



From left to right: Frank Iaccerino, Craig Callan Historic Dodgertown Vice President, Mr. Gardner, John Dean, Dan Richardson, Author Harris, Margaret Richardson, Craig Fletcher, Freddie Woolfork, Bobbi Howard-Davis, Ken Macht, Nancy Johnson, Fran Adams, (unidentified in back) Dick Yemm, Kenny Holmes, Joan Woodhouse, Sheriff Roy Raymond and Chief Jim Gabbard.

Thank you to Freddie Woolfork for identifying these early supporters of GYAC

A BRIEF HISTORY OF GIFFORD YOUTH ACHIEVEMENT CENTER

By Christina Tascon

WHAT DOES A COMMUNITY DO WHEN ITS CHILDREN ARE FAILING MISERABLY AND CANNOT SEEM TO FIND A Foothold ON THE ROAD TO GRADUATION?

Well if you are a close-knit community like Gifford you don't make excuses and hope for the best—you make success happen in the form of the Gifford Youth Achievement Center.

In 1996, Dr. A Ronald Hudson, a long-time educator with the Indian River School District, was astounded to find out that graduation rates had plummeted to just 23 percent among African-American students in Indian River County since the closure of GHS. He brought those statistics to the Progressive Civic League of Gifford, Inc. and the leaders knew something had to be done.

The League's then President was Freddie Woolfork who became GYAC's first Director/Program Developer and is currently its Director

of Public Relations and Facilities Operations. He says the idea of a local community center for the children was something on everyone's wish list but no formal plan had been actualized until the statistics were brought to their attention.

"When Dr. Hudson asked what the community really needed, I said that was easy," Woolfork remembered. "We needed a place to help our kids educationally and give them a place to socialize as well as for the parents to receive training."

As to location, many people may not know that the land which currently holds GYAC, the Gifford Park, the Community Center and Gifford Aquatic

pool was once owned by Indian River Shores. The League convinced the county that the land would be best used as a centralized park for Gifford and county residents. Commissioner Bird plead Gifford's case before the Shores' city council and sweetened the argument by offering to swap the Gifford land for a county owned parcel on the barrier island.

Three years ago, the name was changed to Gifford Youth Achievement Center to highlight the main mission of increasing academic achievement to assist student graduation but the Center is still a hub of "Activity." Not only is GYAC used for events, exercise classes, bible studies, and computer and educational training by the youth as well as seniors, it is also a home for those in need of services and information.

"We don't want to rest on our laurels," said Woolfork. "We want to continue to do things as fervently, and as enthusiastically as we possibly can to let people know that we have a winning solution over here. We need the community to come to GYAC and see firsthand what we're doing and get excited with us. Our favorite slogan at GYAC is 'It takes team work, to make the dream work.'"

GYAC will be celebrating 20 years next year with a gala celebration on January 27, 2018 with a dinner and dance at Oak Harbor. For information on this or the Center's programs, visit www.GYAC.net or call (772) 794-1005.

Christina Tascon is the marketing coordinator for Gifford Youth Achievement Center.

“IT TAKES TEAMWORK, TO MAKE THE DREAM WORK.”

In 1969, Gifford used to have its own high school but desegregation decommissioned Gifford High School and bused everyone to Vero Beach. Although the original philosophy was meant to give equal quality education to the mostly African-American student body, it had an unexpected by-product—reduction of graduation rates for the GHS students.

Gifford is a small community where teachers and parents would discuss a student's progress when they met each other at church; while shopping, and at social gatherings. In their new VBHS surroundings, with new teachers and unknown classmates, the Gifford students also lost their sense of belonging.