

# Advocate

Northeast Florida Community Action Agency

Serving Baker, Clay, Duval, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties | **December 2011**

## Summer program closes with awards ceremonies honoring youth around the region

Teens in seven Northeast Florida counties spent their summer learning new job skills and computer technology, making them better equipped for future employment as a part of NFCAA's Data Busters. The program combines classroom instruction about job and life skills such as goal setting, money management, conflict resolution and interview preparation, along with real-world work experience for low-income teens in Duval, Clay, Baker, Putnam, Flagler, Nassau and St. Johns Counties.

Top program performers were announced at ceremonies in each respective county in July and August. Top honorees were rewarded for their hard work, receiving a new Hewlett-Packard desktop computer and printer, and the second best performers received a Hewlett-Packard net book. Family and friends joined honorees at award ceremonies and receptions in each county.



### 2011 Data Buster Winners

#### Nassau County

**Nicholas Washington**  
1st Place

**Deshazio Perkins**  
Runner-up

#### Baker County

**Joseph Thomas**  
1st Place

**Michelle Cason**  
Runner-up

#### Duval County

Group A1  
**Jaron Beasley**  
1st Place

**Chelby Miranda**  
Runner-up

#### Group A2

**Isaiah Danielowicz**  
1st Place

**Japhmarlene Etienne**  
Runner-up

#### Group B1

**Earl Chaney**  
1st Place

**Tuan Pham**  
Runner-up

#### Group B2

**Autricia Murkey**  
1st Place

**Jeffie Clark**  
Runner-up

#### Clay County

**Cody Kennedy**  
1st Place

**Clarence Chandler**  
Runner-up

**Christopher Garrett Wiles**  
Best Worker

#### St. Johns County

**Shekiniah Preston**  
Highest Overall Achiever

**Daisha Duncan**  
Runner-up

**Rashara Walthour**  
Outstanding PowerPoint  
Presentation

**Tony McKenzie**  
Job Site Performance

#### Flagler County

**Mackenzie Chenault**  
1st Place

**Avery Jackson**  
Runner-up

#### Putnam County

**Tiera Thomas**  
1st Place,  
Best PowerPoint  
Presentation

**Jamarcus Anderson**  
Runner-up

**Unique Green**  
Best Employee Award



## A note from the executive director



The results of the Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPM) by the US Census show 1 out of 6 Americans live in poverty. Our sluggish economy and persistent unemployment show no signs of significant improvement in the near term – ensuring the demand for our services will continue to be great.

Some critics question the effectiveness – and the funding – of programs that work to lift people from poverty. One has only to look at the lives changed to see the value and impact of anti-poverty programs.

For the first time this year, we paid tribute to our clients who overcame poverty at “Lives Illuminated,” an event showcasing three clients and their journeys from poverty to personal and professional success. Those individuals who once faced challenging circumstances and struggled to survive triumphed through their own determination and support of anti-poverty programs. Today, one is a noted mental health counselor and clinic director, another is a third-year college student aspiring to be a physician and the third is a successful businessman and founder of a non-profit organization that helps youth. Yes, these programs are effective – with a reach that goes far beyond the individual to improve the lives of many others. Your continued support is crucial as we must survive and meet the increased demand for our assistance.

This newsletter highlights NFCAA's other recent successes, including honoring our youth who completed the Data Busters program in 2011. The winners from each county are recognized, but we applaud all youth in our seven-county region for their dedication to creating a brighter future.

Another great success story is happening in the city of Bunnell in Flagler County. This county has worked efficiently to maximize its relationships with local organizations and resources. Establishing a Neighborhood Crime Watch Program, supporting the restoration and conversion of the G.W. Carver Gym to a community center and garnering resources for Our House, a resource center in Bunnell's public housing area have all been made possible through NFCAA and city organizations and resources coming together.

Your interest and support are appreciated and needed now more than ever as funding cuts are looming for organizations like NFCAA. We must continue to help our neighbors on their journey along an “illuminated path” and towards self-sufficiency.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'John W. Edwards, Jr.'.

John W. Edwards, Jr.

## NFCAA named Florida's top community action agency

The Florida Association for Community Action (FACA) has named NFCAA “Agency of the Year” 2011. NFCAA also received the award in 2010, 2009 and 2007.

NFCAA executive director John Edwards was delighted to accept the recognition, saying “Having received this award is the utmost compliment to what we strive to do for people in Northeast Florida.” He added, “In turn, we applaud the individuals who seek out our help and utilize their fervent desire and hard work to positively improve their lives and achieve success.”

