

# FEF FOCUS

Volume 8, Issue 2 Spring 2010

## President's Message



Dr. Lawrence Morehouse

Despite budget reductions resulting from Florida's financial crisis, we realize that our constituents rely upon us to adjust to the shifting economic environment, recruit new McKnight Doctoral Fellowship Program (MDF) Fellows, assist Fellows monetarily and academically, and offer effective pre-college programming throughout the year. To help meet these goals, we, in turn, rely upon the graduates we have supported and the students we serve.

We expect our Ph.D. graduates to pursue careers in academia and engage in research that addresses critical community and humanitarian needs, while also helping current MDF Fellows succeed. You will read in this edition of the *Focus* about alumna Dr. Sally

Williams, who fulfills these expectations as a tenured professor at the University of Florida, researching in the area of food safety, while mentoring current Fellows, speaking at MDF conferences and often contributing financially to the FEF.

We also expect matriculating Fellows to conduct important research and fulfill their Ph.D. program requirements, while using their training to enhance FEF academic offerings for newer Fellows and pre-college students. In this edition of the *Focus*, you will read the transcript of a conversation with Fellow Erlande Omisca, who meets these expectations through her research involving water shortages in the Caribbean and her work with pre-college students in the FEF's academic competitions and intensive summer camps.

Finally, we expect our pre-college students to maintain excellent grades and prepare for college, while they serve their communities and help younger students achieve. You will read

in this edition about a number of National Achievers Society (NAS) leaders who fulfill these expectations, with exemplary collective guidance from parents, school administrators, and Center of Excellence Directors. You will meet NAS State President Jasmine Holmes, for instance, who maintains an outstanding GPA in Leon County's International Baccalaureate program, while providing extraordinary leadership for the NAS and running a program she created to help pre-teens develop strong social and interpersonal skills.

Thus, as this edition of the *Focus* manifests, by collaborating with our graduates and students and fully exploiting existing resources, we continue to implement and expand programming despite declining financial support. We will continue honing our ability to respond to challenges with creative and innovative approaches, and we look forward to always achieving our mission in the midst of a dynamic, evolving world.

## Trailblazing 2009 Annual Fellows Meeting Keynote Speakers Offer Wise Counsel

25th Annual McKnight Fellows Meeting keynote speakers Sonia Sanchez and Lydia Villa-Komaroff overcame barriers to blaze new trails in literature and molecular biology. Their stories, related at the Meeting last fall, combined history with wise counsel for aspiring and established scholars.

### Professor Sonia Sanchez on the Burden of Knowledge



Professor Sonia Sanchez

Professor Sonia Sanchez, prolific poet, playwright, essayist, educator, and activist, has been hailed as one of the most important writers of the Black Arts Movement and credited with developing the Nation's first black studies and women studies courses. Often vilified in the 1960's and '70's, the Black Arts Movement eventually paved the way for artists of all

*continues on page 2*

### Dr. Lydia Villa-Komaroff on the Benefits of Failure



Dr. Lydia Villa-Komaroff

In 1975, Dr. Lydia Villa-Komaroff earned her doctorate in cell biology from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT), becoming one of three Mexican American women with science Ph.D.'s in the United States. Three years later, her success in cloning insulin from bacterial cells led to the worldwide source of insulin for diabetics, and she was awarded two patents. Villa-

*continues on page 2*

### Inside this Issue:

McKnight Alumni Spotlight	2
McKnight Annual Meeting Highlights	3
McKnight Doctoral Fellow Profile	4
Brain Bowl and National Achievers Society Highlights	5
National Achievers Society Leaders	6
Centers of Excellence Director of the Year	7
Contact Information	8

## Alumna Spotlight on Dr. Sally Williams, Graduating Class of 1993

When McKnight graduate Dr. Sally K. Williams supervises graduate students in the areas of meat and poultry microbiology, food safety, and product processing, she credits her success in coaxing forth their best work to the MDF Program. "During the Ph.D. program, developing positive relationships with faculty was critical," she states. "McKnight helped facilitate these relationships and showed us how we should be mentored as well as how to mentor others." It's a skill Williams employs everyday as she teaches students to safely process meat products for human consumption according to United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) regulations.

An Associate Professor in the Department of Animal Sciences at the University of Florida (UF), Dr. Williams researches ways to com-

bat salmonella, E. coli, and listeria monocytogenes, bacteria present in ready-to-eat meat and poultry products, which, in certain quantities and strains, can be deadly.

