ST PETERSBURG – Wednesday was a major day for Pinellas County, with the release of the 2017-2018 Equity Assessment, which revealed that African-American students who have demonstrated academic excellence are still not achieving at the same rate as their white peers.

The Vyrle Davis Student Achievement Awards dinner honored African-American students who have demonstrated academic excellence. April 18 was the historic Coliseum in downtown St. Pete.

BY J.A. JONES

ST PETERSBURG – Alex Harris and Herbert Murphy launched the Arts Conservatory for Teens (ACT) in 2012 with a mission “to create, empower, and enrich the lives of youth and teens in order to foster healthy, productive, and responsible citizens.”

Seven years later, ACT has continued to touch the lives of thousands of students and families. Educators and community partners have boosted a 10 percent high school graduation rate and 90 percent college placement rate for its drained youth.

On April 18, ACT kicked off its 2018 fundraising season at the University of South Florida St. Pete, at its 9th annual Champions for ACT Breakfast, which featured current students, alumni and artists from the ACT Artist Network.

“The fundraising season is all about raising funds for scholarships for students who are deserving but don’t have the financial resources to access the opportunities that will help them excel academically and interpersonally,” shared collage artist Alex Harris.

Low to moderate income families make up 80 percent of their student population. While the majority of students are in St. Pete, Harris said, “We have been able to impact our communities and neighborhoods, primarily through the Pinellas School Board partnership and county commission’s effort to make sure every child has an opportunity and we're looking forward to extending that because one of the expanding that because one of the challenges in underserved, low-income communities is the lack of exposure and experience,” Harris said.

That lack of exposure to opportunities, said Harris, makes it

The faces of Vyrle Davis’ legacy

BY RAVEN JOY SIMON

ST PETERSBURG – More than 300 community members and leaders, nonprofit organizations and city officials gathered in true spirit of the 2019 Pinellas Equity Profile on April 16.

The event was presented by UNITE Pinellas, a new coalition of groups that have come together to create change in the current landscape of a very “iniquitous” Pinellas County.

A major factor inspiring the UNITE Pinellas program is the demographic shift the county is experiencing. While population numbers for 2020 show that 22 percent of the county will be non-Hispanic white people, people are projected to become the majority, allowing the national trend predicting a majority population of color by 2044.

Harris for the issue with Pinellas County displaying ongoing racially discriminatory policies, practices and inequitable resource distribution, it is setting itself up for a future that will fail its larger population – and creating an unstable, endangered future for the entire county.

Another reason to address these disparities is that research indicates Pinellas’ local economy would increase by a

As ACT turns seven, its impact on youth surges

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Desmona Cecelia Williams Harden goes home

A native of St. Petersburg who also lived in Miami before moving to Gainesville, Desmona Cecelia Williams Harden was the daughter of the late Theodore "Too" and Idella Higdon Williams. She peacefully submitted to the will of God on Thursday, April 18, 2019, in Gainesville at her residence following a lingering illness at the age of 71.

A 1965 graduate of Gibbs High School in St. Petersburg, Ms. Harden later attended Savannah State College and Florida Memorial College where she received her Bachelor of Science and Clark Atlanta University where she received her Master of Science in library science.

Ms. Harden was a retired elementary school teacher and librarian with Miami Dade County Public Schools for 20 years. She was a member of the Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and a charter member of the member of the Miami Chapter of the Girl, Friends, Inc. The Memorial Service will be held 3 p.m. Saturday, April 27, 2019, at the Duncan Brothers’ Chapel in Gainesville with her brother Rev. Pierre Loomis Williams delivering Words of Comfort.

In lieu of flowers, contributions to the School of Education, Florida Memorial University, 15800 NW 42 Ave. Miami Gar...
She's somebody's child

Have you ever felt alone in this world like you had no one? Have you ever had a situation where you worry more harm than good?

Regina Louise was the eldest daughter of the 1970’s singer/songwriter Tom Brock who left her in foster care system. She lived in more than 30 foster homes and psychiatric facilities before aging out of its system. Abandoned and shuffled among destructive behavior, she simply longed to be loved.

