

SERVING THE LOWCOUNTRY

MUSC Hollings Cancer Center Nurse First in SC To Win Award

As a nurse who witnessed how cancer and chronic disease ravaged patients, Debbie Chatman Bryant, DNP, RN was determined to do something to help people in the Lowcountry fight the disease.



Debbie Chatman Bryant

For her determination to prevent and treat cancer among the medically underserved, Bryant has been named one of 10 recipients of the Robert Wood Johnson Foundation Community Health Leaders Award for 2012. The award honors exceptional men and women who have overcome significant obstacles to tackle some of the most challenging health and health care problems facing their communities. The Robert Wood Johnson Foundation has honored more than 200 community health leaders since 1993. Bryant, director of the MUSC Hollings Cancer Center Outreach Services Program, will receive the award during a ceremony in San Antonio October 17.

"One of the biggest challenges we faced in treating low-income or uninsured patients was that even if we did manage to diagnose them in time, they would not come back for treatment," Bryant said. "They were afraid of the cost and they didn't trust the system," she said. "So we needed to create a system patients would trust so they could get both diagnosed and treated."

Bryant expanded outreach efforts and changed the center's communication approach. She wanted patients to be aware of clinical trials and other treatment options. She used a mobile screening van to link the region's community health centers to Hollings Cancer Center and to provide care in areas where there were very few or no providers.

"When we find something abnormal, we immediately connect the patient with a 'lay navigator,'" she said. Navigators make sure the patient makes diagnostic follow-up and treatment appointments. "And if not, we literally drive to their house and knock on the door."

Bryant's efforts paid off. The number of mobile-unit screenings increased from 1,300 in 2006 to more than 2,000 in both 2010 and 2011. More than half of the patients screened were uninsured or underinsured, and

nearly two-thirds of those served say they would not have been screened if not for the mobile van. The program has decreased the number of patients lost to follow-up from 11 percent in 2009 to less than 5 percent in 2010.

Janice Ford Griffin, national program director for Community Health Leaders, said the selection committee honored Bryant for her perseverance in innovating and executing strategies that treat patients as active participants in realistic and practical steps to improve their health. "Dr. Bryant provides a crucial link in assuring residents' access to information about clinical trials and other sophisticated medical concepts, while at the same time actively mentoring nursing and medical students with advice and support as they pursue their careers."

As a child growing up in South Carolina during the end of segregation, Bryant was the only African American in the classroom and was often ignored by teachers. It was her family who helped her to believe in herself. Nursing is Bryant's second career, and she says she never would have completed graduate school and her doctorate without her family's encouragement. She also believes that family is the key to promoting healthy behaviors. "I've seen families provide incredible support to one another in sickness. Now we need to support each other in health," she said. "And that means making healthy foods part of our family traditions, or taking a walk together after a family meal. We can do this. We have to."

Palmetto Palace Is A Labor Of Love For Dr. Yolanda Gibbs

By Bob Small

For Dr. Yolanda Gibbs the Palmetto Palace is a labor of love. Her joy is helping out-of-town families find a place to stay and a decent meal while attending loved ones in most of the area hospitals.

Gibbs got the idea to start her program while working as a family care manager at Roper St Francis Hospital. "I sometimes worked late hours and would leave at 6 pm and see families in chairs waiting on word about sick family members and when I came in the next morning they were still there."

One day while talking it over with Dr. Fay Brown, a local educator she was given the idea to start something to help those who came in from out-of-town and had no place to go while loved ones were hospitalized. With an idea and a lot of determination Gibbs started Palmetto Palace.

Since the program started in 2011, they have provided 100 nights of stays at local hotels and motels. They have also served over 1,700 meals. Gibbs said she would not be able to provide the service if it were not for several local business who joined in and donated rooms, meals, transportation and intangibles. "Sometimes the clients just need someone to talk to," Gibbs said.

Nancy Cantu, of Houston, Texas can attest to that. Cantu



Yolanda Gibbs(right)

"I sometimes worked late hours and would leave at 6 pm and see families in chairs waiting on word about sick family members and when I came in the next morning they were still there." Dr. Yolanda Gibbs

rushed to Charleston after receiving word that her daughter had broken her back while in boot camp at Parris Island Marine Corp Station.

She arrived in Charleston and headed to MUSC where her daughter was hospitalized with limited funds. Cantu said she thought the Marine Corp would provide housing while she was with her daughter but that did not materialize. "She had to have an operation and I needed to be there with her dur-

ing that time, Cantu recalls.

