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Black history shared in Levy County



Clerk of the Court Danny Shipp and Carolyn Cohens pose just before the program begins.

Story, Photos and Video

By Jeff M. Hardison © Feb. 18, 2018 at 8:48 p.m.

BRONSON – The 17th Annual Levy County Black History Month program was held in Courtroom A of the Levy County Courthouse on Friday (Feb 16).

<https://youtu.be/iSN-kq7YxIg>

In this video, Johnnie Lee Phillips sings the song In Times Like These, which was written by Ruth Caye Jones in 1943.



In this painting by Carolyn Cohens, she shows all of the children, 'red and yellow, black and white,' are loved by Jesus. They are all carrying the American flag, which is being blown by the wind.

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(from left) Sheriff Bobby McCallum, community leader Bob Williams and Superintendent of Schools Jeff Edison are seen just before the start of the program.

In some past years, it has been presented in the Levy County Commission Meeting Room. Every year, this program has been thanks to the efforts of Levy County Clerk of the Court Danny Shipp and renowned artist, author and historian Carolyn Cohens of Chiefland.

Cohens attended Chiefland Junior High School and graduated from Williston Vocational High School.

This year, the following people were honored Dwayne Williams and his father Tucker Williams Jr.; Ida Bell Littles Phillips; Lashae Smith; Katrina Cohens; Larthay and Millie Richardson; Clyde Bowers and Joe Jenkins.

HISTORY

This marks the eighth year when HardisonInk.com covered the event – every year since the daily news website began.

During the past 17 years, the Cohens-Shipp program has highlighted various members of the Levy County community who were valuable contributors to the whole of the county.

Clerk of the Court Shipp welcomed everyone and recognized Sheriff Bobby McCallum, Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones, Superintendent of Schools Jeff Edison, School Board Member Chris Cowart and Bob Williams, a significant member of the Levy County area who recently retired and moved to Gainesville, although he remains very active as a volunteer in Chiefland and elsewhere in Levy County.+++++

Another elected official at the event on Thursday was Chiefland Vice Mayor Chris Jones. Shipp spoke about the program and some of the Levy County Courthouse history.

“I’ll tell you some of the things you’ll see and hear today,” Shipp said. “You’ll hear the Lord being praised.”

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He said listeners will hear expressions of gratitude to some of the people who helped develop Levy County into what it is today.

At one point after Levy County came to be with the establishment of Florida as a state in 1845, there was a time when the unincorporated area known as Levyville was the home of the courthouse.

Shipp said he recently moved to Levyville from Bronson and lives within a quarter of a mile of the former site of the courthouse.

Courtroom A was built in Bronson in 1936, after the first courthouse burned down, Shipp said. Since then, the county leaders have added structures to that center-point.

“We’ve always been proud of this courtroom,” he said.

This is one of the few courtrooms in all of Florida that has seating for 21 members of the Grand Jury as well as seating on the other side for 12 members of the regular jury.

Carolyn Cohens was noted by Shipp to be the director of this annual program.

Cohens said the theme of Black History Month in Levy County this year is “Ancestry in Education.”

“Our older people worked very hard to make it possible for what we have today,” Cohens said. “Our younger ones have no idea of what it was like in the past.”

By progressing through the trials and tribulations endured by older Americans, things have changed for the betterment of everyone, she said.

“Doors have opened,” Cohens said, “but we have so much further to go.”

The author wrote two books on the people of Levy County. One is Levy County, Florida (Black America), published Jan. 23, 2006; and the other is Levy County (Images of America), published Nov. 30, 2009.

Following are the people featured in the program this year.



Carolyn Cohens holds a photo of Dwayne Williams when he was a deputy as Dwayne Williams speaks about his father.

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DWAYNE WILLIAMS AND HIS FATHER TUCKER WILLIAMS JR.

Dwayne Williams of Williston graduated from Williston High School in 1982. He was the first honoree to speak at the program this year.

Cohens presented American flag pins to the honorees or their family representatives and she gave certificates of appreciation to the participants as well.

Williams said he is thankful to Cohens for honoring him and his father in this program, and he thanked everyone in the audience for attending.

On June 18, he said, he and his wife Cassandra are celebrating their 30th anniversary, and he is thankful to her for all of the time they have been together.

