

# Black history month: Trailblazing African-Americans

Editor's note: The following is an excerpt from an article about notable Sandusky-based African-Americans. The article appeared in the Register's final of four commemorative bicentennial editions, publishing Dec. 14, 2018. February 24, 2021

SANDUSKY — In summer 2018, as part of Sandusky's yearlong bicentennial celebration, honoring the city's 200-year anniversary, Sandusky NAACP members recognized more than 70 African-Americans, both dead and alive, for their pioneering spirit at the Sandusky State Theatre.

Here's a list presented of the first African-Americans to accomplish a significant feat in Sandusky:

## **In business**

- Dr. Waudell Hunter: own a hotel called the Hunter Hotel
- Eugene Minnifield: funeral director and owner of a funeral home, Minnifield Funeral Home
- Jackie Campbell and Beverly Oglesby Simmons: telephone operators; Lois Augustus Pettis and Barbara Tiller later joined them.
- Grady McDonald: own a car wash, McDonald's Car Wash
- James and Bill Churchwell: own a gas station
- Althea Johnson and Rubin Johnson: own and operate a business service in Sandusky
- Reuben Sharpe: own and operate a television repair shop and the first to work at NASA Plum Brook as a technician
- Barbara Ann (Hill) Johnson: serve as the executive director of Erie County Metropolitan Housing
- Anna B. Jackson: own and operate a teen club, the White House
- Carmen Wetzel: work as a certified public accountant
- Howard Daniels: work as an electrical engineer
- Jean Fuqua Palmer: work as a bank teller at Third National Bank
- Semon Johnson Sr.: own and operate an auto shop
- Freda V. Garrett: serve as a secretary of UAW Local 913
- William Derrick Sr.: own an electrical engineering company
- Frank Winfrey: work as a committeeman at New Departure (GM)
- Darlene Davis Walk: have dual licenses as a barber and beautician
- George "Nip" Farrar: own and operate a taxi cab company
- Jacquelyn G. Sallee: own and operate a trucking company
- Walter E. Matthews: own and operate an insurance agency
- James M. Jackson Sr.: hired by New Departure (GM)
- Benny F. Higgenbotham: have a real estate agency
- Samuel Alexander: own a grocery store, Alexander's Groceries
- Gilbert Jr. and Virginia Butler: own a florist shop
- Janet Craig Croom: work as a cashier in Gray Drug Store
- Starling Jackson: own and operate the longest-tenured taxi and cab company
- Robert McDonald: own and operate a record shop
- Larry Aaron: own a heating and air conditioning company
- Ailey McDonald: own a rubbish collecting company, McDonald's Hauling
- James Lash and his family: own a clothing store, Progressive Shop
- D. Matthew and Boyd Matthew: operate a food and drink bar, Latural's
- Larry Aaron and Michael Phillips: own an employment agency, Flex-Temp Employment Services
- Deborah Alexander Sanders: as a woman, own and operate a real estate agency
- Blake Harris: own and operate a pedal-tavern business, SanBrew Bike
- Sylvester Green: serve as vice president of Chubb Insurance Co.
- Grant Ritchie: operate the first barbershop in 1888

### **In civic activities**

- Douglas and Helen Thompson: own and organize the first African-American Drum and Bugle Corps
- Ida Elizabeth Alexander: serve as a Girl Scouts leader of an all African-American troop, The Blue Birds
- James M. French: serve as a businessman and community activist; He was born in 1866. Records show he also served as the first president of the Sandusky NAACP.
- Pervis Brown: have a jailhouse ministry
- The Progress Lodge No. 85F: Sandusky's oldest African-American fraternal organization; It was dedicated in 1945. In 1969, Charles Alexander and Clarence A. Carman were honored as the lodge's oldest members.
- Rick Wilcox: serve as fire chief for the Sandusky Fire Department
- Thomas Darden: serve as the city's first elected city commissioner and first ex officio mayor

### **In entertainment**

- John "Johnny the Jock" Norris: work as a DJ on WLEC radio
- Heather L. Carmen: serve as director of the Sandusky Choral Society
- Phyllis Wood Powell: sign with the Philharmonic Orchestra and Cleveland Orchestra
- Roxye A. Twine: host a TV program on cable
- Kevin Fuqua: host a TV program on WGGN-TV
- Marietta Aaron Johnson: as a woman, host a TV program on WGGN-TV

### **In medicine**

- Waudell Hunter: work a medical doctor
- James Taylor: work as a dentist
- Hazel Biddle: work as a nursing instructor at Providence School of Nursing
- Johnnie Mae Larry: graduate fro Providence School of Nursing
- Loybelle W. Poole: work as a head nurse at Providence Hospital
- Doris Seavers, Martha Sallee and Bernell Ray: practice, as nurses, medicine at Good Samaritan Hospital
- Clarence Seavers: serve on Providence Hospital's board of trustees
- Leroy E. Sizemore: serve on Firelands Regional Medical Center's board of trustees

### **In sports**

- Clarence Seavers: umpire for Northeast Ohio Little League
- Therome James: coach boys basketball for Sandusky Schools
- Robert S. Jackson: quarterback at Sandusky High School; He set varsity records for pass completions in a season and career
- London Gant: earn 12 letters in three different sports: football, basketball and track; He won the National Interscholastic Javelin record in 1932 and the Little Big Seven Javelin record in 1932.
- Calvin E. Lewis Sr.: win a state wrestling championship for Sandusky High School
- Orlando Pace: inducted into the Pro Football Hall of Fame in 2016; A 1994 Sandusky High School graduate, he earned the college lineman of the year (Lombardi Trophy) award twice at The Ohio State University and was the No. 1 overall selection in the 1997 NFL draft, by the St. Louis Rams.
- Lillian C. Wade: as a woman, play professional basketball
- Errol Alexander: as a man, cheerlead at Sandusky High School
- Ajaish "Butch" Rather: have a baseball field "Rather Field" named after him
- Scott May: play professional basketball; He was named the Naismith College Basketball Player of the Year after leading Indiana University to a perfect 32-0 season that included a national championship in the 1975-76 season.
- Ronald Craig: serve as a drum major for Sandusky High School
- Marian Ralph: serve as a majorette for Sandusky High School
- John Ralph: coach girls basketball for Sandusky High School
- Roberta Collins: win two titles for Sandusky High School at the girls state track and field championships

- James Rosemond: win two state titles in the same year, 1937, at the boys state track meet
- Clarence Howard: pitch on an all-white baseball team, the Crescents, in 1912; Sandusky's baseball was integrated 35 years before Major League Baseball, when, in 1947, Jackie Robinson played for the Brooklyn Dodgers.
- Priscilla Shaw Farris: serve as a varsity cheerleader



The Sandusky NAACP hosted a ceremony to recognize "the first" African-Americans who worked in certain jobs or achieved significant milestones in Sandusky. A ceremony took place Aug. 15, 2018, at the Sandusky State Theatre. Pictured are many of the recipients or family members of those honored.