

### Youlanda C. Gibbs

**Education:** Bachelor's degree in elementary education, College of Charleston; master's in education, Lesley University; Ph.D in education leadership from Nova Southeastern University

**Hobbies:** Watching lifetime movies and telling people about The Palmetto Palace.

**What she wanted to be when she grew up:** Pediatrician.

**Books recently read:** The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks by Rebecca Skloot and Leadership on the Line by Ronald Heifetz and Marty Linsky



Photo/Leslie Burden

## Palmetto Palace struggles to address needs of hospitalized patients and families

BY SHAINA M. ANDERSON  
Contributing Writer

Last year, 486,864 patients were discharged from hospitals in South Carolina. Of the 13,481 that traveled from out of state, many have families unable to afford even the gas to get to the hospital to support their loved one.

Then there are meals, hotel rooms, and parking fees that accrue during the average four-day stay. This is the need that Charleston native Youlanda C. Gibbs is trying to fill.

In 2010, she founded a non-profit called The Palmetto Palace. The organization provides food vouchers, accommodations, and toiletry "survival" kits for family members of critically ill patients. Gibbs came up with the idea of Palmetto Palace during her employment as family care manager for Roper Hospital. She was shocked to learn thousands of families practically live in waiting rooms every day.

"I would see the families in the waiting rooms when I left at the end of the days. When I arrived back at work for morning shift, they would still be there," she said.

Seeking support for the relatives, she would call different organizations and was turned down repeatedly. "They would tell me that they didn't fit the guidelines."

Gibbs said there is a misconception that many organizations in Charleston help relatives of hospitalized patients. The Ronald McDonald House and American Red Cross' Hope Lodge offer assistance to those fitting specific profiles, such as pediatric patients and cancer victims. While they are doing a good job meeting those needs, she said, "There is another population of families that needs assistance."

She approached Patrick Rogers, the general manager of the Charleston Marriott. Together they founded The Palmetto Palace, which now has 50 volunteers. Gibbs' 10 years in human resources and doctorate in education leadership prepared her to run the organization. She works as a project research manager at the Medical University of South Carolina and teaches at the Art Institute of Charleston.

Her primary passion is meeting the needs of families supporting their loved ones. According to Gibbs, the organization's funds have been depleted since March 2012. She said part of that comes from a lack of awareness.

"We've been turned down because people think we mirror the Ronald McDonald House," Gibbs said. "We're trying to educate, as well as involve."

To date, more than 100 hotel rooms and 1,700 meals have been provided through The Palmetto Palace for families that travel at least 25 miles and receive a

referral from a hospital.

A main goal is providing hotel rooms close to downtown medical facilities.

"Our hotel rates are \$25 to \$50. If family members can provide even \$5 or \$10, The Palmetto Palace absorbs the cost," Gibbs said.

Most hotels provide free transportation to area hospitals, and families can avoid parking fees.

The Palmetto Palace plans to gather for from 9 a.m. to noon, Feb. 14 at the Courtyard Marriott for the next Hospital Hospitality Day to pack 350 survival kits to be distributed to families waiting in local hospital rooms. The organization is seeking volunteers, supply donations, and sponsors for the event and another in May.

Gibbs also hopes to spark general donations to get their operation up and running again.

Her greatest accomplishment of 2012, Gibbs said, was receiving letters of support from Lt. Gov. Glenn McConnell and Congressman James Clyburn and local hospitals Trident Health, East Cooper and Roper Saint Francis. Businesses have stepped up to help as well, such as Platoon Media, California Dreaming, Crosby's Seafood, Limehouse Produce and the Pepsi Bottling group of Charleston.

"Volunteers know people, who know people, who then know other people," she said. "That will help us get the word out. And that's priceless." ■

## People in the News

### ENGINEERING



Baird

Live Oak Consultants has hired **Nathan Baird** in the company's Electrical Design Group. Baird joins Live Oak after recently retiring with 35 years of federal service at Space and Naval Warfare Systems Command Atlantic in North Charleston. He is a registered professional engineer and will be responsible for designing power and lighting systems for office, warehouse, production and recreational spaces along with other project management duties. Live Oak Consultants is an engineering firm.

See **PEOPLE**, Page 29

## Business Digest



### Slatherin' Sauce to be carried by Costco's retail location in Charleston

Original Recipe Slatherin' Sauce will be carried at Costco Charleston, said Robin Rhea founder of Slather Brand Foods Inc. The 32-ounce bottle of Original Recipe Slatherin' Sauce retails for \$7.99 at Costco. The decision follows product tests in 2012 at Charleston's Costco. After the store experienced strong demand for the sauce, Costco requested a special size and package be produced for retail in Costco in Charleston. In 2013, similar tests will be conducted in Myrtle Beach and Wilmington, N.C., to

See **BUSINESS DIGEST**, Page 30

## Calendar

### JAN. 29

**Great Business Networking.** 8 a.m., Perkins Restaurant, 1306 Main St., Summerville. Info: [www.greatbusinessnetworking.com](http://www.greatbusinessnetworking.com), [contact@greatbusinessnetworking.com](mailto:contact@greatbusinessnetworking.com) or 843-628-2283.

See **CALENDAR**, Page 30