Williams said he is also thankful to Sheriff McCallum, because when Williams worked for the Levy County Sheriff's Office from 1988 to 1995, McCallum was also working there. Williams returned to Alachua County after leaving Levy County. He had been at the Alachua County Sheriff's Office from 1984 to 1988.

"He was instrumental in my development as a law enforcement officer," Williams said. "He has a very good and kind heart. And that is what matters – what is in your heart."

Dwayne Williams retired from law enforcement in 2013.

His late father Tucker Williams Jr. was born in Williston, and attended Williston High School. Tucker Williams worked for the Williston Police Department from 1962 until 1980, and then at the LCSO from 1980 until 1988. Tucker Williams Jr. died on Jan. 15, 2009.

Tucker Williams Jr. was the first black policeman in Williston when he began there in 1962, his son Dwayne mentioned on Friday, and with that Tucker Williams Jr. was the first minority law enforcement officer in Levy County.

Dwayne Williams began his law enforcement career at Florida State Prison after he was accepted for a job, even though both he and his older brother applied. Williams soon went to work for the ACSO.

Dwayne Williams said that his mother and father raised him and his siblings to have respect for themselves, and this in turn results in having respect for all people.

Tucker Williams helped his children, his son Dwayne said, know that their lives were not to be shaped by the thoughts and deeds of people doing things that were not right.

Sheriff McCallum said he is glad to have Dwayne as his friend still after all of these years. Sheriff McCallum worked with Tucker Williams as well.

Tucker Williams was very influential in law enforcement in Levy County, Sheriff McCallum said.

Dwayne Williams was "an excellent deputy" and "a wonderful deputy" when he was in Levy County, and everyone was sorry to see him return to Alachua County, Sheriff McCallum said, although Alachua County paid more.

IDA BELL LITTLES PHILLIPS

Irma Phillips Maxwell, Lovelia Phillips Anderson and Johnnie Lee Phillips all spoke well of Ida Bell Littles Phillips, as did Cohens.

Ida Bell Littles Phillips was born Jan. 8, 1917 in Wilcox. She was married to Pastor John H. Phillips Sr. for 66 years. They had 11 children.

Maxwell is her daddy's 16th child and the 11th child of John and Ida Bell Littles Phillips.

Her mother was "strict but fair." One of the highlights of the late Ida Bell Phillips, Maxwell said, was when she earned her high school diploma at the age of 91.

One of Maxwell's sisters was the math coordinator for the Atlanta Public School System at the time. When the day came for the graduation, there was a class of one graduating, but there was

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all of the pomp and circumstance as one would expect at any high school graduation ceremony, Maxwell said.

Anderson said when she earned less than an “A” her mother would question her. She told her mother that she felt the need to pull back on her skills because other children would make fun of her for being smart.

“So, I learned to be proud of being able to achieve,” Anderson said, “and to do the best job that I could.”

Anderson said her mother inspired her. At the age of 68, she just recently earned her Associate of Arts degree from Santa Fe College and she intends to complete work to earn her bachelor’s degree.

Johnnie Lee Phillips said she married into the family, but Ida Bell Phillips treated her like a daughter.

Ida Bell gave Johnnie Lee some advice. First – don’t have a house full of children. Second – always save something out of each paycheck. Third – “Don’t you spoil that man.”

“You see my husband sitting at that table,” Johnnie Lee said as she quoted her mother-in-law. “Now he knows I am tired. I cooked the food. He waits for me to fix his plate, and sit it in front of him.”

Johnnie Lee Phillips said she was the most wonderful mother-in-law she could have hoped to have had.

At the request of Cohens, Johnnie Lee Phillips sang. The singer said, referring to the shooting deaths of school children two days earlier, that in times like these, we need a Savior. She sang *In Times Like These*.



Lashae Smith holds a paper as she speaks. In the background is a painting by Carolyn Cohens. The artist spoke about the things that inspired her to make the various paintings.

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Lashae Smith is presented with a pin by Carolyn Cohens for participating in the 17th Annual Levy County Black History event.

LASHAE SMITH

Lashae Smith, 23, graduated from Chiefland High School in 2013, and joined the United States Army that year.

Still a member of the Army, she is also working to earn a Master's Degree in Speech Pathology.