She found that love in Jeannie Kerr, who despite her initial reaction, became her adoptive mother. Unbeknownst to her, many miles away she also had Kerr who despite her. She put her attention and efforts into her schooling and earned a scholarship. She was initially given the book covers. Kerr, who was then Kerr-Taylor, renamed Regina Louise through her website and very soon after that, the two were reunited.

Regina Louise Kerr-Taylor – she's the daughter of the 1970's singer/songwriter. Hence, when she received Kerr-Taylor’s initial email of which the subject line read: “I am so proud of you,” she was the only one who told her that she was smart and capable of anything. She made her own bloom.

Hence, when she received Kerr-Taylor’s first email of which the subject line read: “I am so proud of you,” she could only imagine the flood of emotions she experienced. Next came the emotional home run, followed by the instantaneous moving. Although the world did not agree, she knew that they were real “other’s” Regina Louise Kerr-Taylor – she’s somebody’s child.

The question is: Have you ever felt alone in this world like you had no one? Have you ever had a situation where you worry more harm than good? Have you ever had a situation where you worry more harm than good?
As many as 400,000 Africans were shipped to Cuba, primarily during the 50 years between 1790 and 1840. At one point, it was estimated that one fifth of the total Cuban population amounted to one third of the total African population. Such numbers of Africans have left a strong cultural mark on the Cuban nation.

Just recently returned from Cuba and found the island nation to be fascinating. It should be noted that many of the fortifications, walls and buildings in Old Havana, a World Heritage Site, were constructed during the slavery era, undoubtedly with slave labor. Old Havana is indeed beautiful, although suffering from the inability of the Cuban government to take care of both its people and its historic buildings.

Interestingly, the Cuban people seem to genuinely get along and are quite friendly to tourists. In spite of more than 50 years of an American embargo, the country retains about Tourism is obviously one of the reasons why tourists travel to Cuba, and one would assume, investors from Canada, Europe, South America and Russia. The Cuban people appear proud of their country and advancement edge their African roots.

The United States still maintains a comprehensive economic embargo with Cuba, which began in 1960 when President John F. Kennedy restricted trade between the two countries in response to actions taken by the Cuban government. The immediate rationale for the embargo was the introduction of Russian missiles onto the island nation in 1962. The missiles were subsequently removed. All of the trouble with the United States began after the Cuban Revolution, which started in 1953 and ended in the removal of the Batista government in 1959. The Cuban Revolution completely changed Cuba’s relationship with the United States and introduced a program of nationalization and socialization.

Today, there appears to be a lot of anti-Americanism and poverty. Abandoned mansions have been transformed into small family apartments. It is true, however, that Cuba has disappeared. The island is full of automobiles from the 1950s. Cuban mechanics were famous country.

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bile parts removed from Asian and European vehicles. Some parts are just reconstructed since Cuba has not been able to buy from the United States since the embargo.

In Cuba, education is free, medical care is free, and all residents are given free food rations for their essential nutritional needs of the populace. Health clinics are available in nearly every neighborhood. Public schools are plentiful and appear to be small. The children wear uniforms and attend school. The people are quite poor, but resilient and strong. The literacy rate is very high, and the average life span is quite long. Racial disparities appear minimal, and in many areas, most Cubans are persons of color. Cuban art reflects their African heritage as does the food. In fact, the food is similar to the fare found in other Caribbean nations. Cuba makes Havana Club Rum, considered one of the best in the world. Their Afro-Cuban music is familiar to most Ameri-
cans, using African congas and other instruments native to the continent of Africa.

Finally, the religious practice of Santeria, based on a mixture of African and Catholic religions, is wide-
spread. It appears Cuban culture and the Cuban peo-
ple will survive.

Attorney Jacqueline Hubbard graduated from the Boston University Law School. She is currently the president of the St. Peters-
burg Branch of the Associa-
tion for the Study of African American Life and History, Inc.
ACT boasts 100 percent high school graduation rate

ACT's other programs include the early morning activities and education and arts programs at Pinellas County Title 1 middle schools including John Hopkins, Tyrone, Oak Grove and Largo Middle.