The award criteria includes demonstrating how the agency changes lives and creates self-sufficiency among residents; improving the community for low-income citizens through advocacy, collaborations, partnerships, community involvement or public service; assisting in employment placements; engaging in strategic planning; and maintaining a three-year record of financial statements with no material findings from audits or state monitoring reviews.

The Agency of the Year Award was established by FACA to recognize and honor achievements by the agency that has fostered the mission of community action through assisting the greatest number of families and individuals to achieve self-sufficiency within their communities – truly giving meaning to the phrase, “helping people and changing lives.”





## NFCAA employee's extra effort helps client two-fold

Mary Lancaster Martin came to the Emmett Reed Center for assistance paying her electric bill and keeping her lights on. She joked that she didn't know why her electric bill was so high, since only one burner on her stove worked. That day Mary went home to a well-lit home and a few weeks later she was surprised with a new stove.

**NFCAA provides emergency financial assistance for utility bills to low-income families through the Low-Income Home Energy Assistance Program (LIHEAP). Eligibility is income-based and capped at 150 percent of Federal Poverty Income Guidelines. In addition to applying for LIHEAP, Mary also attended a class on ways to save energy in her home.**

During 2011, NFCAA worked with Jacksonville's Independent Living Program to provide seniors in need with stoves, refrigerators and air conditioning/heating units.

Glendora McCargo, staff member at NFCAA's Emmett Reed Center, remembered Mary's comment about her stove and submitted Mary's name in the program. A few weeks later, Mary received a new stove.

"The stove is a God-send," said Mary. "It cooks better than anything I've ever had."

Not only does Mary have more convenience, she's also safer with the new stove. The new appliance has a lighted indicator showing when the cook top is still warm so now Mary avoids burns to her arms and hands.

Mary says when her three grown children come to visit, they always want to know "what Momma's cooking." They're not disappointed. Mary's first meal using the range was a family favorite – macaroni and cheese, chicken, greens and bread.

# Community advocacy efforts improve public health and safety in Bunnell



Part of NFCAA's mission is to advocate for needed community services by working with local organizations and resources. In the city of Bunnell (Flagler County), NFCAA's advocacy efforts are yielding positive change through three efforts: establishing a Neighborhood Crime Watch Program, supporting the restoration and conversion of the G.W. Carver Gym to a community center and garnering resources for Our House, a resource center in Bunnell's public housing area.

## Neighborhood Crime Watch Program improves public safety



**The City of Bunnell struggles with one of the highest rates of criminal and drug activity in Flagler County. But that's changing due to a growing and active Neighborhood Crime Watch Program (NCWP) advocated by NFCAA.**

Police chief Arthur Jones oversees a force of 12 officers and three administrative staffers and sought out others to help engage residents in a Neighborhood Crime Watch program. He established a residents advisory board and secured a grant that covered the needed equipment, such as signs and two-way radios. Connie Rapolti at NFCAA's Flagler office quickly signed on for the effort, and was soon serving as the crime watch board coordinator.

Connie Rapolti and Mary Giannotto of the Bunnell Police Department led an outreach program that educated residents about the neighborhood crime watch program including how they can participate and the benefits of organizing. The community advisory board, Rapolti and Gianotto enlisted other community organizations and hosted public meetings in various neighborhoods to introduce the program and recruit participants. They received strong support. At Bella Vista, a community for seniors and the disabled, 20 of its 47 residents attended the first organizing meeting.


Alice Holley, president of the Bella Vista tenants association, gives a great deal of credit to Rapolti and Giannotto. "We had tried two other times to institute a neighborhood community watch program, but it was met with apathy and even some resistance. Then came Connie and Mary. Our residents responded enthusiastically to their energy and commitment to the program."

Buzz about the program spread through word of mouth, media reports and community events. Four neighborhoods established crime watch programs, which involves residents regularly walking their neighborhoods and reporting any suspicious activities to the police.

The crime watch program is showing signs of success. The crime rate in the city has decreased by 4 percent over the past year since the NCWP began and rates for lesser offenses like robbery, larceny, assault and motor vehicle theft have decreased even more. Additionally, the volume of calls to the Bunnell Police Department from citizens reporting crimes and/or suspicious activity has increased 12 percent.

Future plans include a "business watch" program to ensure the safety and security of local merchants.

