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GUARDIAN

A message on legacy at society banquet

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This group was honored by the Pleasant Street Historic Society for their work in the community. They are, from left, Sherry Sherrod DuPree, the Rev. Samuel Jones Jr., Tennessee Jones, and LaKay Banks. [Aida Mallard/Special to the Guardian]

A fifth-generation Alachua County native with deep roots in the Pleasant Street neighborhood delivered a powerful message about the power of legacy and the importance of teaching children about their proud African-American history and culture during the Claronelle Smith Griffin Distinguished Speaker Banquet.

Also, middle school students received awards for their essays and residents were recognized for their community service.

Attended by more than 100 people who enjoyed an afternoon of history, mingling and food, the annual banquet — hosted by the Pleasant Street Historic Society — was held Sunday afternoon at Mount Pleasant United Methodist Church. Maddie Smyth of the Star Center Theatre delivered an inspiring solo.

Dale Harris, mistress of ceremony and president of the Pleasant Street Historic Society, greeted participants.

“We want to bring attention to the Pleasant Street and its wonderful history,” Harris said.

Melanie Barr, banquet chairperson, said the banquet was started 10 years ago as a way to raise funds for the renovation of the Smith-Griffin House at 321 NW Eighth Ave. Smith-Griffin, a retired educator who passed away in 2003, willed her house to the society. It was built in 1870 by her grandfather.

The Pleasant Street Historic Society was founded in 1984 to preserve, promote and protect the Pleasant Street Historic District. Barr spoke about the importance of learning our family’s history and writing it down for future generations.

“I’m trying to preserve a historic house,” said Barr.

Keynote speaker Kenneth Lawson, president and CEO of Visit Florida, the state’s official tourism marketing corporation, spoke about the power of legacy and the impact his grandfather, the late Vernon Trapp, has in his life.

Born and raised here in Gainesville, Lawson graduated in 1982 from Gainesville High School. He holds a bachelor’s degree in international affairs and a law degree, both from Florida State University. He is a member of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc.. He lives in Tampa and works out of Tallahassee.

Barr said she heard him give a great memorial for his grandfather, and since then, the historic society has been trying to get him to speak at the annual banquet.

Lawson said his great great grandparents were born in South Carolina and moved to the Jonesville area of Alachua County. They later moved to the Pleasant Street neighborhood in Gainesville.

Trapp was a teacher and during segregation was principal at Micanopy Elementary, and after integration served as vice-principal at Duval Elementary School. He was founding member of the Pleasant Street Historic Society.

Lawson said his grandfather went to trade school at FAMU and began to plan ahead in five-year increments. He said his grandfather taught him life lessons and the importance of community.

“He said history is how we connect to one another,” said Lawson. “I’m trying to live up to his legacy.”

“My grandfather helped me stand in places where he couldn’t, but I can,” Lawson said. “My grandfather believed education is freedom. He brought excellence and joy to the home.”

Lawson said it’s important to teach children self-determination, who they are and where they come from.

“We want to make sure they know who they are and what they are worth,” said Lawson. “They can’t be broken down because they know where they come from.”

The three winners of the "Standing on the Shoulders: Because You Did, I Can" essay contest received a \$75 cash award, a “Lamp of Knowledge” trophy, a framed certificate, flowers, and a ticket to the banquet.

They are: Naya James, a student at Fort Clarke Middle School who wrote about her mom, Kimberly James; Caleb Little, a student at Caring and Sharing Learning School, who wrote about the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., and Juan Pena, also a Fort Clarke student, who wrote about Roger Federer, considered the best male tennis player of all time.

The finalists of the essay contest received a \$40 cash award, a framed certificate, flowers and a ticket to the banquet.

They are: Char'lae Perry, also a student at Fort Clarke, who wrote about her mom, Tabitha Coleman; Elana Rollins, a student at PASSAGE Christian Academy, who wrote about Oprah Winfrey, author, movie/television producer, and one of the wealthiest women in the world, and Sasha Brown, a student at Howard Bishop Middle School, who wrote about her grandmother, Tanya Russell.

Residents receiving awards for community contributions in areas of interest to Smith Griffin were:

Community Service: LaKay Banks for her community activism.

Banks, who expressed her appreciation for the recognition, moved to Gainesville in 1959, and since then, has generously supported a long list of causes through her time and generosity.

Education: Tennessee Jones, a retired educator, is a volunteer co-director of the Saturday Academy at Mount Carmel Baptist Church, and she also volunteers at Lake Forest Elementary.

“I’m humbled and honored to receive this award,” said Jones.

History: Sherry Sherrod DuPree, a librarian and historian whose research focuses on African-American gospel music and African-American Pentecostal churches.

“We have a history, let’s keep our history” said DuPree. “You have a history that can be the door to understanding.”

Religion: The Rev. Samuel Jones Jr., pastor emeritus of Open Door Ministries in Gainesville.

Jones said Open Door Ministries focuses on marriage and the family.

“Marriage is the house family lives in,” said Jones.



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