensuing invisible wounds, such as the collective trauma that people, families, and communities feel due to gun violence exposure.

Intentional healing spaces can be part of a broader framework to bigger efforts to strengthen the workforce. As we all

know, providing jobs for teenagers is a must if we want to reduce gun violence. For example, in Chicago, youth who engaged in a summer work program run by local community organizations saw a 43 percent reduction in violent crime arrests (including gun violence).

Improvements and repairs to a neighborhood’s basic infrastructure can help to build community cohesiveness and minimize violent crime. Increased street lighting, for example, has regularly been found to reduce violence.

Creating intentional healing spaces in Midtown — one of the areas with the highest rates of violent crime — is essential to St. Petersburg’s anti-gun violence efforts. Residents in this predominantly African-American community persistently advocate for public safety, grocery stores, functioning sewage systems, etc.

We need to listen to communities about what they think will work; after all, they’re the experts on the happenings in their neighborhoods. And healing spaces is what they want.

On Oct. 26, I hosted a community conversation about gun violence and the trauma it inflicts on those most affected. For two hours, a panel led by St. Petersburg Police Chief Anthony Holloway, a licensed clinical social worker, an ex-offender, and three parents who have lost children to gun violence dialogued and identified innovative solutions to curbing the gun



Corey Givens Jr.

epidemic that has found its way into our community.

As part of these efforts, we committed to mentoring more youth in neighborhoods with the highest rates of shots fired and providing these young people with more productive after-school care activities, free of charge.

The youth who participated in the conversation relayed positive stories of good times they had in other neighborhoods where they lived or visited while also remarking on how upsetting it was to see the overgrown lawns, litter, and lack of opportunities where they resided.

They desired clean neighborhoods, a large-scale job apprenticeship program, and innovative teen-focused community recreation centers.

These responses from our youth helped me realize that what our city needed most was a task force designed specifically to address the effects of gun violence. There is a drug task force and a human trafficking task force, but what proactive measures have we made to help reduce gun vio-



Last month, Pinellas Sheriff Bob Gualtieri briefed the media after a St. Petersburg police officer shot 17-year-old Christopher Deon Tonsel. Gualtieri said it happened after Officer Leighton Williams saw a gun in Tonsel’s waistband and ordered him to drop it, but Tonsel instead pulled out the gun and pointed it at Williams. ( Boyzell Hosey / Tampa Bay Times )

lence in St. Pete?

In predominantly Black, lower-income neighborhoods, intentional healing spaces recreate the environment — including infrastructure upgrades and new affordable housing developments — restore safety, rejuvenate communities through youth programs throughout the city, and provide virtual and physical spaces that reinforce unity in the community and promote mental health.

Intentional healing spaces provide benefits beyond decreasing gun violence, which disproportionately affects African Americans, who are 10 times more likely than Caucasians to die from a bullet.

Everytown for Gun Safety recently released a policy report that details the several ways in which gun violence affects African-American adolescents and communities, including heightened anx-

ety, grief, depression, trauma, and unraveled community camaraderie and cohesiveness. That is why St. Petersburg needs policies and programs tailored to specifically address healing from trauma, because what we have learned is that the violence indirectly affects our entire city. Families, business owners and property values are all affected by this epidemic.

Multiple intervention techniques are needed that focus on the various fundamental causes rather than the symptoms, as intentional healing spaces do. These virtual, social, and physically safe spaces will not appear overnight; this will require a long-term approach and full community support.

However, far too many young people are waiting for our local leaders to take action to save their lives. We cannot afford to wait. Now is the time for bold, all-encompassing endeavors.



## CELEBRATION OF CHAMPIONS FARING WELL FESTIVAL

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## CELEBRATION OF CHAMPIONS FARING WELL FESTIVAL

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**TIME:** 5:30-9 P.M.

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## Dream Defenders: The Freedom Column

### Universal childcare is a must!

BY HALE MORRISSETTE

Childcare in the United States is frustrating for everyone involved. Families pay way too much for daycare or are priced out of childcare programs altogether, and care providers earn far too little.

The cost of childcare is an issue for most working families and single parents. Though childcare is needed for parents to work, the \$700 monthly price tag makes it inaccessible for many parents. Studies show that over 2.3 million women have dropped out of the workforce since last February, compared to 1.8 million men who left the labor force.

After months of discussion in Congress, the House has finally passed Biden's nearly \$2 trillion social spending bill. The initiative includes about \$400 billion for early childhood education — universal preschool and affordable childcare.

According to the report, an average woman with two children could see a \$97,000 increase in her lifetime earnings under universal childcare. Overall, the number of women working full time would increase by 17 percent. The number of women



Hale Morrisette

working without a college degree would jump by about 31 percent.

Quality childcare can cost as much as the rent, making it inaccessible for many working-class families. As working-class parents, having quality support will positively impact the family and community in which they reside.

It's also essential for all children to have con-

sistent relationships with people outside of their family. That shouldn't come with the fear of safety or have a price tag attached to it. Educational gains come from early childhood education that is paired with quality childcare.

With two-thirds of children being raised by parents who go to work daily, the United States cannot allow the childcare industry to struggle — or not exist for all people. That simply cannot be an option for families.

We must hold President Joe Biden and policymakers accountable. They must support parents' ability to provide for their families by building a childcare system that supports and offers affordable and accessible care options for all families beginning at a child's birth.

Universal childcare and acceptable compensations for the workforce are powerful tools for achieving racial and economic equity after the pandemic and beyond.

*Hale Morrisette is a human rights activist in Pensacola. She has a bachelor's and master's degree in social work from the University of West Florida and is the Regional Organizer of the Dream Defenders' Pensacola chapter.*



## SelfieMe in Tyrone Mall

BY ERNISA BARNWELL  
Contributor

ST. PETERSBURG — The marriage of photography and technology has created some of the most memorable moments in photographic documentation. What was once deemed a selfish and arrogant way to capture one's essence has become a popular way of capturing self-expression.

For a Throwback Thursday moment, on March 13, 2014, the late General Colin Powell posted a selfie image of himself that he took as a teenager with the caption: "I was doing selfies 60 years before you Facebook folks..."

Twenty-seven-year-old Amberly Mathews has made the selfie moment into an experience for friends, couples, families, content creators, and event planners with SelfieMe, located in Tyrone Square Mall at 6901 22nd Ave. N.

You bring your device, and the lighting is provided for you. You can take as many photos as you like with various multiple-themed backgrounds for \$20 per person.



Mathews decided to bring this cultural trend to St. Pete after visiting a SelfieMe in Atlanta. Her location has a TikTok booth for all of you TikTok content creators. There is also seasonal background-themed booths for every holiday.

Mathews is having a 20 percent off special this Black Friday, so your perfect selfie will cost only \$16. There are no time

limits, and you can use up to 20 backgrounds!

Mrs. Claus will be on hand with Christmas just around the corner for holiday photos. Gift cards are available for purchase and will make a perfect Christmas gift or stocking stuffer.

For more information about SelfieMe, contact Amberly Mathews at 727-341-1994.

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## Happy to give thanks

BY DEXTER MCCREE  
Feature Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – Before the pandemic turned the world upside down, families looked forward to gathering for holiday festivities and a delicious meal. Gospel recording artist Pastor Shirley Caesar sang blessing of “beans, greens, potatoes, tomatoes;” it was the traditional Thanksgiving meal on the table of most African-American families and a testimony of how we have been favored throughout the year.

Thanksgiving gatherings are a special time when faraway relatives have an opportunity to meet new additions to the family while admiring the growth and development of others. A year would have gone by for fables and tales to be gathered

and shared to the excitement of those visiting family members.

But that was before COVID-19 intercepted traditions and expectations —today, who knows what to expect. The presence of COVID strains and uncertainty of who has been vaccinated has brought about caution and fear, mainly of the unknown.

Families are now relegated to present safety measures guidelines that could quickly become offensive and divisive. This is what COVID-19 has done, and it's the new normal.

“This Thanksgiving, we will be gathering together with our family. Since the pandemic, we have noticed we don't have so many visitors stopping by to fellowship,” said Angela Trotter with her husband, Ja-Vonta, nodding in agree-

ment.

