

Prior to Incorporation

In the late 1980's there were several groups in Palm Coast that joined together to form the African American Cultural Society, Inc.

One group which included **James Sharpe**, Original Lifetime Member, noticed that police were harassing young Black kids who were hanging out by the Bowling Alley and the old Wal-Mart site, now occupied by Staples and Beall's Outlet stores. The group decided that they would look into renting space for kids to play ball, games, etc. They looked at renting space on Old Kings Road and had no luck. They tried Carver gym, but the minute they rented it, the gym was condemned for two years. They secured a place at the Community Center and then the powers that be decided that the center needed to be redecorated, so that was out. They started recruiting other people and met in various homes.

Among those who joined with them were **Erma and Bob Brooks**, Lifetime Members, who were running the Third Eye program in Bunnell for youth during the summer. Erma and Bob were also having Black Study groups twice a month at Daytona Beach Community College. In the late 80's they took a trip to Africa and came back very much Afro-centric. They heard about the group that wanted to start an African American group and started going to their meetings. Some of the members of this group decided to join, mainly because the group was interested in erecting a building.

A third group, which included **Lionel Holder**, Gold Lifetime Member, was meeting to form a culturally focused group. They wanted to have a building where they could display art and other cultural items.

All of these groups banded together, hashed out their differences and formed the African American Cultural Society, Inc. They conceived it as a place where youth would have activities and adults could discover their rich history and culture. It took over a year to write the By-laws, but with the assistance of **Jenny Lea**, Gold Lifetime Member, **Elva Lee**, Original Lifetime Member, **James Hinson**, AACS Member, and **Prof. Banks** at Bethune-Cookman, they got them written. When the charter and bylaws were submitted to the state they were approved on first submittal - that was unheard of! When AACS was incorporated in 1991 there were only 52 dues paying members; now we have grown to almost 300 members. What an accomplishment!

The First Five Years

The 25th Anniversary Historical Perspective Committee has established that each historical perspective of the African American Cultural Society should be associated with a Kwanzaa principle.

This presentation is related to **Ujamaa** which is Collective Economics and its aim is to describe the major events that took place during the five-year period after incorporation, and the sources of funding during that period which supported the organization.

AACS was incorporated on December 19, 1991 with the following signing officers: **Lorenzo Jones**, President; **Jeannette Smith**, Secretary; and **Walter Morris**, Treasurer. In April 1992, the first elections were held for a Board of Directors and Executive Board of officers. **Clarence Mauge'** was the first elected President. The federal Internal Revenue Service and the State of Florida granted AACS temporary tax-exempt status in 1993. A second election took place in 1994 and Clarence Mauge' was re-elected President.

AACS purchased the five acres of land in Palm Coast on which The Cultural Center now stands in May 1995. Funds to acquire the land were supplied by the membership purchasing AACS' first debenture bonds and a \$35,000 loan from First Union Bank. Incredibly, AACS was able to pay off the loan in April 1996, only 11 months later.

Several sources of funds supported AACS in those early years. Membership dues were a key source since the number of members was increasing rather quickly. In addition, some Directors wrote grant applications and AACS received funds from state, county and Palm Coast (then unincorporated) agencies to support various cultural programs, including The Third Eye and Youth Computer Office Training (YCOT). In addition, donations were received from various banks, the Flagler County Sheriff's Department and the membership.

Other fundraising at the time took many forms. The Board of Directors' focus on funds for long-range goals resulted in automobile raffles, and memorial brick sales for the Heritage Walk in front of The Cultural Center. The Ways and Means Committee's fundraising aimed to support day-to-day operations with dinner dances, casino trips, ship cruises, raffles and rental of The Cultural Center. Other AACS committees raised funds with golf tournaments and cultural trips to other cities. Overall, the annual "200 Club" has been the strongest and most reliable fundraiser since its inception.