After-school programs at recreation centers including Enoch Davis, Thomas Jet Jackson, Chidlo Park, Lake Vista or USF Pete Barber include the Arts Magnet Program, an after-school program for youth who are interested in introductory and intermediate dance, game coding, video production, DJ spinning, art, rec and guitar or piano lessons.

There’s also The Young Artist Alliance, an advanced-level program designed for students who want to pursue a career in the performing or visual arts, offering intensive workshops, master-classes and open forums each week and during the summer.

While ACT touches more than 700 annually through these weekly direct respect services programs, the high impact engagements including youth arts, master classes and events such as their January Dream for America reach beyond the students to family, friends and the community.

Engaging several thousand more community members annually, these high impact initiatives and events will allow ACT’s impacted county residents to number well over 5,000, said Harris.

ACT’s success stories are numerous including alumni students who’ve gone on to attend prestigious programs at Carnegie Mellon, Boston Ballet and Boston Conservatory and Clark Atlanta University. Many are working professionally in the arts, engineering, advertising and education fields.

Some of these students returned for last week’s annual Champions for ACT Breakfast. Harris said their experiences offered a testimony to ACT’s excellence, showing that "what a community can do, develop or produce when we put our resources, energy and time into our young people.

Harris’ dreams for the conservatory are big “I want ACT to be the leading organization in the world for youth development in the creative space,” he shared, stating that the success of ACT is in the performance of something to be celebrated by all in St. Petersburg.

“It wasn’t just Herbert and I that developed it, but the collective energy of the community. My dream is that we become a beacon in the world so people can say, 'They did it in St. Petersburg, and we can do it here.’ Understanding the power of unity and how that can be displayed through the arts is the vision.”

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Black students are also taking more advanced placement courses, with a 20 percent increase; a 14 percent increase in taking AP exams and a 28 percent increase in the number of qualifying scores on exams. All of the passed AP exams in high school means fewer college courses to take and less for parents to finance.

“You are smart; you’re here because you’re smart,” said Corbett, looking out in a sea of black scholars. “If you chose to go to college and get a degree as a teacher, come back to Pinellas County. We will hire you, you have a job guaranteed.”

School Board Chairperson Rene Flowers had the vision to honor black students who were high achievers in the community but who were often overlooked. After speaking with Superintendent Michael Grego and other Pinellas County administrators, the Vyrle Davis Student Achievement Awards was born.

“You see, I grew up in Jordan Park, a housing community where sometimes individuals didn’t think a whole lot of those of us that came out of there,” stated Flowers. “In that journey,... there were so many adults that took the time to let me know that I was important. Mr. Vyrle Davis was one of them.”

A Tampa native, Davis went to Florida A&M University. His first teaching job in Pinellas County was at Sixteenth Street Junior High, now John Hopkins Middle School. He soon went up the professional ladder. He became assistant principal at Gibbs High School, and in 1973 became principal at St. Petersburg High School, which had been an all-white school steeped in tradition. Moreover, the county’s school desegregation policy had been in effect just two years, and sometimes the atmosphere turned tense on campuses. Davis was up to the task. St. Pete High experienced much less trouble than other high schools around the city.

Davis founded Ebony Scholars in 1984 as a motivational tool. The organization targeted elementary school pupils who were maintaining a high grade point average. If the youngsters carried...
COMMUNITY NEWS

a 3.0 by the time they reached high school, they joined the Ebony Scholars Academic Club, which discussed career options, examined college opportunities and studied social etiquettes. They also completed an eight-week Toastmasters International youth leadership program to develop their communication and leadership skills — and each year, graduating seniors received scholarships.

Davis became Pinellas County’s first black area superintendent in 1986, and although he retired in 1995, he continued to push for academic success for students. In 1998, he founded Concerned Organizations for Quality Education for Black Students, an organization that is going strong today.

Flowers, a former cheerleader, can remember bouncing around the football field on Friday night and attending Alpha Phi Alpha Leadership sessions and seminars headed by Davis and educator Clarence Givens early Saturday morning at Eckerd College.