Some families maintain the traditions with modifications because they see the value in family and faith.

Retired educator, Julia Latimore, stated that she would celebrate Thanksgiving with her family in an alternative way. Her family, extended family, and friends usually gather at one house and put tables out to accommodate the crowd. However, they are getting together on a smaller scale because of the pandemic. Different locations will host smaller gatherings, and the family will intermingle between the homes to have dinner.

“We know that it's still important to get together,” said Latimore. “First, I will have my grown children, grands (children), great grands, sisters, cousins, nieces and nephews. Then, I will



Julia Latimore



Ja-Vonta and Angela Trotter

travel across the bridge to my daughter's house to be with other family members. We always pray and give thanks to God.”

In many families, tradition holds for each person to tell why they are thankful, and during these difficult times, it holds even

more meaning that they are still able to get together and praise the Lord, of course, eat lots of good food.

Times have changed, and it is a new normal for the Thanksgiving season. In the African-American tradition, families pray to-

gether and have a delicious meal. There will be plenty of smiles, laughter, and new additions with lots of fables and tales to go around. Through all that the world has endured this past year, people are just happy to give thanks.

## Mayor-elect Welch invites residents to help shape city's future

ST. PETERSBURG – Mayor-elect Ken Welch is inviting residents to help shape the city's vision and future by holding a “Community Conversations” series in December at the University of South Florida St. Petersburg Student Center. One of the three sessions will also be held virtually for those who cannot attend in person.

“Listening to our community is my top priority and one of the most important things we can do,” Welch said. “This is a great opportunity for our residents to come together to share strategies and ideas to make our great city a better place to live for all.”

The Community Conversations are open to the public and sponsored by the St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership and the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg.

“We are thrilled to help support these community conversations,” said Jason Mathis, St. Petersburg Downtown Partnership CEO. “We know the importance of community engagement, and we are delighted, but not surprised, to see the Welch Administration start out with this important effort. We look forward to working with Mayor-elect Welch and supporting an incredible period of equitable and sustainable growth in our community over the next several years.”

“Listening to the lived experience of city residents is critical to advance the health outcomes for all of us,” added Randall H. Russell, President & CEO of the Foundation for a Healthy St. Petersburg. “This effort illustrates a drive to lift the voices of all residents, including those most often

not heard. The Foundation deeply believes listening to hear, learn, and respond is vital to an involved citizenry.”

Residents are asked to sign up at [bit.ly/StPeteFuture](https://bit.ly/StPeteFuture) for one of the three sessions, with each session able to accommodate 300 people.

- Friday, Dec. 10: 1 p.m. to 4 p.m. USF St. Pete

- Saturday, Dec. 11: 9 a.m. to 12:00 p.m. USF St. Pete

- Monday, Dec. 13: 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. (virtual)

The events will provide the community an opportunity to weigh in on five areas: Education and youth opportunities, equitable development and business opportunities, neighborhood health and safety, the environment, infrastructure and resilience, and housing opportunities for all.

Each session will



begin with opening remarks from Mayor-elect Welch, and then participants will break into smaller groups for 30-minute discussions on each of the five transition topics. The event will close with everyone coming together to share key ideas.

Professional facilitators will lead the program

with the World Cafe systems-thinking model that expands the range of choices available for solving a problem by broadening thinking and helping participants articulate issues.

The University of South Florida St. Petersburg Student Center is located at 200 6th Ave. S in St. Petersburg.

Welch served five terms on the Pinellas County Commission and won the November mayoral election with more than 60 percent of the vote, becoming the first African American to be elected to the city's top elected office. He will become mayor when he is inaugurated on Jan. 6, 2022.

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WE ENCOURAGE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

## The Black community's case for reparations

ST. PETERSBURG – There is a myriad of reasons that the Black community must have reparations from the city government of St. Petersburg. First and foremost, the Tropicana property was built on a trail of lies to the Black residents and businesses that were in the gas plant area.

More than 2,000 Black residents were uprooted along with dozens of businesses, schools, and several Black churches. After declaring the area blighted, the city then used political sleight of hand to convince Black residents to give up their properties. Black residents were promised light industry and jobs. Lies, lies, lies, and more lies.

The lies started in the 1970s, and by the time the city had secured the land for the mysterious “light industry” by pushing Black residents out, city of-

ficials had changed their tune to building a baseball stadium. We recognize now that the city never intended to bring any light industry; they wanted a baseball team and a stadium.

An entire Black community was destroyed for the sake of what the city thought would be a great income generator. For more than 30 years, the Trop has existed as a grim reminder of what the system that many call colonialism can do.

There is only one way to correct this injustice: Reparations now!

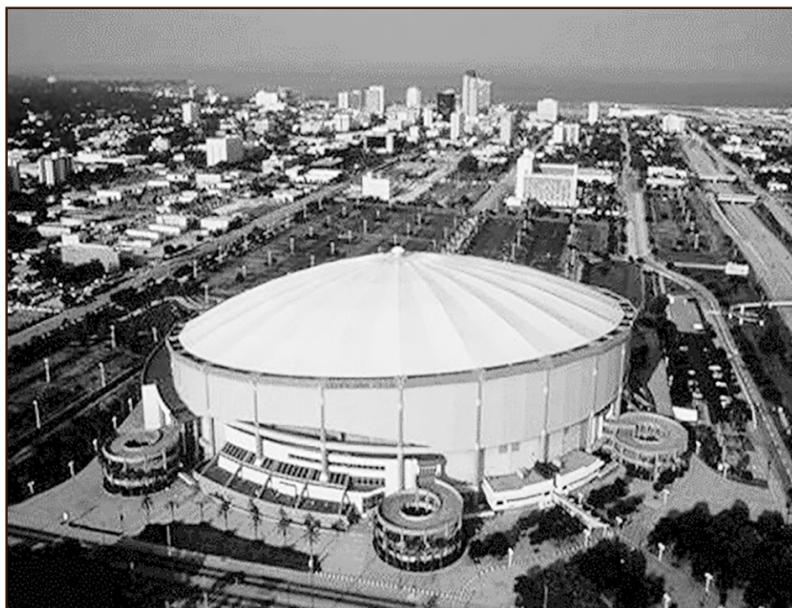
Fast forward to late 2020, and the city government has concocted yet another scam on the African community. Chaimurenga Waller, president of the International People's Democratic Uhuru Movement, calls the city's most recent scheme “Tropiscam II.” This decision by the city to

redevelop the 86 acres of the Tropicana property is adding insult to injury.

Mayor Rick Kriseman has narrowed the search for Trop developers down to two companies, JMA Sugar Partners and Midtown Development. Neither company has raised the question of just compensation, reparations to the Black community.

It is important to note here that some have estimated the value of the Tropicana property at 1 billion dollars! One billion dollars of land plus the Tropicana field itself would be a substantial start to the process of implementing reparations to the Black community.

Former District 7 City Council candidate Eritha “Akile” Cainion has even put forth the mechanism for how the reparations to the Black community would work. She explained that creating a “Repara-



tions Land Trust and Development Authority” would make reparations a reality by controlling how the Tropicana Field property is developed and other vacant city-owned lands in

the Black community.

The point here is that some very important people and organizations have figured out why reparations are due and how they should be implemented.

Reparations now! Take back the Trop!

For more information, contact the International People's Democratic Uhuru Movement at 727-914-3617.

## Call Me MISTER program introduces its first cohort of future male teachers of color

ST. PETERSBURG – On Nov. 9, the USF College of Education officially welcomed its first group of students who have committed to becoming teachers at schools in Pinellas County.

The students are the first cohort for USF's Call Me MISTER program, which stands for Mentors Instructing Students Toward Effective Role Models and aims to increase the number of male teachers of color in elementary schools with large populations of low-income or at-risk students.

In Jan. 2021, USF's St. Petersburg campus partnered with Pinellas County Schools to develop a program that puts Black or Brown male teachers in classrooms where they can be mentors. The two institutions worked together to identify prospective applicants like Juan Dacosta, who grew up in the St. Pete area.

"Because I went to school in Pinellas County for 12 years, I understood the premise of the whole program and why it's necessary and important," Dacosta said.