According to the Centers for Disease Control (CDC), an estimated 76 million ailments, 325,000 hospitalizations, and 5,000 deaths occur in the United States each year due to food borne illnesses. Interestingly, known pathogens account for only an estimated 14 million ailments, 60,000 hospitalizations, and 1,800 deaths. Causes for the remaining illnesses and deaths remain unknown (CDC, 2009), although human error cer-



*Dr. Sally Williams advises a UF student as she checks meat quality.*

tainly accounts for some portion.

In Dr. Williams' view, consumer error is one of the primary areas of food safety concern over which researchers have no control. "Often, people store food improperly or just don't cook meats thoroughly enough, and there is always a small level of naturally occurring bacteria present that can then wreak havoc," she says. "Others believe meats should be sterile. But that isn't the case."

Dr. Williams concludes that "health officials and researchers need to do a better job educating the public." She does her part by lecturing widely on the topic, including making presentations at a number of MDF conferences

over the years, which has afforded her the opportunity to inform while also supporting McKnight.

Dr. Williams fondly remembers her McKnight experience. She recalls developing lifelong friendships and benefiting from a strong network of graduates devoted to ensuring that future Fellows succeed. Since graduating from UF, she too has reached back, sitting on two Fellows' dissertation committees and often contributing monetarily to the MDF Program.

Dr. Williams obtained both her Ph.D. and M.S. in Food Microbiology from UF in 1993 and 1977, respectively, the first African American woman to graduate from UF in her field. Prior to studying at UF, she earned her B.S. in Biology from Albany State College in 1971.

## Annual Fellows Meeting Keynote Speakers

*Sanchez, continued from page 1*

ethnicities to more fully express their own cultures. Currently poet-in-residence at Temple University, Sanchez has been a professor at eight universities and has lectured at over 500 colleges and universities on four continents.

The African refrain "ebeyiye," meaning "it will get better," has propelled much of Sanchez's writing, activism, and life. The Alabama native began writing at age six to cope with the death of her grandmother, surrogate for the mother who died five years earlier in childbirth and source of her love for black vernacular speech. Writing also helped her overcome a stutter that plagued her throughout her youth. By age nine, she and her younger sister had rejoined her father, a musician and schoolteacher, remarried and living in New York. There, Sanchez attended Hunter College and New York University, organized writers' workshops, married, and had children.

"Your fate is to be blessed and burdened with knowledge," Professor Sanchez said, as she charged the MDF audience to bind themselves to responsibility, reject excessive materialism, and fight against "many massacres of mind, spirit, and body." As she related her experiences mentoring students in poor neighborhood schools, she reminded her listeners that all youth are "our children" and that we must embrace and teach each one as our own.



*Professor Sanchez autographs a manuscript for MDF Fellow Xaymara Serrano.*

*Villa-Komaroff, continued from page 1*

Komaroff currently heads a biotechnology firm that develops optical cell sorters, markers for distinguishing good transplant cells from those that will be rejected.

The eldest of six children born to a music teacher and a social worker in Santa Fe, New Mexico, Lydia Villa and her siblings were all expected to complete college and pursue professional careers. Childhood for Lydia was happy, chaotic, and sometimes mysterious because Lydia understood very little Spanish. Her parents, punished as children for speaking Spanish at school, had relegated their mother tongue to conversations among adults and extended family. They insisted Lydia and her siblings master English and exposed them to a variety of academic disciplines.

By age nine, Lydia knew she wanted to be a scientist. In pursuit of this goal, she encountered less discrimination because of her heritage than her gender, often encouraged to consider fields more "suitable" for women. In 1965, she moved to the East Coast and, within a few years, married and started graduate work at MIT.

"If you don't fail, you're not doing enough," according to Villa-Komaroff. "Failure is essential to growth," she said, and talked about packing a truck with the equipment from three frustrating years of lab work. Among the packed items was a single vial of the insulin-forming enzyme that made the rest of her career possible.