## Community center for all made possible through partnerships



On the morning of September 10, Bunnell residents celebrated the re-dedication of the George Washington Carver Gym. What was once a neglected shell of a building from the historic George Washington Carver High School, is today a modern and safe community center providing free programs and events for both youth and adults. NFCAA was one of several community organizations and individuals who helped bring this much needed resource to Bunnell.

Over time, GW Carver Gym changed ownership several times before being abandoned. The building was close to being demolished before Bunnell City Commissioners Barbara Revel and Daisy Henry rallied service and volunteer organizations, businesses, other elected officials, city and federal agencies, local residents and media to support a renovation effort. Their vision was to organize a private/public partnership that would support a community center that serves as a safe haven for children, providing recreational and educational programs, and adults, with life, job skills training and health programming.

In less than one year, renovation was completed. Today, the GW Carver Community Center features an indoor basketball court, game room with new foosball, air-hockey and pool tables; a computer lab with Internet access and eight new computer stations featuring Macintosh computers; a lounge with a large screen TV, XBOX 360, books, magazines and sectional seating; and a second floor with two classrooms. A Youth Advisory Council is in place to set rules and policies and provide opportunities for leadership experience.

Several community groups, including NFCAA, are sponsoring programs at the center. NFCAA worked with the United Way to hold its Money Smart program for adults at the center. Additionally, the agency will be providing more upcoming programs for Flagler County residents.

Supporters hope to build on the momentum surrounding the center and in the future add more features, including sports fields.

***“Our advocacy efforts in Flagler County demonstrate how we can strengthen families and neighborhoods by partnering with community leaders, volunteers and organizations,” said John Edwards, NFCAA’s executive director. “As Connie’s efforts have shown, it’s not always money that make things possible but advocacy and relationships.”***

## Our House empowers residents of Bunnell Housing Authority

Residents of the Bunnell Housing Authority, a low-income neighborhood with 165 homes, organized to establish a resource center that provides opportunities for self-sufficiency, economic independence and improved health through education, encouragement and prayer. NFCAA’s community advocate, Connie Rapolti, worked closely with organizers to obtain needed equipment, supplies and volunteers.

Located within one of the neighborhood units, Our House buzzes with activity, with more than 100 neighborhood children and adults using the resource center each week. Current programs include after-school homework assistance and summer camp for youth. For adults, there are quilting, sewing and healthy cooking classes using fresh vegetables picked from the center’s garden. Blood pressure screenings, stroke and heart health assessments and diabetes education are provided by the University of Central Florida’s School of Nursing.

The center was the brainchild of Catherine Crowley, president of the Bunnell Housing Authority tenants association. Once Rapolti learned of Crowley’s efforts, she focused on helping the center obtain needed equipment and support. Rapolti helped secure sewing machines and fabric for the quilting and sewing classes, enabling residents to make their own clothing and backpacks for the children. She obtained five computers from the Make-IT-Take-IT program that are used for youth and adult computer classes and job searches. She partnered with the United Way to bring Money Smart, a financial literacy class, to the center. And enlisted the Red Cross to teach CPR classes to the staff working the summer youth program. Working with Crowley and other residents, Rapolti helped establish a Neighborhood Crime Watch program.

Currently, Rapolti’s efforts focus on obtaining free cell phones for residents who can’t afford phone service and obtaining an extension from the Postal Service for mail delivery to the Housing Authority so residents can use services that require a physical mailing address. She’s also enlisting members of the Flagler Volunteer Services organization to serve as tutors and teachers for various adult and youth programs.

***Crowley and residents hope to expand the center’s offerings in the future to include:***

- Parenting classes;
- GED program for both teens and adults;
- Youth drug/alcohol and awareness prevention program;
- Teen pregnancy prevention and HIV AIDS awareness classes;
- Adult Jazzercise classes; and
- Adult woodworking.

# Duval CAB and River City Clinic partner to treat more patients at free clinic

Dr. Lesleigh Box treats uninsured patients at the River City Clinic two Saturdays each month. The patients she sees at the free clinic are often in need of additional help that she isn't able to provide. "We can treat them medically, but we can't treat the other side of things. We need community support from organizations like NFCAA."

Dr. Box learned of NFCAA and its programs through an acquaintance at a local church. The River City Clinic and NFCAA have since begun a partnership that involves volunteers from the Duval County Client Advisory Board (CAB). The Duval CAB assisted the clinic in raising funds to remove lead paint on the outside of its clinic building. NFCAA also brought a group of youth to do landscaping for the clinic. "These projects make a free clinic in a tough neighborhood more inviting."