As a graduate student, Dacosta has a master's degree in business administration and is now pursuing a master's in education. "For me, without thought, I had to do it because it allows me to give something back to the community."

The Call Me MISTER cohort for 2021-22 includes Dacosta and two undergraduate students, Michael Wright and Triston Williams. During a ceremony, these students signed commitment letters at the USF St. Petersburg campus, where the program is housed. The ceremony symbolized their commitment to urban school teaching and the Call Me MISTER program's mission and values, including confidence, dignity, discipline

and self-respect.

"The commitment isn't a one-way street. It's very much reciprocal," said Brenda Walker, the program's director and professor in exceptional student education at the USF Tampa campus. "You have the unwavering support; you have the commitment and the investment of multiple USF individuals and our partners at Pinellas County Schools," she said at the event.

Walker is the former associate dean of education at USF's St. Petersburg campus and played a crucial role in securing the coveted Call Me MISTER license.

Founded and based at Clemson University, the innovative program has spread to more than 25 colleges and universities nationwide. USF is the only university to hold a license for the Call Me MISTER program in Florida.

Students enrolled in



USF's St. Petersburg campus partnered with Pinellas County Schools to develop the Call Me MISTER program, which puts Black or Brown male teachers in classrooms where they can be mentors. MISTERS for 2021-22, (left to right) Juan Dacosta, Michael Wright and Triston Williams.

the program receive tuition assistance for approved areas of study, an academic support system to help assure success, social and cultural support, assistance with job placement and the opportunity to attend a national summer conference with all the Call Me MISTER participants.

In exchange, graduates agree to teach in urban or low-income elementary school classrooms – at least one year for every year they receive assistance from the program.

"It's a calling as a public servant. It's an opportunity to give back to society," said Sandra Vernon-Jackson, coordinator of the Call Me MISTER program and instructor of mathematics education at the USF St. Petersburg campus. "When it comes to education, we've been losing individuals. There's a low rate of men going

into the teaching profession."

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, since 2014, ethnic and racial minorities have made up more than half of the student population in U.S. public schools. But about 80 percent of teachers are white, and 77 percent are female. People of color make up about 20 percent of teachers, and just two percent are Black men.

Research from the Institute of Labor Economics also shows that the drop-out rate for very low-income Black youth decreased by 39 percent by having at least one Black teacher in elementary school.

"I've always had the desire to leave a positive impact on those around me and be a mentor to someone. The program provides that and assists me in the process of becoming a teacher, which

is a field that lacks diversity," Williams said, one of the students in the cohort.

The Call Me MISTER program, including the student's tuition, is entirely funded by private donors. USF hopes to increase the number of students and expand the program to its campuses in Tampa and Sarasota-Manatee.

"I've never had a male teacher of color, so I believe expanding this underrepresented group will inspire children and teach them that someone who looks like them can work in a highly-respected profession," said Wright, another student in the cohort. "As I go through the program, I hope to learn how to be an amazing educator and leave an everlasting impression with the students I encounter."



During the Nov. 9 welcoming ceremony, students signed commitment letters at the USF St. Petersburg campus, where the Call Me MISTER program is housed.

## Sandra Sims Moody goes home

ST. PETERSBURG – Sandra Sims Moody of St. Petersburg passed away Saturday, Nov. 6, 2021. Funeral services were held on Nov. 22 at St. Andrew's Episcopal Church, where Father Crawford officiated the service.

On Jan. 15, 1946, an unforgettable spirit was gifted to the McCall Family. Edward and Lillie McCall welcomed their third daughter, Sandra Louise McCall, to the fold. She was educated in the Hillsborough County Public School System, graduating from Blake High School in 1964.

During her tenure at Blake, the fashionable, fierce, and fly teenager broke the color barrier while participating as a Yellow Jacket Tennis Team member. Other extra-curricular activities included the basketball and drill teams, respectively.

Mrs. Moody continued her education by attending Gibbs Junior College and Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University on the highest of seven hills, majoring in social work and education. Red and Lillie's daughter taught at Rickards High, Leonard Wesson Elementary, and Bethel Christian School in Tallahassee as an educator par excellence.

Upon returning to the Tampa Bay area, the distinguished educator finished her career at Madeira Beach Middle and 16th Street Middle School. The afro-centric educator received the Teacher of the Year award and was recognized for her ability to prepare inner-city students to achieve high standardized test scores during her career.



As a second career, the kindhearted queen finished her professional career as a caregiver to the developmentally disabled, veteran, and HIV/AIDS communities.

The social butterfly was a proud member of the Blake Alumni Organization. As a lifelong servant of the people, she was an active member of several churches in the Tampa Bay area, spending most of her time, talents, and treasures at St. James and St. Augustine Episcopal Churches, where she was elected as the senior warden.

Mrs. Moody was a devoted mother who loved her family, friends and fashion.

She was preceded in death by her parents, Edward and Lillie McCall; sister, Eddie Mae Ford (Wimp); ex-husband, Steven Moody; grandparents, John and Eliza McCall, and Reginal and Josephine Pottinger; aunts and uncles, Morris

and Marie Parham, Frank Waiters, James Thomas, Albert and Rachel Thomas, Victor Thomas, Eugene and Zanie Lou Thomas, Timothy Thomas Sr., Virginia Gainer, Richard McCall and Eliza McKnight and host of other relatives.

She leaves to cherish her memory two sons, Korey Sims (Erronetta) and Kelly Sims (Kahlya); ex-husband, Zeke Sims Jr.; grandchildren, Tylor Sims, Sheria Moore, Korey-Yonna Sims, LaQuashia Sims, Ciarra Williams, Kelis Sims, and Kloe Sims; great-grandchildren, Tylor Sims Jr., and Celina Hawkins; brothers, Edward McCall Jr. (Zella), and Ronald McCall; sisters, Norma Reese (Ernest), Stephanie Davis and Donna Powell (Amahl); aunts, Louise Waiters and Dorothy Thomas; and a host of other relatives to include nieces, nephews, cousins, friends, and the Blake High Class of 1964.

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22 SOUTH

## Proud of the village

BY DEXTER MCCREE  
Feature Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – The Jersey Mike’s Basketball Classic held at Eckerd College over the weekend brought in college teams from around the country to St. Petersburg for nationally televised play. It also brought together local products who expanded beyond their village and are now making an impact all over the world. Local eyes are seeing their own rise on the national platform, and the village was there to support them.

High school and college basketball official Bernard Reedy Sr. attended the tournament as community support and was more than pleased with the outcome. Reedy has officiated high school basketball in Pinellas County for 29 years and has seen many players firsthand.

“It’s been great to see the homecoming of kids and the staff that’s on the

camera come back to St. Petersburg,” said Reedy Sr. “I enjoy the games, and the atmosphere was good. I came to watch and support them, and I hope they return next year.”

Daral (DJ) Moore and Jalen White represented Pinellas County and Lakewood High School in the action over the weekend. Moore, son of local Podiatry Specialist Dr. Daral Moore and Regina Moore, is a 2008 graduate of Lakewood High.

He left St. Pete to attend the University of Central Florida, majoring in broadcasting. As a freelance sports broadcast camera operator, Moore worked the weekend for CBS Sports Network, shooting the live telecast. His experience is memorable.

“Coming back here to work in my old stomping grounds is surreal. I remember coming to Eckerd College to play when Lakewood and Bogie (Boca Ciega) games would sell out,” said DJ

Moore. “We had friends and family that came to watch the games. It was great! So, to travel the country and be able to come back and see the hometown local challenge in the city that you know is pretty cool.”

Also returning home, Jalen White, now playing for the University of North Carolina at Greensboro (UNCG). He brought in an undefeated Spartan team and brought out a section full of supporters to the Eckerd College gymnasium. Lakewood High School Coach Anthony Lawrence was proud to see one of his former players making contributions on the national scale.

At the 13:30 mark of the second half of the UNCG first game, White made a move that Pinellas County was accustomed to seeing. He took a pass, cut to the basket, and dunked over a Green Bay Wisconsin player to tie the score and was fouled. White made the free throw to put the Spartans ahead. St. Pe-



Bernard Reedy Sr.



