

**NEWS**

Home > News > Metro > Story

E-mail Story Print Story Post Comment Most Popular

**METRO**

Last modified Mon., April 17, 2006 - 12:11 AM  
Originally created Monday, April 17, 2006

**Group battles Jacksonville's racial stigma**

It wants to reverse 1996 title of worst race relations

By CHARLIE PATTON, The Times-Union

As far as anniversaries go, it's not one likely to be celebrated with fireworks or a mayoral proclamation.

But 10 years ago this month a committee of the U.S. Commission on Civil Rights reported that Jacksonville had the worst race relations of any major city in Florida.

For Charlene Taylor Hill, director of the city's Human Rights Commission, the bad news was an opportunity to try something new.

She began a Study Circle program aimed at encouraging people to talk with each other about issues that were creating racial divisions.

Since the program was launched, about 2,500 people have participated in a Study Circle, Taylor Hill said.

Mayor John Peyton became one of those participants in 2003 after defeating Nat Glover, Jacksonville's first black sheriff, in what he termed "a very contentious election."

"I decided to do anything I could do to understand the dynamics of race relations," Peyton said.

It was a profound experience.

"The study circle has been the most meaningful experience I have had personally," he said.

Peyton has formed a task force to try to recruit community leaders into the process. He said if more people experienced the program, people in Jacksonville would treat each other better.

When Jacksonville adopted Study Circles in 1997, one of the earliest participants was Laura D'Alisera, now assistant director of the Florida Center for Public Policy and Leadership. D'Alisera, who has since served as a facilitator for a number of Study Circles, said what makes the course of five two-hour sessions work is the "interpersonal approach."

"It sounds almost hokey to say it this way, but you really bond with people," she said. "It's amazing what people are willing to share."

Retired University of North Florida history professor James Crooks was another early participant and has been a regular facilitator.

The program is designed to begin by building bonds between participants, said Crooks, who also chairs the Human Rights Commission.

"Then, once you have gotten to know one another in an informal, good-humored way, you can start asking questions," he said.

While Crooks is enthusiastic about the program's potential effects on individuals, he also admits it has its limitations. Participation is voluntary and to be effective, the individual groups must be limited usually to 12 to 16 people.

"We're affecting people on a one-by-one basis," Crooks said. "It's like a few grains of sand on the beach."

When an incident occurs, like the recent one in which nooses turned up in a downtown firehouse, Crooks said he wonders if anything has changed. The racial divide in Jacksonville and America cannot be "solved in our lifetime," he said.

But D'Alisera, while admitting that the process of change can be agonizingly slow, took a more optimistic view.

"Sure, it's one person at a time," she said. "But all meaningful change begins on the inside. Getting to the back of the brain ... to foment

**SEARCH CENTER**

Search  
Keyword  
for  
GO  
click here to search archives

Find local results by keyword and city, zip, or area code

what  
where  
search  
get your business listed

**Free Samples**

**Grocery Coupons**

**Baby Coupons**

**Pet Coupons**

**Travel Coupons**

**Beauty Coupons**

**Free Stuff**

**View All**

**CoolSavings**

**Study Circle courses**

To find out more about Jacksonville's Study Circles program and how to participate, contact the Jacksonville Human Rights Commission at (904) 630-3430 or e-mail [StudyCircles@coj.net](mailto:StudyCircles@coj.net) to talk with the coordinator about upcoming Study Circles opportunities.

**TOP ADS**

**Top Jobs**  
**DETAILER Full Time**  
Brumos Motor Cars Auto dealership looking for ...  
**LAKE BUTLER HOSPITAL ARNP/PA**, Small acute care critical access hos...  
[ View all Top Jobs ]

**Top Homes**  
**909 Granada Blvd**  
Prestigious Alhambra Area Southside United Metho...  
VILANO BCH 100x165.

change. That's what this is about."

Susie Wiles, Peyton's communications director, is one of several people at City Hall who have participated.

"It's a very liberating environment," she said. "You couldn't leave the experience without a heightened sense of life in a different realm than yours."

During her study circle, Wiles was particularly moved by hearing Alton Yates, a longtime Jacksonville civil rights leader, talk about growing up during the days of legalized segregation in Jacksonville and going through the civil rights movement in the '50s and '60s.

Yates said he emerged from the process feeling he had "developed lifelong friendships" with people he might otherwise have never known.

"It was like an awakening for some of us," he said. "People developed a better understanding of where each other was coming from."

Yates said he has recommended participation to many friends.

Some have resisted, he said. But for those who followed through, it was successful.

"I've had no one come back to me yet and say they didn't enjoy the experience."