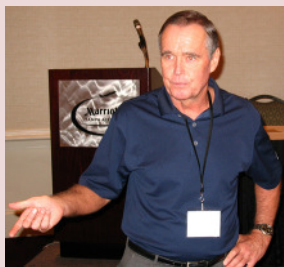


*Dr. Morehouse congratulates Dr. Villa-Komaroff.*

## McKnight Fellows Consider America's Financial Crisis

The Annual Fellows Meeting (AFM) offers McKnight Fellows opportunities not only for professional development, but also for mentoring by McKnight alumni and other outstanding scholars. Part of the mentoring process involves having Fellows observe scholarly presentations by seasoned professionals. This facilitates an understanding of the process of developing, organizing and delivering an effective public presentation; expands knowledge of relevant issues confronting our communities and the Nation; and illustrates the importance of conducting research that helps solve critical problems.

In a poignant presentation on the causes and impact of the 2008 - 2009 financial crisis and recession, University of South Florida Professor and Certified Financial Analyst Jack Rader



*Professor Rader analyzes the U.S. financial crisis.*

succinctly illustrated the significance of data collection and analysis. From an examination of financial institution lending practices, mortgage acquisitions, Gross Domestic Product and employment statistics, U.S. monetary policy, and domestic and global stock market trends, he developed a set of logical solutions to the crisis grounded in research.

To describe the causes of the crisis, Rader argued that America's "irrational exuberance" over maximizing profits in the housing and stock markets triggered a general decline in the American economy that led to the current recession. As the economy began to boom in 2004, a flood of low interest loans became available to potential home buyers, creating inflation, "a bubble," in the housing market. Many investors took advantage of the low rates to buy homes to resell (flip) at enormous profits. Others bought homes they could not afford.

However, according to Rader, once interest rates began to rise in 2006 and 2007, housing prices declined throughout the United States, while refinancing became more difficult. Defaults and foreclosure activity increased dramatically, as easy initial terms expired, home prices failed to rise as anticipated, and lenders raised Adjustable Rate Mortgage interest rates.

As buyers realized they would lose money by selling their homes for less than their mortgage amounts, they defaulted on loans, and lenders initiated foreclosure proceedings. As

foreclosure rates increased, many banks and hedge funds, which had bought mortgage-backed securities on the secondary markets, panicked, as they realized they faced huge losses.

In response to these huge losses, by August 2007, banks became afraid to lend to each other and take these toxic loans as collateral. This led to the \$700 billion federal bailout and bankruptcies, or government nationalization, of Bear Stearns, AIG, Fannie Mae, Freddie Mac,

Indy Mac Bank, and Washington Mutual. By December 2008, the housing crisis led to a severe decline in employment, and the American and world economies fell into one of the deepest recessions since the Great Depression.

To fix the U.S. economy, Rader argued that the United States government must continue to use monetary policy to stimulate growth while preventing deflation, appropriate stimulus dollars to prevent new bank failures, and nationalize any major bank (a "systematically significant bank too big to fail") in danger of bankruptcy.

Beyond this, according to Rader, government should design the stimulus program to generate jobs that will produce the largest possible employment boost; spend in areas that strengthen the economy in the long run, such as infrastructure redevelopment; and, finally, despite the recession, hasten the fight against global warming.

Rader noted that a green public-investment stimulus would further these goals by protecting state-level health and education projects against budget cuts; financing long-delayed upgrades to our roads, bridges, railroads and water management systems; and underwriting investments in energy efficiency, including building retrofits and public transportation, as well as new wind, solar, geothermal and biomass technologies.

In closing, Rader concluded that "bubbles happen and bubbles burst," causing pervasive, severe, and long lasting consequences. Bubbles thus should encourage policy makers to think in earnest about how real people behave and work to fashion permanent solutions to this pressing problem. Frequently, however, partisan politics limit our governments' ability to create effective public policy. Given the serious nature of these issues, sound research and analysis may force policy makers to rise above destructive politics.

## Shots from the 2009 AFM



*From top, Fellows visit with the ASU recruiter; Dr. Glen Jones discusses tenure and promotion; Fellows attend the AFM plenary session; Fellow Brandon Burrell introduces his mentor Dr. Karen Bearor; 2009 "jacketed" Fellows pose with Dr. Morehouse.*

## MDF Fellow Erlande Omisca Works Toward a Sustainable World

According to the World Health Organization and UNICEF, approximately 1.1 billion people worldwide lack sufficient access to safe sources of drinking water, such as a sanitary piped connection or a protected well.