DJ Moore

tersburg fans have seen that play many times over.

Since leaving Lakewood, The Jersey Mike’s Classic is White’s first return to St. Pete with his UNCG team. His former coach was in the stands looking on to his former star player.

“Jalen played strong. Overall, he has improved his game. He is extremely talented and hard-working. I’m proud of him,” said Coach Lawrence.

Even 7-year-old Bryan Drayon, attending the game with his dad and Lakewood High assistant coach, Tracy Tearrt, got in on the action. The referee handed the youngster the basketball to hold during a time-out until the teams returned to the court. The excitement showed through his wide eyes and beaming smile.

The Jersey Mike’s Basketball Classic was showcased by Superior Sports Management (SSM), a Florida-based sporting event organizer who creates and promotes world-

class events in top locations globally. UNCG played three quality opponents for the first time in the program’s history, battling Green Bay on Thursday, UMass on Friday, and Florida International on Sunday.

Pinellas County always

showed up and out, supporting its young athletes who grew up in the area. The village is always proud when one of their own goes on to do great things. The Jersey Mike’s Basketball Classic brought forth the evidence.



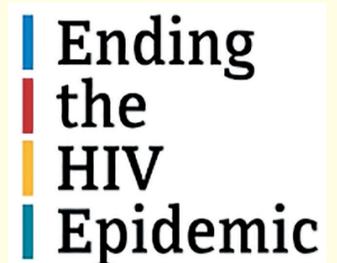
Tracy Tearrt with son Bryan



## “Take a stand for Health Justice: Have the Conversation”

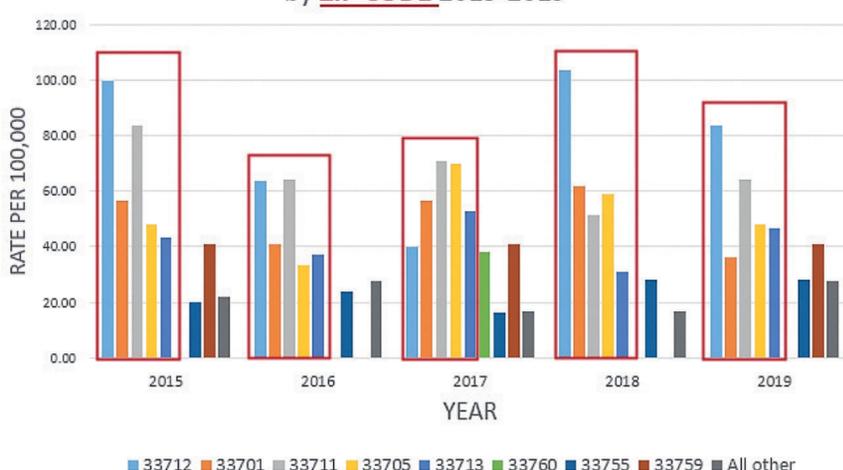
*Precshard Williams, Prevention and Sexual Health Program Coordinator at Metro Inclusive Health:*

“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.



## Pinellas County

NEW HIV Cases by ZIP CODE 2015-2019



• **High Zip-Code Rates:**

- 33701
- 33705
- 33711
- 33712
- 33713

• **These zip codes represent:**

- 12% of the population in Pinellas.
- 44% of new infections in the previous 5 years.

Data Source: [www.FLHEALTHCHARTS.com](http://www.FLHEALTHCHARTS.com)

## St. Pete honors veterans

BY FRANK DROUZAS  
Staff Writer

ST. PETERSBURG – Mayor Rick Kriseman attended his last city-sponsored Veterans Day celebration as mayor of St. Petersburg on Nov. 11, Veterans Day. Eight years ago, when he and his staff were readying for the first celebration, he hoped this event would continue long after he was gone because “those who served our country in uniform deserve our respect and our recognition.”

The mayor said he was struck not just by the veterans’ selfless service “but by their rich experiences and diversity,” such as 2017 honoree Dr. Carrie W. Nero, Brigadier General, ANC, USAR (Ret), the first African-American nurse to reach the rank of brigadier general in the army reserves and 2015 honored veteran Master Sergeant Willie Rogers, a member of the Tuskegee Airmen who served during World War II.

This year, special recognition went to three

veterans, including Rear Admiral Sidney Boyd Vaughn, Jr., USCG. Vaughn retired in 1984 after 38 years of service with stations in Alaska, Mississippi, Washington, D.C., and St. Pete. He was awarded The Legion of Merit Medal for exceptionally meritorious conduct in the performance of outstanding services and achievements.

Vaughn Jr. has roots in St. Pete, graduating from St. Pete High, and just last year, at the age of 92, he completed the Skyway 10K with plans to participate next year at the age of 94.

“Mr. Mayor, it’s great to be honored,” Vaughn said, fighting back the tears, “but it’s even greater to be honored by your own town.”

Another honoree, Captain Antonio Sanpere, served in the army from 1960-68 in Germany and Vietnam. He earned many awards, including multiple Purple Heart awards, two Bronze Star Medals, a National Defense Service Medal for his Cold War efforts, along with good

conduct medals and air medals for his hours in the air.

After retiring, Sanpere earned a degree in engineering and an M.B.A. He became an avid sailor, representing the U.S. in international competition.

Master Sgt. Catherine Washington was among the honorees. She joined the army reserves in 1974, where she served for 30 years. She is a two-time recipient of The Army Commendation Medal for meritorious service and a three-time recipient of the Army Achievement Medal for meritorious performance. In 2008, she received the Legion of Merit award.

After her military career, Washington served as a licensed practical nurse at Bayfront Medical Center and is a 26-year-veteran firefighter emergency medical technician (EMT) with the St. Petersburg Fire & Rescue Department.

Washington was the first woman to join the fire department, and with her daughter following in her footsteps, they became



The City of St. Petersburg held its annual Veterans Day celebration on Nov. 11 in Williams Park. This year’s honorees included Rear Admiral Sidney Boyd Vaughn, Jr., USCG, Captain Antonio Sanpere, and Ret. U.S. Army Master Sergeant (pictured).



Ret. U.S. Coast Guard Rear Admiral Sidney “Sid” Boyd Vaughn, Jr.



Ret. U.S. Army Captain Antonio “Tony” Sanpere

the first and only mother and daughter EMTs in the department.

“I want to honor all the people who have been on my journey, my life journey,” Washington said.

“My life journey has been touched by so many people, from my mother to my family to my firefighter family to my church family. I want to thank all of you for coming out and being here to celebrate this award.”

City Council Chair Ed Montanari called veterans the “hidden heroes of our peaceful nation.”

“They are colleagues, friends, neighbors, and family members who answered the call to serve,” he said, “and then returned to live in the country that they defended.”

Montanari, who served in the United States Air Force, related a story of a tragic accident he witnessed of his squadron commander leading a flight of two F-16 jets, getting disoriented in a moonless night and crashing.

“This summer, I went

to Arlington National Cemetery with my son,” he said. “Every time I go there, I pay my respects to my squadron commander and my friend.”

Montanari reminded everyone that we need to remember the men and women who did not live to be called veterans.

Dignitaries present included City Council Vice-Chair Gina Driscoll, Mayor-elect Ken Welch, Councilwoman Deborah Figgs-Sanders, County Commissioner Rene Flowers, Pinellas School Board member Caprice Edmond, and State Representative Michelle Rayner, and Congressman Charlie Crist representative Gershon Faulkner.

