

Local chapter of Delta Sigma Theta celebrates 30 years of making an impact in the community
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Tuesday, April 30th marked the 30th anniversary of the Melbourne-Palm Bay Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta. Members hosted an All White Day Party to commemorate this milestone and honor its chartering members who set their sights on fostering a home for Deltas in the southern Brevard County area.

Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Incorporated was founded on January 13th, 1913 with a vision of sisterhood, scholarship and service—three basic principles that chapters across the United States and parts of the world continue to stand for today.

The Melbourne-Palm Bay Alumnae Chapter (MPBAC) was chartered on April 30th, 1989. Founding member, Clara Smith has been a part of the chapter's growth since its inception.

"Having our own chapter here in the southern area of Brevard County gave us a chance to make a bigger difference here in the community," she said.

Each chapter of Delta Sigma Theta (DST), including those at both the collegiate and alumnae level, uses guidelines set by the Grand Chapter and develops programs for their respective communities.

The programs fall under DST's five-point programmatic thrust of economic development, educational development, international awareness and involvement, physical and mental health and finally, political awareness and involvement.

"The Melbourne-Palm Bay Alumnae chapter strives to carry out programs that benefit and lift up the black community in the south Brevard County area," Recording Secretary and Fundraising Chairperson, Deborah Dean-Nelson said.

Some popular programs currently enacted in the community by the chapter include youth programs like G.E.M.S (Growing and Empowering Myself Successfully), Delta Academy, EMBODI (Empowering Males to Build Opportunities for Developing Independence), and Connecting Children with Reading (CCWR).

According to their website, CCWR is a program that takes place twice a week where local Deltas and other volunteers give hands-on reading tutorials to students K-12 who are in need of better reading skills.

GEMS and Delta Academy are educational initiatives created to give guidance to young women in transitions through social, emotional and physiological development. They are also in place to lend support to those looking to pursue college or higher education.

GEMS targets young African-American women 14-18 and/or in grades 9-12 and Delta Academy for those in the 11-14 age bracket. EMBODI was created to embolden young black men aged 13-17.

"The purpose is to help them get more in touch with their environment, their goals and who they are." Chapter President, Dr. Carole Stephens explained. These programs, she says, are "critical to have in all areas."

In early April, local members of the Delta Academy and GEMS participated in the US Navy SeaPerch Regional competition in Jacksonville. The initiative was designed to present

opportunities for the students to learn engineering and design skills. The team of 30 was the only all-African American team present at the competition.

“Educational programs that benefit young people are the cornerstone of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority initiatives, and they are vitally important to the development of young black people in this community,” Dean-Nelson said.

In addition to their impactful programs, the Melbourne-Palm Bay Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta hosts events like the All White Day Party and their Black Heritage Fest to help raise funds for scholarships and other youth initiatives.

Over their time in the southern area of Brevard County, the chapter has found ways to make a difference in the lives of community members both young and old.

Clara Jackson, who has been a member of the local chapter of Delta Sigma Theta for over 20 years, reflected on the transformation she has witnessed in the community. “The impact we’ve had is great and necessary and the change over time in the community is clear,” she said. Jackson was a part of the Delta Sigma Theta Germany Alumnae Chapter prior to joining the Melbourne-Palm Bay Alumnae chapter.

“Alumnae chapters,” Stephens said, “are critical to one’s personal and professional development. It doesn’t matter what part you’re at in your career, we can all use a mentor.”

The presence of Alumnae chapters also provides a place for sisterhood, one of the three principles of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc. Sisterhood, Dean-Nelson explained, “means no matter where I go in the world, if I see a Soror wearing DST letters, I know I’ve found family.”

Currently, the chapter is focused on aiding in the restoration of voting rights and getting locals registered to vote ahead of the 2020 election. Youth programs return in September.

If you are interested in membership, volunteering, or information on youth initiatives and involvement visit www.melbournedeltas.com.