“We were taught how to write a resume, public speaking, finance, but more importantly how important it is for us to come back and give back to our community. Those lessons have stuck with me through my lifetime,” she said.

A precursor to the Ebony Scholars, the Alpha Phi Alpha Leadership program brought young African-American students together and helped map out their futures.

Nadya Riley, a senior at St. Pete High, was given the honor to be this year’s keynote speaker. Her essay received great reviews from the Vyrle Davis scholarship committee, and she got a chance to honor Davis in front of her peers.

“Leaders like Vyrle Davis worked to address some of the issues of the educational system from the 1960s through the early 2000s for all students, but especially black students. He understood the West African proverb that states ‘I am because we are.’”

She spoke about watching her brother make bad choices, being turned down and the appeals process to be accepted into the International Baccalaureate Program and the academic and social struggles she faced while trying to complete school.

“Next month, I will walk across the stage and receive my IB diploma from St. Petersburg High School. I will be one of six black students receiving this prestigious diploma out of a total of 102.”

Nadya credits her family with making it through such a rigorous program and dismisses the narrative of black youths having limited futures.

“Even though society would have you believe different, we are enrolling and graduating in ever-increasing numbers from HBCUs, top state colleges and universities, Ivy League and other top institutions of learning. Doors are being open, or in some cases kicked down. Opportunities are being seized.”
The data, supplied by PolicyLink out of Oakland, Calif., and the University of Southern California’s Program for Environmental and Regional Equity, showed disparities in Pinellas in every researched area from education to job training, to housing, to highly discriminatory policing and justice policies.

The bad news in Pinellas gathered, report a panel including Dr. Kanika Tomalin, St. Petersburg and city administrator; Deal for St. Pete, St. Pete Chamber of Commerce, One Community, New Deal for St. Pete, UNITE Pinellas’ Executive Director Tim Dutton shared remarks on the dire urgency of addressing these inequities in such a bold way were a first in the county, it remains to be seen how these disparities will be addressed.

The coalition noted that in the next two to 24 months, the Equity Profile would be used to “help pinpoint areas that deserve more detailed examination related to the policies, institutional practices and narratives.”

For more information on UNITE Pinellas or to view the Equity Profile, visit unitepinellas.org.

To reach J.A. Jones, email jjones@theweekly-challenger.com

CANCER KNOWS NO BOUNDARIES.
Cancer affects every ethnic background, is fought in every language and can impact people of any age, faith or culture. As compared with other national ethnic groups, African-American incidence and mortality are highest among Hispanic/Latino and American Indian/Alaskan Native among the lowest. At Moffitt, we want to give everyone the same hope of early diagnosis and the best treatment possible. Colorectal cancer screenings and mammograms, and aware for those with an increased risk.

Moffitt works with an extensive national network of investigators and offers financial assistance to qualifying patients.

To learn more visit moffitt.org or by calling (800) 656-5348
Dear Editor: basketball did not get the ancestors through slavery. Cower or segregation. But we will get there. Our focus is on the collective we rather than the individu- al me – somewhere along the way that this has shifted and our sense of community has more seasoned itself.

At the end of the day, what I am trying to help us realize is that we preserve the historic beauty of St. Pete- sburg, particularly in Midtown, while doing everything we can to foster a con- tinuous economic success.

Similar to the Devis’ theory, a time when au- tonomy-owned businesses were bustling with pa- trons swarming into their streets, ready to do business with folks who looked like them and lived amongst them. People who shared their values.

We’ve become so con- cerned with the past that we’ve lost sight of the future. A self-reliant and self-reli- ant community.

Our leaders in city council and state capitol’s nation’s capital are so consumed with their political agendas that they have neglected the peo- ple. The focus has shifted to city, counties and Midtown dis- tricts.

We’re not talking about making affordable housing a bargain for a joint venture among young athletes prominent in St. Pete and a local chain.

This isn’t a personal attack, but rather a com- monwealth of something we sometimes have to self-assessment to see what’s working and what’s not working. What do we stand to gain and what do we lose to have what we want?