To reach Frank Drouzas, email [fdrouzas@theweeklychallenger.com](mailto:fdrouzas@theweeklychallenger.com)

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**GREEKFEST**  
**Nov 26-28, 2021**

<p><b>FRI. 26<sup>th</sup></b> <b>GREEK SOCIAL</b> 6:00 pm - 10:00 pm Manhattan Casino, 642 22nd Street South, St. Pete 33712 Tickets: \$25 includes appetizers w/ 2 specialty drink tickets. <a href="https://www.paypal.com/pcnphc">PayPal.Me/pcnphc</a></p>	<p><b>SAT. 27<sup>th</sup></b> <b>GREEK GAMES AND COOK-OUT</b> 1:00 pm - 6:00 pm Lake Vista Park, 1401 62nd Ave S, St. Petersburg, FL 33705 Free to attend Vendor Opportunities Available: \$75</p>	<p><b>SUN. 28<sup>th</sup></b> <b>GREEK UNITY SERVICE</b> 10:30 am - 12:00 pm Moore's Chapel AME, 3037 Fairfield Ave S, St. Petersburg, FL 33712 Honoring Members with 50+ years of service</p>
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**WE ENCOURAGE LETTERS TO THE EDITOR**

## Zap the reading gap

BY DEXTER MCCREE  
Feature Writer

MADEIRA BEACH – Sing Out and READ (SOAR), the St. Petersburg Midtown Rotary Club, and Eckerd Connects joined together to celebrate the achievement of elementary children who completed the 12-week reading program Family Literacy Project (FLiP).

FLiP uses a fun and unique sing-to-read method to improve reading levels, focusing on students of color in Pinellas County.

The Cambria Hotel on Madeira Beach hosted the awards program and celebration to acknowledge the students who achieved tremendous gains in their reading level. The youth honored on Nov. 4 averaged more than 1,500 minutes of reading over the 12-week session.

SOAR co-founder and Executive Director Carlo Franzblau shared with the audience that there is approximately a 30 percent difference in the reading levels of Black students

and non-Black students, with no measurable progress being made in the last five years.

Franzblau stated that similar gaps exist in reading achievement for Hispanic youth, low-income students, and foster children.

“We have got to do something different in order to make a difference in our children’s education, and it starts with reading,” said Franzblau. “I am so happy to partner with people, organizations, and businesses who invest in our children’s reading.”

The FLiP program lends a specially configured tablet to low-income families that have a struggling reader in the home, targeting first through fifth graders. A large part of the program’s effectiveness is due to how it disguises learning through gamification.

The special device is meant for home use. The FLiP tablet has a cellular connection so that children can access the program anywhere and anytime. Each session is 12 weeks, with students

committing to complete 90 minutes per week.

When a student achieves 900 minutes, they earn a new high-quality tablet that is theirs to keep. SOAR has found that more than two-thirds of children who start the all-volunteer program complete it. Struggling readers move up one full reading grade level in just three months.

The St. Petersburg Midtown Rotary Club sponsored 10 foster children who worked diligently on improving their reading levels. According to Franzblau, foster children were selected to participate in the program because they have a higher absenteeism rate than their peers and are three times more likely to drop out of high school.

In the Tampa Bay area, there are approximately 6,000 foster children in Pasco, Pinellas, and Hillsborough counties alone.

“It really takes a village to raise a child,” said St. Petersburg Midtown Rotary Club President Paulette Jones.



St. Petersburg Midtown Rotary Club President Paulette Jones and Sing Out and READ co-founder and Executive Director Carlo Franzblau celebrated the achievements of elementary school children who complete the 12-week Family Literacy Project program on Nov. 4.

Students should be reading on grade level by the third grade; however, two-thirds of children nationwide cannot read at this stage. A high proportion of at-risk children are of color and from low-income households. Children who can’t read are four times more likely to drop out of high school.

Franzblau reported

that 85 percent of juvenile offenders have difficulty reading, and 70 percent of incarcerated adults cannot read at a fourth-grade level. Bringing all adults to the equivalent of a sixth-grade reading level would generate an additional 2.2 trillion dollars in annual income for the country.

Reading well pro-

motes racial equity by narrowing the reading gap between Black students and their counterparts.

To sign your child up for the program, visit [www.singoutandread.org](http://www.singoutandread.org).

To reach Dexter McCree, email [dmcree@theweeklychallenger.com](mailto:dmcree@theweeklychallenger.com)

## Ben Shirley Sr. honored with building name

SHIRLEY, from front page

“When you asked him a question, you got a story behind it,” Joseph laughed. “He would never answer that question directly. Ben would give you the history of how it started and how it finished.”

Ben Shirley, Jr. echoed Joseph’s sentiment about his father being Google.

“Unfortunately, we didn’t have fact check back then; we just had to believe him,” Shirley, Jr. expressed. Shirley Sr.’s children are still trying to verify if he actually lost colleagues from falling off the back of the sanitation truck because they were

too cold to hold on or if he really did walk 50 miles to school every day.

“One thing we do know is how strong he was, how committed he was, and how dedicated he was to not only his job, his staff, but to the City of Pete,” stated Shirley, Jr.

Mayor Rick Kriseman noted that mayors from around the state and even the country knew Shirley Sr. and his work and were watching the ceremony virtually.

“It was a tradition of excellence that defined Ben Shirley,” Kriseman said. “For 48 years, he was a part of the City of St. Pe-

tersburg’s family. A part of and a leader of the sanitation department family,” adding that many would say Shirley Sr. made the sanitation department what it is today.

Deputy Mayor and City Administrator Dr. Kanika Tomalin called Shirley Sr. an “amazing trailblazer” who set the standard for his department and the city overall.

“He paved the way, set the standard that excellence is not an option but a requirement,” she said. “He was so proud of this department, so proud of this city.”

Tomalin recalled one

of the first conversations she had with Shirley Sr. when she first came to work for the city. He came to her office and told her to see him if she needed anything at all.

“He said, ‘Do you understand?’ and I said, ‘Yes, sir,’” Tomalin recalled, through tears. “And he meant that not only to me, he meant that to anybody who was seeking opportunity, trying to navigate a system, trying to understand their way. He made a difference for so many people in so many ways on levels seen and unseen.”

Shirley Sr. was a leader in the National Forum for



Black Public Administrators (NFBPA), defining excellence for the African-American community, and helped create a chapter locally.

“For years, long before he carried the title of director of sanitation,” Tomalin said, “he carried the title of ‘godfather’ of those people of color who were looking to make a way for themselves, take care of their families, advance their careers, and understand opportunity.”

Abdul Karim Ali — son of Joseph Savage, who fought for the rights of sanitation workers in 1968 — said Shirley Sr. and his father had much in common, as they were African-American men working alongside one another to improve the department.

“We believe that today my father and his good friend Mr. Benjamin F.

Shirley are smiling and looking down on this wonderful event,” he said.

City Council Chair Ed Montanari noted that the city holds a special place in its heart for Shirley Sr., citing his strong, compassionate leadership and all his strong work ethic.

“He cared about others and made sure his team did the same,” he said. “From now on, anyone who enters this building will think about Ben Shirley and what he means to our city.”

Surrounded by Shirley’s family, Kriseman formally unveiled the building’s dedication plaques, which bear Shirley’s likeness.

Joseph summed up the day’s sentiment: “He will greatly and truly be missed, but he will never be forgotten.”



Ben Shirley Sr. arrived in St. Pete on Nov. 11, 1970, and eight days later, he was hired on in the Department of Sanitation at the City of St. Petersburg repairing lids and wheels on containers. He spent the next 48 years building the department, becoming the first Black sanitation director.

## Pancakes & PJ's

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## St. Pete-based filmmaker directs 'Kirk Franklin's A Gospel Christmas'

**FILM, from front page**

as a singer." Living in the shadow of her megachurch pastor mom, Olivia leaves to pastor a small church in Texas, following her journey to recover from "church hurt" and reclaim her family's generational gift as a singing pastor.

Olivia's journey to self-awareness is one many people can relate to. While there is a romantic aspect, along with Franklin's high-energy gospel songs and the Jesus Christmas element, Sutherland noted that it's not the familiar Lifetime Television narrative. "That's what I think is so sweet about it," she acknowledged.

Sutherland's journey has been both extremely blessed and full of sacrifice. Born in St. Louis, she got her Bachelor of Arts degree in Theater and Dance Performance at Southern Illinois University.

Landing in St. Pete in 2008, she taught at PCCA while also working with

Herbert Murphy and Alex Harris at the Boys and Girls Club at the Royal Theater. It was there that she also made contacts that connected her with an international job directing in an arts program in St. Thomas.

As the first Black theater/acting instructor at PCCA, Sutherland shared, "I would have to say teaching at PCCA helped forge me into the director I am today." She had to learn to interact with "numerous personalities and learning styles" while figuring out how to encourage students to perform at their highest level and with their "best selves."