In addition, even when suitable water is available, many consumers contaminate their own drinking water by unsafe handling and storage procedures at home. They often collect or keep water in open, uncovered or poorly covered containers; use unsanitary methods to dispense water from containers; fail to protect against germs from flies, cockroaches, and rodents; and inadequately clean storage tanks to prevent biofilm formation and accumulation of sediments. These practices contribute to an estimated 1.9 million annual deaths from unsafe water, mostly among young children in developing countries.

To address these issues, an increasing number of researchers have begun field tests to determine whether point-of-use treatment and safe water storage in the home can help vulnerable populations ensure their own water hygiene.

USF McKnight Doctoral Fellow Erlande Omisca, founding member of the USF Chapter of Engineers for a Sustainable World, engages in such research, seeking solutions that will reduce water storage catastrophes.

**FEF:** How did you select your field of research?

**Omisca:** I've always been interested in the sciences and public health. After I completed my Masters in Public Health, I wanted to research environmental issues and also address disparities in developing countries, mainly in the Caribbean, where



Erlande Omisca and her team measure water parameters and take samples for lab analyses in Tampa.

my parents are from. After several unsuccessful project initiatives, my advisor, Dr. Maya Trotz, approached me with a pilot project involving household water storage and water quality in Guyana, Trinidad, and Bolivia. Given the worldwide impact of the issue, I embraced the topic and have brought my unique perspective as a child of immigrant parents and an international researcher to an indepth study of the issues.

**FEF:** What challenges have you encountered in your research?

**Omisca:** In taking on an international research project, I've encountered funding shortages, issues with malfunctioning equipment in the field, cultural and language differences, and disappointing results. I am grateful I've had fellow researchers Joniqua Howard, Ken Thomas, and Douglas Oti to assist me in addressing and overcoming these challenges.

**FEF:** How have the McKnight Fellowship and the FEF impacted your life?

**Omisca:** The McKnight Program is like a family, an academic therapy group, and a resource center rolled into one. I first attended an MDF conference before I accepted the Fellowship and was welcomed

warmly by Charles Jackson, Dr. Morehouse, and the MDF Fellows. Since then, I've always been encouraged by the staff and Fellows, enlightened by the conference presenters, and inspired to be better and give back. Participating in the FEF's pre-college programs has enabled me to give back while providing valuable guidance to middle and high school students in the Math Brain Bowl and the Applied Math Summer Camps.



Erlande officiates at the FEF Annual Brain Bowl Competitions in 2006 and 2009.

**FEF:** What are you doing locally that impacts the environment?

**Omisca:** Currently, I am working on transforming several of Tampa Bay's storm water ponds into community friendly green spaces. In October 2009, my team, USF Engineers for a Sustainable World, won a \$75,000 Environmental Protection Agency P3 award. The award supports a community-wide collaboration among students from local elementary and middle schools, USF Civil and Environ-

mental Engineering and Architecture students, and the East Tampa community. As a result of the grant, I've learned how to assess the needs of a community and effectively teach and communicate environmental awareness to adults and children.

**FEF:** As a person of Haitian ancestry and an environmental researcher, what do you believe would help alleviate the problems Haiti faces after the disastrous earthquake?

**Omisca:** Prior to the earthquake, Haiti already faced severe environmental issues, such as deforestation, energy scarcity, food shortages, and obstacles in accessing clean water. Now, the gravity of those issues has grown exponentially. Long term environmental goals should involve overhauling and enforcing current building codes, increasing

environmental monitoring and disaster preparedness, establishing improved water sources, and continuing collaboration among the Haitian government, the Haitian people, and the international community. Most importantly, Haiti's people must become involved, because even the best interventions will fail if the target group is not allowed to participate in planning and implementation.

*"Long term environmental goals [in Haiti] should involve overhauling and enforcing current building codes, increasing environmental monitoring and disaster preparedness, establishing improved water sources, and continuing collaboration among the Haitian government, the Haitian people, and the international community. Most importantly, Haiti's people must become involved, because even the best interventions will fail if the target group is not allowed to participate in planning and implementation."*