Building the Cultural Center

Starting in 1995, AACS officers and members dug deep into their pockets and purchased AACS-issued debenture bonds to obtain land for a desired cultural center. A total of \$65,000 in bond funds were used in 1996 to acquire five acres of choice land on U.S. Route 1, north of White View Parkway in Palm Coast, Florida.

Assistance with the purchase was provided by **James Sharpe**, Original Lifetime Member, **Courtney Coke**, Land Purchase Committee Chair and **Albert McCray**, an engineer who donated his services. **Lionel Holder**, Gold Lifetime Member, then formed the Pledge Committee to raise funds for construction of the center. AACS was able to obtain a mortgage of \$580,000 using the funds raised in-house along with grants from First Union Bank (now Wells Fargo), Nations Bank (now Bank of America) and SunTrust Bank.

Ray Tajmir was selected to design the center by the Design and Planning Committee of **Lionel Holder**, **Clarence Mauge**, **Evelyn Corbin** and **Louis McCarthy**, Silver Lifetime Member, committee chair. After the membership approved the building design, a Construction Cabinet was formed. The Cabinet included **Lionel Holder**, **Clarence Mauge**, **Jim Lee**, **Al Logan**, **Phil Horne** and **Bill Robinson**, Silver Lifetime Member, committee chair. After the receipt of required permits, Cooperative Construction Corp. was hired to accomplish center construction.

On February 19, 2000, a ground-breaking ceremony was held on the grounds and excavation began on February 26th. During the construction phase, it was decided that the building needed a commercial kitchen. Many members stepped forward and donated funds for the required appliances. Their names now are proudly displayed on the Kitchen Brigade Plaque in the Center's entrance hall. In addition, funds were donated by **Robert and Erma Brooks**, Original Lifetime Members, for the Library Room, **Walter and Jean Boone**, Original Lifetime Members, for the Pyramid on the building's front lawn, and **Lionel and Eunice Holder**, Gold Lifetime Members, for the medallion in the entrance hall.

AACS' Tenth Anniversary was celebrated with the opening of its Cultural Center Building on November 17, 2001. Ms. Susan L. Taylor, Essence Magazine Editorial Director, was honored to be the celebration's keynote speaker. She praised AACS members, saying that we were "sisters and brothers who know what to do." Honored guests that evening included former Presidential Candidate and New York Congresswoman Shirley Chisholm, Palm Coast Mayor Jim Canfield and Palm Coast Councilman Ralph Carter.

Accomplishing Education

The next years, the period 2005 to 2011, concern the Education Committee's ability to educate the community, utilizing presentations, lectures, and group discussions relative to the African and African-American contributions to world civilizations and our nation.

The Education Committee continued to serve students, providing tutors from our membership for reading and math on all grade levels, and contributing special-skilled persons in music, dance, chess, and as storytellers in the Griot Exchange.

The Education Committee, along with the Black Studies Committee, presented a series of Cultural Dinner Meetings at the Center, sharing the history, knowledge, and contributions that we have made as a people.

With that said, the Education Committee had partnered with the Flagler County School Board to additionally offer educational lectures, presentations, and discussions about African and African-American history to teachers, high-school and middle-school students. "PowerPoint" slide presentations with regard to the contributions of Africans to world civilizations were featured for presentation to the public, as well as to teachers and students at the Flagler County middle schools and high schools.

The Committee formed partnerships with Daytona State College and Bethune-Cookman University to inform education majors regarding African and African-American history.

The Education Committee has produced a DVD titled "Project Griot: Memories of Segregation in Flagler County." The DVD is in conjunction with the Flagler Palm Coast High School students and teachers, AACS, and the Flagler County School Board. It is available to high schools, the AACS membership, the Flagler County Public Library, and the Flagler County Historical Society.

An African American History Course was initiated by Education Committee member **Bertrand W. Green**, who was serving on the GAP Committee. Mr. Green invited members of the Education Committee to join the GAP Committee. The GAP Committee was an advisory board that made recommendations for the betterment of African American students. Members of the Education Committee joined the GAP Committee, which ultimately resulted in the Education Committee beginning the process of accreditation for the African American History Course.