Before leaving St. Pete to get her MFA in Film and Television Production from the University of Southern California – the highest-rated film school in the country and third in the world – Sutherland also directed at St. Petersburg City Theatre. "I directed three shows for them and had a wonderful time working at the theatre. I

was always able to choose my team, which meant I got to work with truly talented friends."

While she was the theater's first-ever Black director (it opened in 1925), Sutherland noted, "I didn't take that [being the first Black director] with me as I directed. I was focused on doing my best work at the time. And because of that focus, when I directed "Memphis, the Musical," which was an amazing experience, I believe we broke some box office records."

In 2017, she headed west to film school, where she assisted in the development and writing of the award-winning *Voodoo Macbeth*, produced by Warner Brothers and USC.

While working on the project, she became friends with Tracy "Twinkie" Byrd, an executive producer and casting director. They knew they wanted to work together in the future, and Byrd arranged a meeting for Sutherland with former Lifetime Television executive Mychael Chinn (currently an executive at CBS/Viacom).

"One of [Chinn's] superpowers is about finding new talent and cultivating new talents. We met, had lunch, and he was like, 'Look, I believe in you. I appreciate your art. I'm working on some things, and when I have it together, I'm going to come back around.' And he did," Sutherland recalled.

The pandemic forced Sutherland off USC's campus, but she finished her degree back in St. Pete

online. She had also held a fellowship with the Blackhouse Foundation and Sundance by this time.

But, remembering the talented filmmaker, Chinn made good on his word, and she was selected for the 2020 Lifetime Network's Director Shadow program. By the beginning of 2021, she was hired as the director on the team that would develop *A Gospel Christmas*.

Looking back on her path, Sutherland shared, "When I was in grad school, I knew that, after listening to filmmakers discuss their journeys, and how different each journey was, there was no blueprint."

She acknowledged her fears of taking on the film world after many years as a theater veteran.

"I just felt like, oh my God, I don't know how I'm gonna do this. So, I just kept asking God; I was just like, 'Hey, I have no idea how to navigate this system, I don't know what I'm doing — you got to lead me through this.'"

Having gone back to school in her late 30s, she also knew she couldn't "network all over the place because I'm older and didn't have the energy of my youth like my 20-year-old counterparts." Constant prayer and asking to meet the "right people" worked.

She has words of advice and realism regarding the journey to success she's currently experiencing. "The first piece of advice is never give up. I went back to school at 37; I graduated at 40, and I



'Kirk Franklin's A Gospel Christmas' follows Olivia (Demetria McKinney), a young assistant pastor, as she deals with the transition to be the lead pastor at a new church a month before Christmas and finds a little romance along the way.

am having my directorial debut."

But, she admits, "It's hard. I'm not gonna lie; it's not comfortable. They're great moments. Many uncertainties. But I think the question is how much are you willing to invest in yourself?"

Walking away "from everything," cashing out her 401K to go to film school means there's "a lot of debt."

There are also sacrifices, said Sutherland, "I don't have children. I'm not married. These are choices that I made. Now, not all artists make these choices. And I ask myself, was it worth it, Erica?"

Still, her accomplishments speak for her dedication: Sutherland is also a recipient of Facebook's SEEN initiative for Black filmmakers. As a poet for as many years as she's worked in theatre and film, her written works

are also published in Dr. Gary L. Lemons' books "Building Womanist Coalitions: Writing and Teaching in the Spirit of Love and Hooked on the Art of Love: bell hooks and My Calling for Soul-Work."

Catch Kirk Franklin's *A Gospel Christmas*, airing Dec. 4 at 8 p.m. EST on Lifetime Television. Check your local listings.

To reach J.A. Jones, email [jjones@theweeklychallenger.com](mailto:jjones@theweeklychallenger.com)



'Kirk Franklin's A Gospel Christmas' contains eight songs from his "Christmas" album rearranged to work inside the storyline. Kirk Franklin (pictured) is a 16-time Grammy award-winning choir director, gospel singer, dancer, songwriter, and author.



Erica Sutherland

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# COMMUNITY NEWS



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Tampa Bay Times



## Dream Defenders: The Freedom Column

#YesOn2 may not have passed, but it wasn't a loss

BY MALIK GARY  
Tallahassee Dream Defenders

Following the tragedy of George Floyd's murder in Minneapolis, 26 million people rose up to disrupt the status quo. Since then, organizers have mobilized millions of people to build Black political power toward a new vision for safety.

There have been conversations where people overwhelmingly agree that police should not be our only source of safety all across the country.

Earlier this month, Dream Defenders traveled to Minneapolis to canvas for #YesOn2, a ballot measure that would have created a Department of Public Safety in Minneapolis. The measure aimed to remove the requirement for the city to maintain an armed police-only model of safety and instead



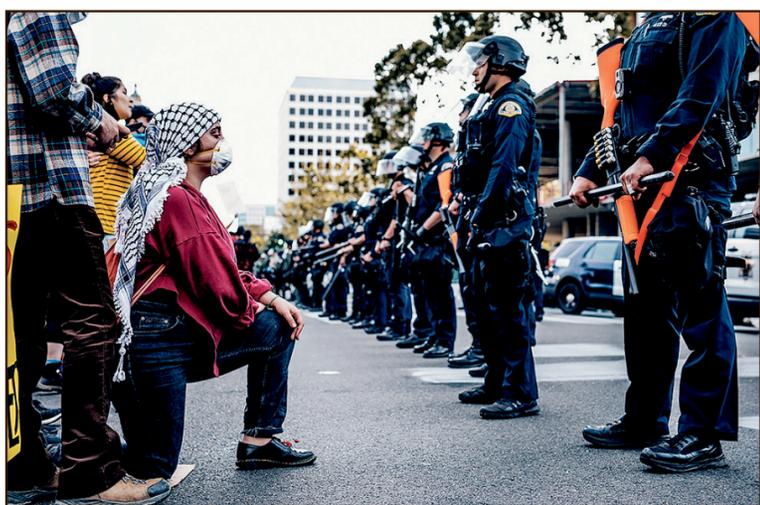
Malik Gary

dispatch social workers, housing experts, mental health and addiction specialists, and other qualified professionals.

Ultimately, the ballot measure did not pass, but something amazing happened. After years of being told our ideas and values are unpopular and unrealistic, roughly 45 percent of the electorate voted for transformation; they voted for our values.

Black Visions Minneapolis and the Yes4Minneapolis coalition gave the entire country hope that something else was possible. The world we believe in can be realized, and we are moving closer to our Freedom Papers.

*Malik Gary is a political science major at Tallahassee Community College. Since July, he has been the squad leader of the Tallahassee Dream Defenders.*



"After years of being told our ideas and values are unpopular and unrealistic, roughly 45 percent of the electorate voted for transformation," said Malik Gary, squad leader, Tallahassee Dream Defenders.

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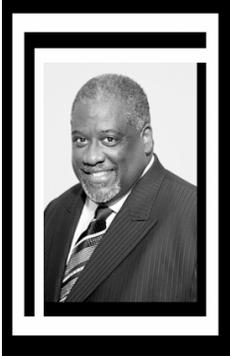
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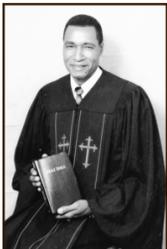
### First Mount Zion Missionary Baptist Church

1121 22nd Street South, St. Petersburg, FL 33712  
(727) 327-8708

Sunday Worship Services 8:00 and 11:00 a.m.  
Sunday School.....9:30 a.m.  
Prayer Meeting (Tuesday) .....6:00 p.m.  
Bible Study (Tuesday) .....7:00 p.m.  
Baptist Training Union (Sunday) ..4:00 p.m.

