

# Local residents will be part of 'History Makers'

## National archive documents black experience

By KAT BERGERON  
THE SUN HERALD

South Mississippians easily recognize the names of Dr. Gilbert Mason, Bishop Joseph Howze, chemist Katie Booth, war hero Lanier Phillips and other distinguished black Americans who overcame the odds in the segregated South, but their stories are little-known outside the region.

That will change as they join the ranks of national jazz legend Ramsey Lewis, Sen. Carol Moseley Braun, Rev. Al Sharpton, activist Jesse Jackson and hundreds of other notable blacks taking part in a national archive called the History Makers.

The producer and videographer for the oral history project are spending three days in Biloxi and Gulfport to tape the first-person stories before yet another generation disappears without documenting their lives and civil rights struggles.

"I know nothing about my grandfather and very little about my grandmother because it was never written down, and we didn't ask because we were too busy trying to live ourselves," said Biloxi native Harry Tarrt, a 94-year-old retired teacher, Methodist minister and military man with five battle stars. "I also know very little about my own parents. My father could hear a piece played on an organ and play it back, and he couldn't even read a note. Now I wonder how, and I will never know."

"That's why this project is so important. It is history but it's also a new beginning because we're finally starting to record our own history."

Retired banker Sidney Rushing, who was a teacher when

Gulfport High was integrated, describes History Makers as "a collection of important pieces of history that otherwise may not be collected."

Tarrt and Rushing are two of six being interviewed by director-interviewer Larry Crowe and videographer Scott Stearns. When they finish their

Coast interviews today, they will head to New Orleans for two more days of recording oral histories.

Since its founding in 1999, History Makers has interviewed more than 400, but that's less than one-tenth of the video archive the institute hopes to amass. A recent grant

from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has allowed the pair to travel across the country and to smaller communities like Akron, Ohio, Grand Forks, S.D., and Biloxi.

"We find interesting people everywhere we go," Crowe said. "This is America's missing history, the people who quietly

and not so quietly moved obstacles to make change."

History Makers (www.thehistorymakers.com) was founded by Julieanna Richardson, a Chicago lawyer. With her diverse background in corporate law, television production and cable television, she dreamed of using cutting-edge video and digital technology to preserve and make accessible the black American story. Universities, scholars, researchers

and the public will eventually have access to the History Maker archives.

"We're looking for the stories of the known," said Scott, "but also the unknown and the unsung. They all are history makers."

Kat Bergeron can be reached at 896-2309 or at [kbergeron@sunherald.com](mailto:kbergeron@sunherald.com).

Stay informed.

Read The Sun Herald daily.