-- MDF Fellow Erlande Omisca

## FEF Brain Bowl Competitions Celebrate 25 Years

THE TAMPA TRIBUNE-TIMES, Sunday, December 15, 1985

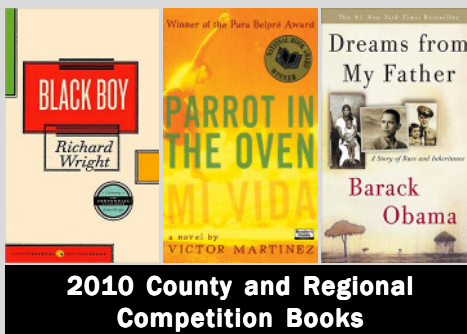


The champion team from Hillsborough High School competes at the 1st Annual FEF History & Culture State Brain Bowl Competition in 1985. From left, Lawrence Mungin, Casey Davis, Jacqueline Coffie, Mike Simmons and Carlos Chambers

On Saturday, December 14, 1985, thirty-four students from across the State of Florida participated in the first annual State Brain Bowl Competition in History & Culture held at the University of Tampa. Hillsborough County team captain Carlos Chambers led his teammates Jacqueline Coffie, Casey Davis, Lawrence Mungin, Wanda Pressley and Mike Simmons to victory, with the team successfully answering the majority of over 2,000 questions from a Trivial Pursuit-like game entitled "Rise and Fly."

On Friday, April 16, 2010, the FEF expects 200 students on regional champion teams to compete in the 25th State Brain Bowl Com-

petitions in History & Culture and Mathematics (introduced in 2002) in Orlando. Instead of game questions, History & Culture competitors will answer vocabulary, comprehension



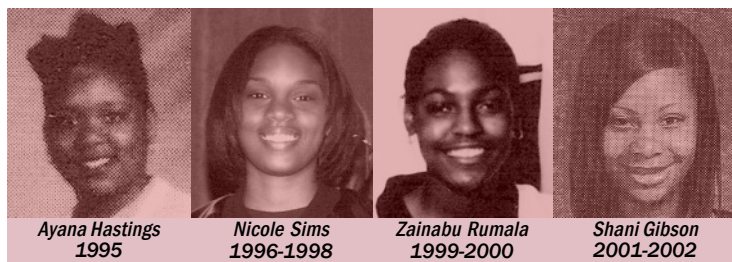
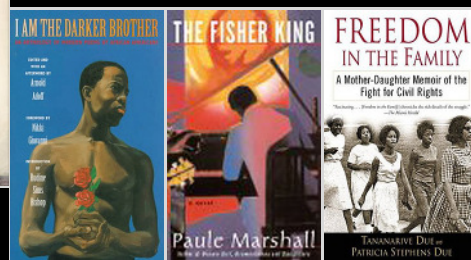
2010 County and Regional Competition Books

and extended reasoning questions, similar to those asked on the SAT, from three books: *I Am the Darker Brother: An Anthology of Modern Poems by African Americans* by Arnold Adoff, *The Fisher King* by Paule Marshall, and *Freedom in the Family: A Mother-Daughter Memoir of the Fight for Civil Rights* by Tananarive Due and Patricia Stephens Due.

Math teams in three separate levels of competition will solve FCAT or SAT math problems.

Since 1985, more than 14,880 students have competed in the FEF's annual academic Brain Bowl Competitions, and over 615 winners have won 4-year scholarships contributed by Florida's colleges and universities.

### 2010 State Competition Books



Ayana Hastings  
1995

Nicole Sims  
1996-1998

Zainabu Rumala  
1999-2000

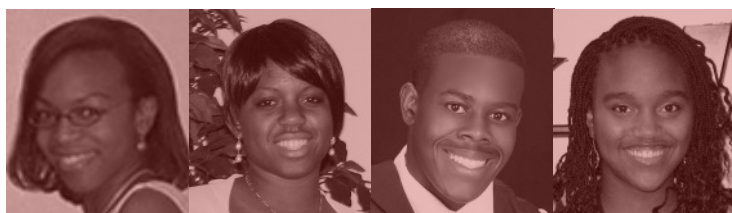
Shani Gibson  
2001-2002



Barrington Russell, Jr.  
2003



Jamil Jude  
2004



Sakeena Gohagen  
2005-2006

Taneisha Grant  
2007-2008

Tavarus Andrews  
2009

Jasmine Holmes  
2010

## The National Achievers Society Turns 25

Established in 1984, the National Achievers Society, originally the McKnight Achievers Society, has established itself as one of the FEF's premier programs designed to motivate and prepare high achieving students for college while also exposing them and their families to higher educational opportunities.

