

4 SOUTH FLORIDIANS TAPPED FOR 2014 ACHIEVERS AWARD

Written by KYOTO WALKER

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DEERFIELD BEACH — One is a passionate advocate and educator in arts and culture. Another is a school principal who is committed to uncovering the potential in young people. A third is so wedded to that belief that she used hundreds of thousands of dollars of her retirement money to outfit a bus and take technology to the under-served.

And a fourth has blazed a trail in entrepreneurship and politics. Marshall Davis, James F. Griffin II, Estella Pyfrom and Barbara Sharief will be under the spotlight when they are honored at the 22nd annual African American Achievers Awards, sponsored by JM Family Enterprises Inc. of Deerfield Beach, Southeast Toyota Distributors Inc. and JM Lexus.

They were chosen from among nearly 200 nominees for the award. The judges included former Achievers and community leaders. Davis, a Miami resident who will be recognized for his work in the field of Arts & Culture, is the long-time managing director of the African Heritage Cultural Arts Center at 6161 NW 22nd Ave. in Miami's Liberty City community. He has promoted arts and cultural awareness in the area for more than three decades.

"My biggest achievement is the development of students and the arts," Davis says. Some of his students, he says, have gone on to perform on Broadway and with the Alvin Ailey American Dance Theater in New York.

African Americans have contributed heavily to the development of the arts and should reap the benefits from its success in this area, Davis says.

"People from the black community introduced genres such as jazz and tap, all derived from the black life experience," he noted.

Generations of people in the community have taken advantage of the opportunities offered by being exposed to the arts and cultural scene, he added.

"The arts can show youth practical applications of basic skills such as math and reading through music and theatre," he says. "It gives them a chance to earn jobs and scholarships through the center's programs, as well as return to become [mentors] to current students." Griffin, who will receive the Education achiever award, also thinks it is important to support youth and education because they have "limitless potential."

Griffin, who is acting principal of Lauderdale Lakes Middle School, 7720 West Oakland Park Blvd., Sunrise, believes that youth can achieve greatness with the proper guidance.

Accelerated and innovative programs in math and technology, as well as vocational opportunities, will help prepare them for college and the workforce, Griffin says.

Pyfrom, who will be presented with the Community Service award, has gone much further in translating her views into action. She says she spent more than \$900,000 of her money to customize a bus as a mobile technology lab containing nearly 20 computers, educational materials and staff.

Her Estella's Brilliant Bus travels to areas where there is little access to even basic technology. "It is a way to provide education and technology, which is a big step towards bridging the digital divide," she said. "Bridging the digital divide is not just important to African Americans but to any and all individuals residing in under-served neighborhoods."

Pyfrom, whose initiative has garnered worldwide attention and made her a CNN Hero in 2013, plans to acquire additional buses to extend more programs and services to people where they live.

Sharief rose from very desperate economic circumstances when her father, a small merchant and the family's sole breadwinner, was shot and killed during a robbery. Growing up with a seriously ill sibling inspired her to start South Florida Pediatric Homecare Inc., a company which now employs 600 professionals.

Sharief, who is also currently serving as the first black female mayor of Broward County, says that job-creation and economic development are an integral part of being a public servant. She will be presented with the Business & Entrepreneurism award.

The winner of the Jerome Edmund Gray Youth Achievement Award will be announced at the ceremony.

The awards ceremony will be held at 6:15 p.m. Wednesday, April 9, at the Broward County Convention Center, 1950 Eisenhower Blvd., Fort Lauderdale. For information, call 866-516-2497 or email achievers@jmfamily.com.