

# Learn My History launches Children's Network to encourage local mentorships



**Samantha Gholar, Sarasota Herald-Tribune**



SARASOTA — A local youth organization is launching a new program this month with the hopes of connecting more underserved children to mentors and adults who can help them achieve their career goals.

The organization, Learn My History, was founded by Ronnique Hawkins in New York nearly 20 years ago. Upon her arrival in Sarasota, Hawkins decided to launch a Florida branch of her nonprofit organization to further the goal of connecting Black, Latino and multicultural youth to their family history.

“The program instills racial harmony, especially in this climate,” Hawkins says. “When you pair children and mentors and these conversations about their family and their lineage, they uncover many similarities. Then they share it with their friends ... you're teaching tolerance of other cultures.”



The program introduces youth to prospective mentors, encourages a career match, and nurtures long-term relationships between participants, Hawkins said.

Mentees Diego and Alfonso with Judge Charles Williams: Photo provided

Through traditional mentor partnerships with community members in fields of interest of the students, LMH has created its second program, Children's Network, which will launch on July 25.



Hawkins chose the date of the program launch to commemorate the life of Emmitt Till, a teenage African American boy whose abduction and lynching in Mississippi in 1955 sparked the beginning of the Civil Rights Movement, and her own mentor Rev. Wheeler Parker. Parker witnessed Till's abduction in 1955; his mentorship with Hawkins later led her to create a documentary about Till's and Parker's lives.

Local mentors involved with the program include 12th Circuit Court Judge Charles Williams, Mother Minnie Dupree, former Sarasota Police Officer Andre Jenkins, and the city of Bradenton Fire Department's Daniel Hedgeman.

Learn My History is seeking mentors from the community to work with local youth for the year-long program.

Hedgeman, who recently completed work with LMH, thinks more community members should consider mentorship to help the younger generations become successful in their lives and cites his own youth mentors as big contributors to his accomplishments.

“I'm a son of a firefighter and honorably discharged Air Force mechanic. I decided to serve my community as a firefighter myself... and I'm so thankful to my mentors,” Hedgeman said. “I find the mentoring program of LMH to be one of true passion and uniqueness ... I am excited to see how this will continue to bear fruit.”

Learn My History's new Children Network will host a program launch on July 25 at the Robert Taylor Community Complex located at 1843 34th St. in Sarasota. The event will highlight the organization's ambassadors and mentors and register students and local youth for the mentorship program. Attendance is free and includes a screening of Hawkins' documentary. The program launch and LMH mentorship program are both free to interested participants. Students must be ages 8-17 to participate.

For more information, visit <https://www.learnmyhistory.org>.

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