With limited funds and determined to stay by her daughter's side she began contacting various social agencies for help. That's when the local chapter of the American Red Cross referred her to Palmetto Palace. The program was able to provide three nights in a local hotel and food vouchers. Food vouchers are issued by the hospital cafeterias.

"If it wasn't for Dr. Gibbs, I don't know what I would have done. She was with me every

step of the way. She helped me and was someone I could talk to," she said.

Gibbs said there are agencies that provide help for families of patients with cancer or pediatric problems but there is little for those with other illnesses or injuries.

Gibbs said the program operates with 50 volunteers who do everything from preparing lunches to driving clients to and from the hospital.

Recently Palmetto Palace sponsored a Hospitality Day in which volunteers went around to operating waiting rooms and provided 350 lunches to families waiting to hear on the condition of their loved ones.

Currently all three Roper St. Francis sites, two East Cooper Medical facilities and Trident Medical Systems have partnered with Palmetto Palace and the American Red Cross.

Gibbs said that in addition to referral from hospitals and medical facilities she receives referrals through word of mouth. "Some former clients share their experiences with us and when those people are in need they call on us," she said. Referrals also come from the hospitals.

Those interested in giving donations should send donations to Palmetto Palace 21076, Charleston, SC 29413 or check out their website at PalmettoPalace.com.

For Charleston County School Board - Elect Mickey Mouse

- cont. from pg 1

By Barney Blakeney

As Charleston County voters prepare to go to the polls Nov. 6 to elect six county school board members the impact on public education as it relates to Black students has been a question some voters are concerned about.

Last year 20,150 of the county's 44,413 students were Black. Most of those Black students attended predominantly Black schools which have become synonymous with failing schools.

The achievement gap between the county's Black and white students at some grade levels

is over 30 points. Black students are at the lower achievement levels in every grade level. Charleston County School District is a system where Black male students comprise about 80 percent of special education students, but less than 20 percent of gifted and talented program students.

As predominantly Black schools such as North Charleston and Burke High schools face decades-long academic low performance, several individuals were asked how they view the upcoming school board elections and the nine

candidates vying to fill the six seats to be elected. Voters will elect one representative for downtown Charleston, three for West Ashley and two for North Charleston.

Elaine Gadson of West Ashley said she has mixed emotions about the school board elections. No candidate will be on the ballot for the downtown Charleston seat on the board though several individuals are seeking election as write-in candidates. No candidate submitted the required number of petition signatures necessary to be placed on the ballot in July.

Charleston County School Board historically has ignored the needs of African American students, Gadson said. And the board's African American representatives have not been great supporters of the Black community's agenda, she added.

She cited the proposed High Tech High, a technical education school to be located at the Rivers campus, as one example of the board's neglect of Black students' needs. The proposed school would offer an alternative for students who don't pursue an academic track in high school, she said. But the Board has failed to

Unopposed County Council Incumbents Face Lackluster Races

- cont. from pg. 1

By Barney Blakeney

Four incumbents are seeking re-election to Charleston County Council Nov. 6 in lackluster races that almost assuredly will result in maintaining the status quo.

J. Elliott Summey in Dist. 3, Henry E. Darby in Dist. 4, A.

Victor Rawl in Dist. 6 and Colleen T. Condon in Dist. 7 are seeking re-election.

Rawl is the only incumbent with opposition this election cycle. He will face Republican Carolyn Hughes, a write-in candidate for election to the Dist. 6 seat. Summey is the

only Republican among the incumbents seeking re-election.

Summey, a former Democrat, defected to the Republican Party after redistricting reconfigured his district to include a significantly greater white constituency.

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OCT. 25 - NOV. 4 • Exchange Park - Hwy 78 - Ladson

PAUL RYERE & THE RAIDERS
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MARSHALL TUCKER BAND
Fri. 10/26 • 8:00pm

LITTLE TEXAS
Sat. 10/27 • 8:00pm

JAMES GREGORY
Sun. 10/28 • 5:00pm

JO DEE MESSINA
Mon. 10/29 • 7:30pm

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SENIOR CITIZENS DAY:
Wed. Oct. 31 - 60+... \$4.00 gate admission - Seniors 11am - 3pm

THE OAK RIDGE BOYS
Thu. 10/30 • 7:30pm

VILLAGE PEOPLE
Wed. 10/31 • 7:30pm

COREY SMITH
Thu. 11/1 • 7:30pm

LAUREN ALAINA
Fri. 11/2 • 8:00pm

EDENS EDGE
Sat. 11/3 • 8:00pm

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