Rev. Wallace Elliott  
Sr. - Pastor

**“The Little Church Where Everybody Is Somebody”**



### First Mount Pilgrim Evangelical Missionary Baptist Church

“But for me and my house, we will serve the Lord”  
Joshua 24:15  
2700 5th Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33715  
727-320-2709  
[lpdavisememorial@gmail.com](mailto:lpdavisememorial@gmail.com)



Reverend  
Darrel W. Davis, Sr.  
Pastor - Teacher

**Sunday Worship Services**  
Sunday School 9:30 am • Worship Service 11:00 am  
Prayer Meeting (Wednesday) 7 pm  
Bible Study (Wednesday) 7:30 pm

### Victory Christian Center Church

3012 18th Avenue South  
St. Petersburg, Fla. 33712  
(727) 321-0911  
[www.victorychristiancenterchurch.org](http://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)

Donn & Jean  
Fresher

Victory Christian Center is a Word of Faith Church.  
For more information about the other services and ministries at Victory Christian Center, please call (727) 321-0911.  
\*Nursery and Youth Services Available



### 20th Street Church Of Christ

825 20th Street South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33712  
Home: 896-8006

Bro. Robert Smith

Sunday Bible Class (All Ages) .....8:30 a.m.  
Sunday Morning Worship .....9:45 a.m.  
Sunday Evening Worship .....6:00 p.m.  
Ladies Bible Class Monday .....7:00 p.m.  
Monday Evening Bible Class .....7:00 p.m.  
Wednesday Morning Bible Class .....10:00 a.m.  
Wednesday Evening Bible Class .....7:00 p.m.



### UNITY Temple of Truth CHURCH

**Sunday Worship Service 10:00 A.M. \***

511 Prescott Street South  
St. Petersburg, FL 33712  
727-898-2457  
[www.unitytemplestpete.org](http://www.unitytemplestpete.org)  
[unitytruth1957@gmail.com](mailto:unitytruth1957@gmail.com)

Helping People Live Healthy, Prosperous and Meaningful Lives thru Practical Christianity

\* Live Streaming on our Facebook Page



## INSPIRATIONS

BY DIERDRE DOWNING-JACKSON

### Encourage

**E**-Enlighten and encourage others with the truth of GOD’s Word;  
**N**-Never cease in your fervent prayers, for they will always be heard.  
**C**-CHRIST JESUS is your strength and HIS way will protect you;  
**O**-Obedience and forgiveness are HIS promises to see you through.  
**U**-Understanding of the wisdom only GOD’s Word can provide;  
**R**-Remember this is GOD’s blueprint and the Holy Spirit will be your guide.  
**A**-Always keep your mind stayed on JESUS CHRIST alone;

**G**-GOD’s blessed assurance grants you favor for the seeds of kindness you have sown.  
**E**-Eternity awaits you as you love unconditionally;  
Encourage peace and humbly walk by faith as you demonstrate to the world that GOD truly walks with thee.”  
AMEN  
“But charge Joshua, and encourage him, and strengthen him: for he shall go over before this people, and he shall cause them to inherit the land which thou shalt see.”



## Pastor’s Corner

BY REV. DR. DORAL R. PULLEY,  
SPIRITUAL LEADER  
TODAY’S CHURCH Tampa Bay

### Praying in the Name of Jesus

“In that day you will ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever you shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it to you (John 16:23).”  
Praying in the name of Jesus is more than saying “in the name of Jesus” at the end of prayer (John 16:22-27). Pray with the understanding that when you pray in the name of Jesus that you pray in his authority and his power as if you were him. When you pray in the name of Jesus, you pray with the confidence and assurance that the Father will answer your prayer just as if you were Jesus Christ. You are an heir of God and a joint heir with Christ Jesus (Romans 8:17).

Imagine utilizing the name of Jesus as if you have a signed document giving you power of attorney. As a Kingdom citizen, you have the right to act on Jesus’s behalf on the earth since he is no longer here physically. You are his representative (II Corinthians 5:20). You have the power and authority to be who he was on the earth, to say what he said, and to do what he did and even greater works (John 14:12).  
End your prayers with “in the name and through the power and in the consciousness of Christ Jesus.” In the name means in the nature or character of Christ Jesus. Although other people were named

Jesus, your prayer is about the image that comes in mind when you say the name. “Through the power” is a reminder that there is Only One Power and One Presence in the Universe. The same power that Jesus Christ used in the Bible is the same power you can use now and get the same results. “In the consciousness of Christ Jesus” means that you are aware of Jesus’ development from Jesus (human) to Jesus Christ (both human and divine) to Christ Jesus (divinity first, humanity second). In this awareness, you can focus on your divinity and what God can do through you (Philippians 4:13).



## St. Mark M.B. Church

### Thankful During Unsettling Times - Philippians 4:4-7

As we are getting ready to celebrate another Thanksgiving holiday, let us be reminded that we don't need a holiday to be thankful. Every day is a day to be thankful. Paul writes this epistle while imprisoned to a bellowed group of people. He does not tell of his sad story but tells of his satisfaction with God. Paul opens up for us an opportunity for our humanity to show forth. We all have things that trouble us. Anxiety knows our name.

Paul does not dwell on the negative but says even though there is anxiety, let nothing be done because of it but be in prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made unto God. It's easy to tell God thank you when all is going well. We may not be well, have money or a job but we should still be thankful. Unsettling times will always be with us until the Lord returns. If we can't change the unsettlement, can we use it to do good? Can we be unchanged by unsettling moments? It's an opportunity for God to show us that something good can happen to us.

Paul was sure to give God his thanksgiving and magnify his name so the world could see Jesus in him. Every day we should give God our greatest praise. The question asked of the text by Pastor Brown was: What will a thankful attitude provide us in unsettling times? The first point from verse 6: When we have a thankful attitude, access to God's presence is granted. We do not get access to God by our works, monies, friends, or family but it's God who says he's waiting on the password. Access is granted when we come to him with a heart that says thank you. Psalm

100:4 tells us to enter into his presence with thanksgiving and into his court with praise, be thankful and bless him and bless his name. Thankfulness and a thankful attitude will grant us access into God's presence. The place we want to be when we're going through the worst is in the present of the Lord

The second point from verse 7: When we have a thankful attitude, God grants us assurance of his peace. Peace can be defined as freedom of the mind from annoyance, distraction, anxiety, and obsession. Peace is tranquility and serenity. When we tell God thank you, not only does thankfulness and a thankful attitude grant us access into his presence, it also grants us assurance of his peace. As we affirm that God you're still good, and you're worthy of praise, we are thankful despite what we have, where we are, the conditions, etc. God says now that we understand that he is to be thanked he gives us peace.

This peace was already there, but was bogged down by our annoyances, distractions, anxieties, and obsessions. Peace was trying to get through but needed thanksgiving to pave the way. When our focus is on the object for which we are thankful for, then we lose sight of the annoyances, distraction, anxieties, and obsessions. All we then see is what we are thankful for. Through it all we should recognize that the good outweighs the bad we may be going through.

The final point from verse 8: When we have a thankful attitude, God grants us activation into his plan for our lives. The plan of God is for us to 'think right' but we can't think right until we



Rev. Brian K. Brown,  
Pastor

'thank right'. Our thinking is connected to our thankfulness. If we give thanks to God he will help us with a plan on how to think about life no matter how life comes our way. The plan is that everything starts with our thoughts. God created everything from his thoughts.

Proverbs 23:7 tells us as he thinketh in his heart so is he. If our thoughts are not right then we cannot become the object of our thoughts. If our thoughts are wrong then action that lead from them will also be wrong. God's plan is that we will think about ourselves and circumstances the way he thinks about them. The verse tells us the way we should think, whatsoever things are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, of good report think on those things. Because we are in his presence, blessed by his peace, it will now cause us to think in the right way. Everything in our lives is not positive, but our focus should be on the positive. We should look for the positive and good in the negative and wait on God to make the negative positive again as we focus on the positive.

Let us be thankful all day every day. Be at peace with God as we show him we're glad for the life we live each day and focus on the positive.

Join us Sunday mornings in the sanctuary or via live-stream on YouTube @ St Mark MBC at 10:20 for Sunday School, worship service at 10:45 a.m., and bible study on Wednesdays @ 7:00 p.m.