In 1997, because of the success of the Achievers Program, the National Urban League and its partner organizations, under the auspices of the Campaign for African American Achievement, officially adopted the Achievers Society and made plans to introduce the Achievers model to African American communities across the Nation. In 1998, the Campaign replicated the Achievers Society on the national level and renamed it the National Achievers Society (NAS).

Over the past 25 years, more than 18,575 students have earned induction into the NAS, with the vast majority ultimately graduating from high school and college.

To become Achievers, hundreds of students each year submit applications that include, among other information, their most recent grades, which must consist of at least two A's and no C's. Each FEF Center of Excellence selects applicants for induction at least once during the year.

### NAS State Presidents, 1995 to Present

## NAS State President Jasmine Holmes: Serving Tirelessly to Reap a Genuine Harvest

After moving from Miami in 2003, National Achievers Society (NAS) State President Jasmine Holmes found it hard to transition, but she credits the Tallahassee Coalition Center of Excellence (COE), led by Dr. Malinda Jackson, for helping her discover her niche, nurture her talents and feed her desire to serve. As Jasmine states, "the COE and NAS are a community, network, support system, and training ground for anyone willing to embrace them. They are where I gained the confidence and skill to lead."



Jasmine Holmes

Several mentors also supported Jasmine through the move to her new community and have helped her develop leadership and other skills. College student Angela has helped with academics and social life, Jasmine's grandmother has guided her spiritually, and her godmother has encouraged her love of dance and taught life lessons along the way. Her parents, Andre and Kai Holmes, have instilled ambition and a giving spirit. "My parents have planted in me a seed of drive which has been harvested into an infinite supply of self-motivation, creativity and concern for my community," she says.

That concern has propelled her to share her knowledge and the support she has received by creating and directing the Always Genuine Summer Program designed to help pre-teen girls develop into informed citizens dedicated to service and leadership. The Program, which runs for two weeks during the summer, offers sessions on personal and character development; arts exploration; career and professional development; leadership and team building; and goal setting. Jasmine plans to apply for the Program's non-profit status as she begins recruiting for the second year, following a successful first summer cultivating 25 middle school girls.

For her work with the Program and other accomplishments, in 2009, Zonta of Tallahassee presented Jasmine, a junior, with the Carol Bellamy Young Women Public Affairs award, an honor typically reserved for seniors. She reinvested the award funds in the Always Genuine Summer Program.

In addition to her work with the Always Genuine Program, Jasmine participates in a variety of local and national service organizations,

such as the March of Dimes Chain Reaction Leadership Council, the NAACP Youth Council, the Florida State University College of Medicine's Science Student Program, Student Government, Student District Advisory Council, the Leon County School Board, the Girl Scouts of America, the National Honors Society, and more.

She also expresses her creativity through the NAACP ACT-SO Program, which provides a venue to display her dance skill and showcase the modern and abstract art pieces she creates depicting relationships, challenging stereotypes, and bringing awareness to global issues.

After graduating from the International Baccalaureate Program at Rickards High School this May, Jasmine intends to follow in her father's footsteps, pursuing accounting and taxation degrees and a CPA license. In the future, she plans to make partner at an accounting firm, expand the Always Genuine Summer Program beyond Leon County, travel, marry, have children, and lead a healthy and spiritual life. "All in all," Jasmine says, "I will continue to strive to uplift others, be resourceful and responsible, and represent my family well."

## NAS State VP Matthew Desir Excels

Excelling in academics, sports, theater and community service, Matthew Desir, the National Achievers Society (NAS) State Vice President, epitomizes the well-rounded scholar colleges seek to admit. Inducted into the NAS in 1998 at the Atlantic Coast COE, Matthew has maintained the grades and met all requirements to remain a member for the past twelve school years. He will graduate from high school in 2010, as President of a local NAS Chapter at the UCF-McKnight COE, where Director Rasha Daniel has benefited from his tireless commitment. "Matthew is a dedicated, hardworking, and thoughtful young man," she says. "He has been an EXCELLENT role model for all Achievers by not only attending and participating in events throughout the year, but also coming early and staying late to assist with community service projects and helping any other way he can."

In addition to his roles in the NAS, Matthew divides his time among studying for AP classes, practicing on the football field, rehearsing for choir performances, and performing in plays at the local musical theater. He admits he juggles quite a bit, but says performing serves as a buffer, an escape when life gets hectic.