As a child, Smith said she learned that through hard work, dedication and prayer, any goal was possible to attain.

After four years in the Army, Smith said she is ranked among the top five soldiers in her company.

During her deployment in Africa for a year, she faced significant adversity because she was the only female in a predominantly white unit.

"Nothing was given to me," she said. "I had to work hard and earn my way to the top. With my faith and prayer, I knew I would overcome (any obstacle or adversity), and I did."

She told listeners that challenges can be the driving factor to inspire a person to keep going, even when they may feel their back is against the wall.

Smith said she is thankful to Bob Williams, because he presented her with a scholarship at a special ceremony at Buie Park, where she went right after work, still wearing her 'scrubs' as she was a Certified Nursing Assistant then. Her grandmother had called her to the park, and although she wanted to go home, she listened to her grandmother and went.

That scholarship helped start her on the way for more education after graduating from CHS.

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Carolyn Cohens (left) holds a picture of her daughter Katrina Cohens, when Katrina was younger.

KATRINA COHENS

Katrina Cohens was born Aug.13, 1973. She was a dancer in the marching band and was a member of the Chiefland High School Varsity Cheerleading Squad. She graduated from CHS in 1991.

She is the daughter of Carolyn Cohens. Carolyn told stories about her daughter as a child, and how she showed great interest in mathematics.

Katrina said she would advise young people to listen to their parents.

Katrina Cohens earned her Master's in Business Administration at the age of 40, she said. She had a 3.8 GPA.

Kip Harrison, Community Bank President at Capital City Bank Group Inc. of Gainesville, spoke about Katrina.

Harrison said he has worked with Katrina for two years.

She is responsible for the management of the three Capital City Bank offices in Gainesville, Harrison said.

“She’s been in the banking industry for about 20 years,” Harrison said, “and the last 10 of those she has been at Capital City Bank.”

Her responsibilities include operations, administration and staffing for the Gainesville offices of Capital City Bank.

Harrison said Katrina Cohens has used her talent to identify issues quickly, and to create best practices for the organization. She has helped to foster an environment of diversity and inclusion, he said.

Harrison expressed his gratitude for being to invite to speak about his colleague.

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(from left) Franklin Schuler Jr., a Democrat seeking to be elected to the United States House of Representatives, District 2 Florida; Juan Henley, a teacher in Gilchrist County; and Marjorie Henley, Juan's mother and the daughter of Larthay Richardson, speak about the Richardson family.

LARTHAY AND MILLIE RICHARDSON

Millie Richardson was among the teachers who helped Carolyn Cohens learn math long ago. Larthay Richardson was in the Masons, Cohens said, and he was the father of Cohens' sister – Marjorie Henley.

Marjorie Henley said her father Larthay Richardson was always seen with his wife Millie.

Juan Henley said that even though Millie Richardson was his step-grandmother, she always treated him as her own grandson. In fact, he added jokingly, he was certain that he was her favorite.

He said that his grandmother would watch the news and would worry about things. Before his first trip to Europe, he said, there was an avalanche somewhere. Therefore, he did not want to tell her about his plan to travel there.

Juan Henley mentioned that he was able to visit all seven continents so far in his life. He enjoys traveling.

He also said he is proud of his Aunt Carolyn, the author and illustrator. He tells his students about his aunt.

Franklin Schuler Jr. is a member of the extended Richardson family. He spoke about the heritage of the family that moved to Gulf Hammock from South Carolina many decades ago.

At the end of the part of the program honoring the many people who were brought forward to honor for their service to education in Levy County, family members from the families of Clyde Bowers and Joe Jenkins shared entertaining stories too.

Carolyn Cohens gave people in the audience an opportunity to share their input, and she presented certificates of recognition to Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones, Levy County

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School Board Member Chris Cowart and Levy County Tourist Development Council Director Tisha Whitehurst

After the event, Whitehurst served cookies and lemonade to guests in the lobby of the courthouse.



Carolyn Cohens (left) presents certificates of recognition to Supervisor of Elections Tammy Jones (green blouse), Levy County School Board Member Chris Cowart (light brown coat) and Levy County Tourist Development Council Director Tisha Whitehurst



Levy County Tourist Development Council Director Tisha Whitehurst prepares to serve people cookies and lemonade.