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FLORIDA'S AFRICAN-AMERICAN HISTORY TAKES SPOTLIGHT ON TOUR

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Educators, school administrators and others wanting to know more about the people and places that have shaped African-American history in Florida will spend five days visiting key sites in different parts of the state.

On the "African American Heritage Tour," which begins July 10, participants will visit a variety of historical landmarks – from Hillsborough County where the routes slaves used to escape to freedom have been chronicled, to Tallahassee where the Black Archives Research Center and Museum at Florida Agriculture and Mechanical University offers scores of displays on African American antiques and "Old South" memorabilia. In Tallahassee the tourists also will learn about banking for blacks during the Reconstruction era at the Freedman's Savings Bank.

In Daytona Beach, they will visit sites associated with Mary M. Bethune in education and civil rights, and Jackie Robinson in professional athletics. In Jacksonville, they will learn about James Weldon Johnson, the NAACP activist/attorney, school principal, author/lyricist and U.S. ambassador, and A. Phillip Randolph, a civil rights activist and organizer of the Pullman car porters and the civil rights march on Washington.

"I think it is important," said Sherrilyn Scott, a member of the State of Florida's African American History Task Force. "I always tell people, 'Know your history, love your history and never leave home without it.'"

The task force, which includes educators and administrators representing various school districts in the state, is working with the U.S. Commission of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization to offer the tour, said Sherry DuPree, a task force member and director of the tour project.

"It's a cooperative, grassroots approach and a very educational approach," DuPree said of the tour, which eventually will grow to include South Florida and other parts of the state, she said.

"We can not run over the state in one week," said DuPree, who is based in Gainesville and is a published author and Smithsonian Institution scholar who has done research on Pentecostal churches in the United States. "We don't ride in and ride out. We have to allow time and take segments of the state."

Scott, a curriculum and instruction supervisor for Miami-Dade County Public Schools, agrees that the tour should include South Florida.

"Miami-Dade County Public School District has 319,000 students," Scott said, "and African Americans are 26 percent of the population. It's key that we share this information. Having the tour come down would shed light on the struggle of what it took for us to get where we are today."

This upcoming tour, which costs \$190, targets educators who are encouraged to incorporate their new-found knowledge and awareness of African-American history into their classroom instruction. Participants will receive a certificate of completion for submission to the school district to earn professional development credits.

The project also helps educators know about people and events that are not covered in text books. "It serves as a constant reminder of the struggle in our story," Scott added. "A lot of our history was not documented."

About 30 participants have signed up for the tour, which begins at the black-owned and managed Innisbrook Resort in Tampa, and continues with lectures and visits to the Kingsley Plantation at Fort George Island near Jacksonville, Fort Mose, the first free community of ex-slaves, founded in 1738. In the Orlando area, educators will learn about African-American culture before desegregation. They will tour the business/entertainment district and visit the Wells' Built Museum's exhibit and video on African American Music performers.

Although the tour is designed for education professionals, others, including independent researchers, are also included. Brian Williams, vice mayor of Palmetto City, and Bonnie Burgess, former mayor of Alachua, also have signed on for the tour.

Beyond the tour's reach, Scott said it is important that school districts implement African-American history each school day, which is a mandate of the task force.

Only six of the state's 66 school districts demonstrate what Scott calls an "exemplary curriculum" that incorporates African-American history. Broward, Palm Beach and Miami-Dade school districts are among the six.

Scott also serves on a state-wide instructional text book committee, which will select the social studies textbooks for the state's 66 school districts.

"We make sure African-American history is covered," Scott said.

In the past, added DuPree, text books would include only one picture of a slave who was brought to America. "They did not want to deal with the hidden history," she said.

For more information on the tour or the task force, call Sherry DuPree at 352-281-2286.

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