**Box hopes that with additional non-medical support the clinic will be able to open every Saturday.**

The medical team at the River City Clinic also refers patients needing further assistance to NFCAA. If a doctor learns a patient is in need of other family support services, they now have a resource they can refer to with NFCAA.

The River City Clinic and NFCAA hope to continue projects in the future. Just this month, Duval CAB member CiCi Newby volunteered her time making copies for the clinic. Organizations like NFCAA are instrumental in growing our volunteer support, Box said. Non-medical volunteers can assist with clerical work, clean the facility and much more, just as Newby did. Box hopes that with additional non-medical support the clinic will be able to open every Saturday, instead of just the first and third Saturdays of the month. She is especially excited about getting more youth involved.

**The River City Clinic opened in 2008. The free clinic treats uninsured adults living 200 percent below the poverty line. Patients are treated on a first-come, first-served basis from 12-4 p.m. on the first and third Saturday of each month. Every clinic is staffed by one or two board certified physicians and several volunteers. All work on a volunteer basis. The clinic is located at 309 McDuff Avenue South.**

## Thank you to our supporters for attending inaugural event

NFCAA held its first annual event, "Lives Illuminated: A Night of Reflection and Rejuvenation" on Nov. 3 at the former Koger Gallery and Gardens building. The highlight of the evening was a film produced by Fat Screaming Baby Productions, featuring three NFCAA clients who bravely shared their journeys from poverty to personal and professional success. The evening was also fun with great food and mingling among NFCAA staff, new supporters and community leaders.



*Photo far left:  
Cedric Twillie and family. Twillie was  
featured in film presentation.*

*Photo left:  
Mia Jones, Elaine Spencer, Tony Hill  
and Nancy Seely*

## NFCAA program keeps a roof over families in need in Baker County *Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP)*

One hundred and sixty eight residents of Baker County have been able to maintain homes because of NFCAA's Homeless Prevention and Rapid Re-housing Program (HPRP) program. Individuals and families are offered assistance with rent payments, rent deposits, utility deposits or utility payments allowing them to maintain housing and preventing them from becoming homeless. NFCAA often works with community agencies to locate temporary housing for clients. The recent 168 customers aided were provided funds as a part of a grant from HUD through the City of Jacksonville and the Emergency Homeless Coalition of Jacksonville. Individuals and families receiving assistance work with a case manager to make sure they stay in a home. This assistance is often a gateway to further assistance, like the Family Self-Sufficiency Program (FSSP).

## NFCAA welcomes new board member

Representing the Clay County Board of Commissioners, Donna Marie Bonet, is the newest member of NFCAA's board of directors. Bonet is the CEO of her own company, First Coast Consulting, as well as a substitute teacher in the Clay County School District, adjunct professor at Florida State College Jacksonville, ITT Technical Institute and St. Johns State College (SJSC) and an author. In addition to teaching, King volunteers at the Quigley House and her church. She served eight years in the US Navy Reserves.



## Emmett Reed Center hosts back to school safety event

The Emmett Reed Center in Duval County hosted a Back to School Safety event on Aug. 6. Mayor Alvin Brown attended the event, in addition to hundreds of children and their families who enjoyed a cookout, fun and games, interactions with community organizations and receiving school supplies.