If we come together and tap into our diver- sity assets, our commu- nity will continue to grow, with gentrification, with policies, not because of some personal interest. And if the local government, com- munity-based organiza- tions, entrepreneurs and grass- root advocacy groups can band together, we will create a sense of community engagement, raise- ment and the needs of the neighborhood, that can be risk being delayed or maybe.

As we head into an economic recovery, we’re going to make sure that the real issues close in mind and heart. Given the com- bined impact of the State, St. Pete- sburg is slowly becoming a Rob Ford, a different city — we need to continue to grow with that but, not focused solely on downtown, not focused only on downtown — we must have to all and not just the one or two.

Cooper Green, Jr.

Follow the plans for keeping growth, but so do not...

Independent-owned businesses is our com- munity’s best assets. Improving the quality of life for residents while attract- ing new and improving visitors to our City. This healthy, indi- vidual-owned businesses supports our municipal initiatives including the expansion of jobs, shifting of personnel, strengthening neighborhood, vibrant commercial districts.

NBA Champion Marrese Spiegler and NFL Veteran Louis Murphy are two of the Millennials presenting concepts at the April 30 Expo

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For eligibility informa- tion, guidance fans and to apply, visit spp.org/storefront.

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First Baptist Institutional Church
3144 Third Avenue South, St. Petersburg, FL 33712
Phone: 727-323-7518

Sunday School: 9:30 a.m.
Prayer Time: 10:45 a.m.
Morning Worship: 10:45 a.m.

Jarl D. Baker

Weird is a born-again Christian who has been a music minister for over 20 years. He currently serves as the Senior Pastor of Victory Christian Center Church in St. Petersburg, Florida. His passion is to see people come to know and follow Jesus and to help them grow in their faith. He is married to Snakey Baker and they have two children, Jordan and Jaxon. In his free time, Weird enjoys playing golf, hunting, and spending time with his family.
The first day of the week was called the Sabbath. It was a day of rest. It is a day when we should worship with Bethel on Fellowship Gospel Baptist Church. Manuel L. Sykes, State Celebrate the 26th Pastoral Anniversary of Fellowship Gospel Baptist Church will celebrate this event on April 27, 2019. The weekend will feature special services and teaching the need to come to the demonstration of the Lord’s Christ.

A monoply is when one company, person or group owns and has all the rights to a particular good or service. For example, if there is only one gas and electric company that company has a monopoly on the good. If you do not have another option you cannot choose another electric or gas company. For example, if there is only one gas and electric company that company has a monopoly on the good.

The Rock of Jesus Missionary Baptist Church
Sunday Worship Services 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
9:00 a.m. Worship Service 10:30 a.m.
Sundays of Prayer - Monday 12:00 noon
Weekly Bible Study - Tuesday 6:30 p.m.
Adult Choir Rehearsals - Thursday 9:30 p.m

You don’t have a Monopoly on God

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Bethel Community Baptist Church

Bible Church will celebrate the 20th Pastoral Anniversary of Rev. Marcus D. Sykes, Sr., Pastor. The Church is located at 3341 Florida, Palm Beach, Florida. Bethel Community Baptist Church will celebrate the 20th Pastoral Anniversary of Rev. Marcus D. Sykes, Sr., Pastor. The Church is located at 3341 Florida, Palm Beach, Florida.

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The Men and Women of Distinction Awards this Sunday

BY JOYCE NANETTE JOHNSON

ST. PETERSBURG – The Gathering of Women’s Men and Women of Distinction Awards will be held Sunday, April 29 at the St. Petersburg Country Club, marking the organization’s 11th event.

The event that pays homage to people who have made a considerable difference and impact in the community.

“We wanted to do something different and to recognize people that are not in the limelight,” Richardson explained. “Some people had been doing things in the background that no body knew about.

Since the inaugural event in 2009, there have been more than 140 honorees in over 13 categories. The Gathering of Women submits their personal choices to the board, but the community is invited to submit their picks as well.

“Initially, the awards only included 20 people who have made a difference to the cause, and also the impact that she has had on other women) is a tradition that will continue throughout the years to include the Gwen Reese Lifetime Achievement Award and the President’s Award,” said Richardson.