Performing also has garnered him a number of awards. Over the past two years, the Central Florida Critics and Award Program, which celebrates and provides learning experiences for high school theater students, nominated Matthew for the Critics Choice for Featured Actor in *Thoroughly Modern Millie* and the Critics Choice for Male Vocalist in *Peter Pan*. He has used his celebrated talent on his high school thespian troupe, where he trains younger members to become better actors, singers, and responsible citizens. "It is encouraging to give back to a community that has poured so much into me," Matthew says.

To further serve the community, Matthew has interned with State Senator Gary Siplin and participated in several of the Senator's constituent meetings and community outreach projects. As Senator Siplin states, "Matthew's experiences and community involvement emphasize his leadership qualities and no doubt confirm his commitment to improving his community."

Indeed, acting on that commitment has become Matthew's way of showing appreciation for the opportunities he and his family have experienced since his parents migrated to the United States from Haiti, where they suffered deprivation. The move to the United States has bonded the family into a tight group, a constant support system Matthew credits with helping ignite his and older brother Nathaniel's passion to succeed. Nathaniel, an NAS Alumnus and one of Matthew's mentors, is a current sophomore at the University of Central Florida.

Matthew plans to follow his brother's lead and pursue a degree from a four-year university, then train at a fire academy, all while encouraging elementary, middle and high school students to seek and maintain membership in the NAS. "Of all the groups and activities I am involved in," Matthew says, "the NAS has proved the most beneficial to my future success. The number one fear of kids my age is public speaking. I have conquered that fear, among others, because of the NAS. As a result, I've been offered many opportunities to speak at school and in the community. The NAS also has helped build my leadership and organizational skills, fed my passion for learning, and enabled me to develop lifelong friendships."



Matthew Desir

## Center of Excellence Director of the Year Gloria McIntosh

Center of Excellence (COE) Director of the Year Ms. Gloria McIntosh was raised by two strong, hard-working parents who valued education and the principles of Christian living. Her goal is to pass those values on throughout her community by providing access to educational opportunities not widely available in Florida's Columbia and Hamilton Counties.



Ms. Gloria McIntosh

For the past six years, McIntosh has achieved this goal as the North Florida COE Director, where she has instituted academic enrichment programming that includes the FEF's Brain Bowl Competitions and National Achievers Society (NAS). In addition to overseeing five active NAS chapters, McIntosh has conducted standardized test preparation camps and courses and encouraged hundreds of middle and high school students to participate in county and regional Brain Bowl contests in History & Culture and Mathematics. This year, she hopes to bring home state championships in Mathematics and regain the Center's dominance in History & Culture that led to first place state wins in 1987, 1993, and 2004. She also is working to raise the stature of the NAS to the same level of distinction as the National Honor Society and Beta Clubs on her campus at Columbia High School.

Her long term goal is to create a system to monitor students from third grade through high school to ensure they stay on the college

track. "I would like to see 90% or more Achievers qualify for academic scholarships, enabling them to complete at least a bachelor's degree," said "Ms. Mack," as her students call her.

Since receiving her own bachelor's in Chemistry with a minor in Mathematics from Stillman College in Tuscaloosa, Alabama, McIntosh has taught for 31 years in her native Lake City, in both the school system and via her church. In 2007, she won the Sunshine State Scholars Region II Scholar's Distinguished Teacher Award in Science. She also has earned the Ida S. Baker Distinguished Minority Educator of the Year Award for Columbia County and been named Columbia High School Teacher of the Year. At her church, she serves as Christian Education Director, Youth Director, Secretary and devoted member of Mount Pleasant Missionary Baptist, the same church she has attended since the age of 14.

"I would like to be remembered as one who made a difference in the lives of young people and all those I came in contact with. And, although I can be tough, I always add a cup of compassion as I urge students to reach their fullest potential," McIntosh says.



"Ms. Mack" and Ashlin Thomas confer.

## Profile: North Florida NAS President Ashlin Thomas

More than a COE Director, Gloria McIntosh becomes a trusted mentor to the students she serves at the North Florida Center of Excellence, developing particularly close relationships with the presidents of her five NAS chapters.

FEF Publications Manager Rachael Nickie spoke with one such student leader, Ashlin Thomas, about her background, goals, and the support she has received from "Ms. Mack" through the years.