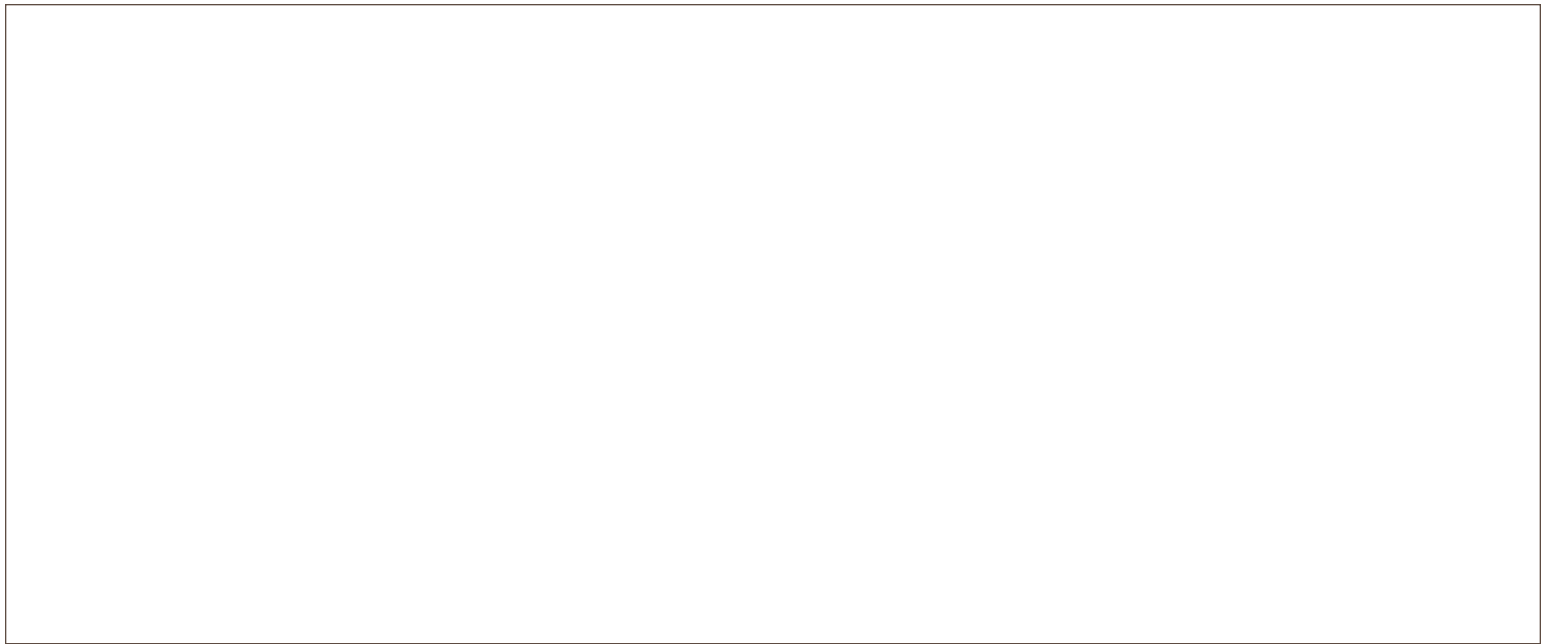
## Shop with Buy4.com and generate donations for NFCAA

Online holiday shoppers can generate donations for NFCAA by shopping at major retailers through [www.Buy4.com](http://www.Buy4.com). The charitable shopping website has partnerships with Amazon, Best Buy, Macy's, Target, Walmart and hundreds of other popular merchants. The retailer pays a percentage, up to 30 percent, of each purchase generated by Buy4 members to that member's favorite cause, like NFCAA. There is no additional cost to the shopper and Buy4 is free and easy to use.

## Family Self-Sufficiency Program lays foundation for success

Autumn Berg is a pre-school teacher and car owner, but these two things weren't easy to come by. Two years ago Autumn enrolled in NFCAA's Family Self Sufficiency Program (FSSP) and today she is providing for her family and managing her own finances.

Autumn had been out of work for two years due to a severe car accident. NFCAA assisted her with enrollment in a Certified Nursing Assistant (CNA) program, where she graduated at the top of the class, and obtained Home Health Aid and CNA certificate. NFCAA continued to assist Autumn while she looked for employment in a tough job market. The agency referred her to a local daycare where she began working as a pre-school teacher in January. Shortly after, Autumn completed classes to earn her Department of Children & Families certificate. Using knowledge gained from the FSSP, Autumn created a 90-day-budget and opened a savings account. With accumulated savings Autumn purchased a vehicle while enrolled in the FSSP program. **Now she's really going places!**



NFCAA's first annual event, "Lives Illuminated: A Night of Reflection and Rejuvenation" at the former Koger Gallery and Gardens building

**Thank you  
to our supporters  
for attending our  
inaugural event**



**The mission of Northeast Florida Community Action Agency** is to defeat poverty and erase its devastating effects on Northeast Florida families by providing the education, empowerment and assistance that leads to self-sufficiency and a positive place within our community. Produced periodically, *The Advocate* highlights NFCAA's current efforts helping individuals and families living in Baker, Duval, Clay, Flagler, Nassau, Putnam and St. Johns counties.

For more information, call (904) 398-7472, (888) 498-7472 or visit [www.nfcaa.org](http://www.nfcaa.org).