## 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

## Friendship Missionary Baptist Church

3300 31st St. S., St. Petersburg, FL 33712  
(727) 906-8300 www.friendshipstpetersburg.org  
Email: fmcb3300@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.*

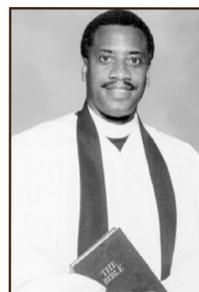
## THE ROCK OF JESUS MISSIONARY BAPTIST CHURCH

### 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: rojmbc@knology.net  
Office Hours: Tues. & Thurs. 10 a.m. - 5 p.m.



Rev. Frank W. Peterman, Jr.  
Pastor

## Let the Redeemed Say So - Psalm 107:1-2

As we approach the national day of Thanksgiving Pastor Brown asked us to consider why we are thankful. While this may be traditional for this day, beyond the day we should be telling God thank you every day of our lives. Thanksgiving should be a way of life for the believers on Jesus Christ. Giving thanks is not something to be done one day out of the year but every day that we have breath is an opportunity to exercise thanksgiving. The Psalmist lets us know that giving thanks is not an option to the born-again believer. The question asked of the text was why should the redeemed say so?

The first reason the redeemed say so from verse 1 is because of God's goodness. In the verse the Psalmist says God is good

and if he is good he gives nothing but good to those he loves. God is always doing something to benefit us. The redeemed should know how good God is if no one else knows does.

The second reason the redeemed say so from verse 1 also is because of God's greatness. God is great in his love. It's not easy to love those who are not loving to us but God's love endureth forever. God does not get short in patience with his love for us. God will love us until the end, and we have security in God's love. Humans may fail us in love, but God loves us with a never-ending love. The bible says that God is love and God's love will never cease because God is forever.

The third reason the redeemed say so from verse 2 is because of God's gracious-

ness. In the text the Psalmist speaks of Israel's wondering and captivity but in all they did God continued to show them grace. Every day of our lives God has had to buy back something that has gone awry, and God does so because he is gracious. We much understand that we were fallen but God bought us back into his fellowship. We have been broken and lost but God has put us back together and found us. God's graciousness to us extends to the redemption of our sinful lives to the point of giving his only begotten son to die in our stead.

Join us Sunday mornings in the sanctuary or via live-stream on YouTube @ St Mark MBC at 10:20 for Sunday School, worship service at 10:45 a.m., and bible study on Wednesdays @ 7:00 p.m.

**TODAY'S CHURCH**  
TAMPA BAY

<b>ST. PETERSBURG</b> 2114 54th Avenue North	<b>TAMPA</b> 5107 N Central Avenue
<b>SUNDAY MORNING WORSHIP</b> 8:45AM Dive in Centering Service	<b>SUNDAY AFTERNOON WORSHIP</b> 2pm Cultural Integration Worship Experience
10:30AM CREATIVE EXPRESSION WORSHIP EXPERIENCE WEDNESDAY NIGHT WORD 6:30 PM - COLLECTIVE CONSCIOUSNESS PRAYER 7 PM - BIBLE STUDY	
WWW.TODAYSCHURCHTAMPABAY ZOOM: MEETING ID 375 007 212 PASSWORD 5107	

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### Dear Reader:

## God is Not Removed - Don't We All Seek Shelter from the Storm? Scripture Study: 1 Kings 19:1-21

Dear Reader: Dear Reader,

I'm not sure how my words will find you when you read them, but I pray that they find you well and bring you hope and perspective.

Don't we all seek shelter when the thunder, lightning, and storms of life are upon us, and don't we all seek covering when it begins to rain? We seek our raincoats, we seek our umbrellas, we seek our shelter and places of safety. You see, God doesn't need an umbrella or a raincoat; He doesn't need a building nor a dwelling place to be our covering, because the presence of His shadow can be our covering, even when the storms of life are upon us.

You see, Elijah's fear led him to the secret place of the Most High God, and what He found beneath the juniper tree would sustain and strengthen him for his journey. "He [laid] down and slept under the juniper tree, and behold, an angel touched him and said to him, 'Get up and eat.' He

looked, and by his head there was a bread cake baked on hot coal, and a pitcher of water. So he ate and drank and [laid] down again. Then the angel of the Lord came again a second time and touched him and said, 'Get up, and eat, for the journey is too long for you [without adequate sustenance].' So he got up and ate and drank, and with the strength of that food he traveled forty days and nights to Horeb (Sinai), the mountain of God" (1 Kings 19:5-8 AMP).

You see, the hurting, broken, and depressed need sustenance; they need strength, and they need a touch from God when their journey becomes too much. God can use counseling, He can use medicine, and He can use a support system of wisdom to do all of these things. For He assures us in Psalm 23:2 that we will find rest in green pastures and peace beside the quiet streams.

Dear reader and broken one, do not be afraid of the darkness of your valley, for the Lord's rod and staff will console and comfort you. I want

you to know that He will refresh and restore your soul. This is a promise and guarantee of your Shepherd. You will lack nothing, for He, the Lord, is your Shepherd. So, trust in Him, and be of great confidence, because He is someone who you truly can rely on. There is security in Him and safety in His dwelling place. For the one "who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will remain secure and rest in the shadow of the Almighty [whose power no enemy can withstand]" (Psalm 91:1 AMP).

I thought this would be a great opportunity to share some information concerning mental health and why there shouldn't be a stigma, because knowledge is power, and we shouldn't be afraid to use it.

"Depression can cause a range of symptoms, including cognitive changes that people commonly refer to as brain fog. These symptoms often occur during depressive episodes, but they can develop before these episodes begin and continue during remission.

According to some estimates, the prevalence of cognitive symptoms in people with MDD is 85-94% during depressive episodes and 39-44% during periods of remission. Cognitive problems, especially difficulty thinking, making decisions, and concentrating, feature as hallmarks of depression in the Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-5).

Ultimately, depression seems to involve a dysregulation of the neural networks in critical brain regions, including the: hippocampus, prefrontal cortex, amygdala, anterior cingulate cortex, basal ganglia.

Neural disruptions that relate to depression appear to cause or worsen cognitive symptoms by reducing the brain's gray matter volume and white matter connectivity. Gray matter is an important part of the nervous system that plays a role in both sensory perception and muscle control. White matter serves to link and connect the gray matter.

Anyone can experience depression and related brain fog at any age, though it usually begins in adulthood. Researchers think that depression develops due to a combination of genetic, environmental, physiological, and biological factors.

Common risk factors for depression currently include: personal or family history of depression, trauma, substantial or chronic stress, major life changes, chronic or disabling physical or mental illness, certain medications" (Medical Health News, Medically reviewed by Timothy J. Legg, Ph.D., CRNP - Written by Jennifer Huizen).

Dear reader, may the wisdom of the Lord be your covering, and may His wise counsel strengthen, sustain, and encourage you. A covering is something "used to cover something else, typically in order to protect or conceal it." God used the juniper tree to cover Elijah, and underneath its shade, the presence of God's shadow became Eli-

jah's dwelling place. May you know the covering of the Lord, and the comfort of His shadow.

I pray and hope that you will continue to read the written content and stay connected with us over the next few weeks.

My dear reader, God is not removed. Know that it's OK to seek His shelter from your storm and allow yourself to be guided by His wise counsel.

Blessings and favor to you until next time and until we meet again.

Share your story and prayer requests at SenecaHoward.com/contact, and our team will be sure to keep you lifted in our prayers.

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.

# GAS PLANT/

# LAUREL PARK

# NEIGHBORHOOD

# REUNION

**CELEBRATING THE PAST,  
ENVISIONING THE FUTURE**  
**SUNDAY, DECEMBER 12TH**  
**TROPICANA FIELD, LOT 4**  
**NOON - 3 P.M.**

This reunion is for former residents and family members of both neighborhoods. It will be a fun time for all with free food, entertainment, opportunities to see old friends, and sharing of memories and photos of both neighborhoods.

Stay tuned for more information regarding registration and how you can get involved. There will also be scholarship opportunities for middle school and high school students.

SCAN TO  
REGISTER FOR  
THE EVENT



Email: [VoicesHeardVoicesMatter@gmail.com](mailto:VoicesHeardVoicesMatter@gmail.com)  
Phone Number: 727-371-6153

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