**FEF:** Why did you join the North Florida COE?

**Thomas:** My science teacher, Ms. McIntosh, Director of the North Florida COE, asked me to try out for the Brain Bowl Math Team. I scored well on the competition pre- and post-tests and was selected captain. After competing at the State Brain Bowl, I was excited about the many opportunities the COE offered. The rush of competition and the many workshops at the Pre-College Summit challenged me, put me in contact with hundreds more

college bound students, and gave me a new love for the NAS. Last spring, I was inducted into NAS, and I am now the local President.

**FEF:** Aside from the NAS, what activities are you involved in?

**Thomas:** I am a member of the BETA Club, Junior Class Club, and Interact Club. I also have a black belt in karate. I like to swim and play soccer as well. I also am on my school's Academic Team.

**FEF:** Do you feel you have made an impact in your community?

**Thomas:** I believe I have. This summer, I completed 200 hours of community service at my local V. A. Hospital. I not only furthered my love for the medical field, but



Ashlin competes at State on the North Florida COE Math team.

also served my community.

**FEF:** What are your immediate and long term goals?

**Thomas:** I want to continue making straight A's in school and take more AP classes each term. I have my sights set on a high ACT/SAT score and becoming valedictorian. I plan to continue volunteering at the V. A. Hospital as well. In the future, I plan to go to college, attend medical school, and become a doctor, perhaps specializing in cardiology.

**FEF:** Do you have a mentor and, if so, how has that relationship helped you?

**Thomas:** I have many mentors, but I'd have to choose Ms. McIntosh as my favorite. She has always helped me stay on the right track. When she realized how determined I am to score high on the ACT/SAT, she recruited me for the Math Brain Bowl team to give me additional opportunities to practice solving standardized test problems. She has always made her-

self available when I've had questions on my work in science classes. And, there has been many a time when she has motivated me with her straight forward, "no-nonsense" words of encouragement.

**FEF:** Where do you get your drive to succeed?

**Thomas:** My drive comes from my parents who had a determination to reach their goals and came to America from India to do so. On my first trip to India, I saw immense poverty on the streets and the children who were able to attend school studying so hard so they could prosper. The meaning of a good education as a door to better opportunities became more real for me during that trip. Thankfully, in America, education is available to anyone willing to work hard to attain it. I believe anything is possible here as long as you work hard.

## FEF Board of Directors

Dr. Hayward J. Benson, Jr., Chair  
 Dr. Robert L. Nixon, Vice Chair  
 Mr. Elliott L. Carr, Treasurer  
 Dr. Sylvia Carley  
 Ms. Cristal Cole  
 Dr. Carl M. Crawford  
 Dr. Robert Friedman  
 Ms. Magda R. Orta  
 Dr. Robert L. Thomas  
 Dr. Sylvia W. Thomas  
 Mr. Philippe L. Villain

## FEF Staff

Dr. Lawrence Morehouse  
*President and Chief Executive Officer*  
 Lyra Logan, Esquire  
*Vice President and General Counsel*  
 Mr. Charles Jackson  
*MDF Program Manager*  
 Ms. Mindy Lai  
*Finance Manager*  
 Ms. Rachael Nickie  
*Program Coordinator/  
 Publications Manager*  
 Ms. Monica Olivera  
*Executive Assistant*  
 Ms. Phyllis Reddick  
*Executive Assistant/  
 Communications Specialist*  
 Ms. Khahnlong Sengsoulya  
*Administrative Assistant*

FEF Focus is a semi-annual publication of the Florida Education Fund.  
 ©2010, All Rights Reserved.

Volume 8, Issue 2 Spring 2010

Layout & Design:	Lyra Logan, Monica Olivera
Editing:	Lyra Logan, Rachael Nickie, Monica Olivera, Phyllis Reddick
Staff Writing:	Charles Jackson, Lawrence Morehouse, Rachael Nickie, Phyllis Reddick
Staff Photography:	Charles Jackson, Rachael Nickie

*The FEF's mission is to strengthen the larger community by creating and implementing programs and services that lead to greater educational advancement for historically underrepresented groups.*

**For information on how you may support FEF programs, please call 813-272-2772.**



201 East Kennedy Boulevard  
 Suite 1525  
 Tampa, Florida 33602

Phone: 813-272-2772  
 Fax: 813-272-2784

Visit Our Web Site at  
[www.fefonline.org](http://www.fefonline.org)