The award ceremony has grown and transitioned throughout the years to include the Gwen Reese Lifetime Achievement Award and the President’s Award.

The Gwen Reese Award was named in honor of Gwen because of what she was involved in,” explained Richardson. “She devoted herself entirely to the cause, and also the impact that she has had on children through her work.

The Gwen Reese Lifetime Achievement Award is given to people who exemplify longevity in the community.

The President’s Award honoree is selected to recognize people that are not in the limelight, and must have character, devotion, leadership and involvement in women and children.

The Gathering of Women continues to form new innovative partnerships such as the collaboration with St. Joseph Catholic Church where they will develop a garden and build a playground and basket ball court for the youth.

Also, their project entitled WHOW (women helping other women) is a program that helps women after incarceration with training, resources, jobs, mental health and educational services.

“We are not a gathering of white women, we are a gathering of all women, we are a gathering of all races and all ethnicities,” stated Richardson, referring to the diversity of the 25-member organization. “Color doesn’t matter to us, because we’re one. We have different backgrounds and ethnicities, but we all walk in the same way aside.

The honorees have given unselfishly to the community with their time, talents and considerable gifts. Some are well known throughout the city for their efforts while others have worked quietly behind the scenes, pushing forward to bring positive results to fruition. According to Richardson, solid partnerships and continued relationships are formed with many of the previous award winners.

“Many of the recipients reach back with not only voluntary donations but also with their time,” she said. “We have established networked and connected community services through our honorees.”

The 2019 Men and Women of Distinction Awards will take place this Sunday, April 29 from 5-11 p.m. at the St. Petersburg Country Club, 2000 Country Club Way S, St. Petersburg, Fl.

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“We are not a gathering of white women, we are a gathering of all women, we are a gathering of all races and all ethnicities,” stated Richardson, referring to the diversity of the 25-member organization. “Color doesn’t matter to us, because we’re one. We have different backgrounds and ethnicities, but we all walk in the same way aside.

The honorees have given unselfishly to the community with their time, talents and considerable gifts. Some are well known throughout the city for their efforts while others have worked quietly behind the scenes, pushing forward to bring positive results to fruition. According to Richardson, solid partnerships and continued relationships are formed with many of the previous award winners.

“Many of the recipients reach back with not only voluntary donations but also with their time,” she said. “We have established networked and connected community services through our honorees.”

The 2019 Men and Women of Distinction Awards will take place this Sunday, April 29 from 5-11 p.m. at the St. Petersburg Country Club, 2000 Country Club Way S, St. Petersburg, Fl.

The 2019 Men and Women of Distinction Awards will be held Sunday, April 29 at the St. Petersburg Country Club, marking the organization’s 11th event.

The event that pays homage to people who have made a considerable difference and impact in the community.

“We wanted to do something different and to recognize people that are not in the limelight,” Richardson explained. “Some people had been doing things in the background that no body knew about.

Since the inaugural event in 2009, there have been more than 140 honorees in over 13 categories. The Gathering of Women submits their personal choices to the board, but the community is invited to submit their picks as well.

“Initially, the awards only included 20 people who have made a difference to the cause, and also the impact that she has had on other women) is a tradition that will continue throughout the years to include the Gwen Reese Lifetime Achievement Award and the President’s Award,” said Richardson.

The award ceremony has grown and transitioned throughout the years to include the Gwen Reese Lifetime Achievement Award and the President’s Award.

The Gwen Reese Award was named in honor of Gwen because of what she was involved in,” explained Richardson. “She devoted herself entirely to the cause, and also the impact that she has had on children through her work.

The Gwen Reese Lifetime Achievement Award is given to people who exemplify longevity in the community.

The President’s Award honoree is selected to recognize people that are not in the limelight, and must have character, devotion, leadership and involvement in women and children.

The Gathering of Women continues to form new innovative partnerships such as the collaboration with St. Joseph Catholic Church where they will develop a garden and build a playground and basketball court for the youth.

Also, their project entitled WHOW (women helping other women) is a program that helps women after incarceration with training, resources, jobs, mental health and educational services.

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