[charlie.patton@jacksonville.com](mailto:charlie.patton@jacksonville.com), (904) 359-4413

Oceanfrnt, 2800sf, 4/3,  
beautifully renov., \$...  
[ [View all Top Homes](#) ]

**REAL Cities**

[Click here to visit other  
Real Cities sites](#)

**MORE STORIES**

**Metro Headlines**

- » [Boy slain on walk home from club](#)
  - » [Tasers are back, but often not fired](#)
  - » [Group battles Jacksonville's racial stigma](#)
  - » [Severing land line may cut security](#)
  - » [LAW & DISORDER: Jacksonville man missing after 10-foot boat capsizes](#)
- [ [More Metro Headlines](#) ]

**Florida Headlines**

- » [Brush fire destroys 150 acres in Santa Rosa County](#)
  - » [4 dead in Fort Lauderdale crash](#)
  - » [3 killed in plane crash at Gainesville Regional Airport](#)
  - » [Quirky Sarasota college earns 'top value' reputation](#)
  - » [3 killed in plane crash at Gainesville Regional Airport](#)
- [ [More Florida Headlines](#) ]

**Most Popular Stories**

- » [Boy slain on walk home from club](#)
  - » [LAW & DISORDER: Jacksonville man missing after 10-foot boat capsizes](#)
  - » [A new venture bringing fun from 'Down Under'](#)
  - » [Where's the love?](#)
  - » [Landstar, Fidelity dominate list of hometown performers](#)
- [ [More Most Viewed Stories](#) ]

<b>JAX Ad Match</b>			
<p><b><a href="#">A Guide to Endometriosis</a></b> Get a Free Doctor Discussion Guide. Endometriosis Can Be Managed <a href="http://www.endoknow.com">http://www.endoknow.com</a></p>	<p><b><a href="#">Car Insurance: Save \$500</a></b> We track down the best CAR insurance rates. Get your quotes in minutes <a href="http://www.bestcarinsurancesite.com">www.bestcarinsurancesite.com</a></p>	<p><b><a href="#">Healthy Weight Loss</a></b> Complete Weight Loss Plan. Losing weight doesn't get any easier! <a href="http://www.LifeofNutrition4u.com">www.LifeofNutrition4u.com</a></p>	<p><b><a href="#">\$145,000 Loan for \$484/mo</a></b> Free mortgage quotes. Refinance and save \$1000s - Bad Credit OK <a href="http://www.LowerMyBills.com">www.LowerMyBills.com</a></p>
[ post your ad here ]			

TABLE OF CONTENTS				
<p><b>Jacksonville.com</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertisement Policy</li> <li>• Copyright</li> <li>• How to use this site</li> <li>• Jacksonville.com History</li> <li>• Online Feedback Form</li> <li>• Online Staff Directory</li> <li>• Privacy Policy</li> <li>• User Agreement</li> </ul> <p><b>Florida Times-Union</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Contact Us</li> <li>• Copyright</li> <li>• Employment Opportunities</li> <li>• Florida Times-Union History</li> <li>• Mission Statement &amp; Benefits</li> <li>• Speakers Bureau</li> <li>• Today's Front Page</li> </ul> <p><b>Guest Services</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Advertising/Media Kit</li> <li>• Circulation</li> <li>• Contact Us</li> <li>• Employment</li> <li>• Forms</li> <li>• Help</li> <li>• History</li> <li>• Legal</li> </ul>	<p><b>News</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Archives</li> <li>• Columnists</li> <li>• First Coast Fugitives</li> <li>• Georgia</li> <li>• Jax2Go</li> <li>• Legislature</li> <li>• Metro</li> <li>• Multimedia</li> <li>• Nation</li> <li>• Opinion</li> <li>• Obituaries</li> <li>• Podcasts</li> <li>• RSS Feeds</li> <li>• Traffic</li> <li>• Weather</li> <li>• World</li> </ul> <p><b>Business</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Licenses</li> <li>• Business News</li> <li>• Career Track</li> <li>• In The Pipeline</li> <li>• Indexes</li> <li>• Unclaimed Property</li> <li>• Stocks</li> </ul> <p><b>Entertainment</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Concerts</li> <li>• Dining</li> <li>• Events Calendar</li> </ul>	<p><b>Sports</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Baseball</li> <li>• Basketball</li> <li>• College Sports</li> <li>• Fantasy Sports</li> <li>• Football</li> <li>• Golf</li> <li>• Jacksonville Jaguars</li> <li>• Jacksonville Suns</li> <li>• Odds</li> <li>• Other Sports</li> <li>• Outdoors</li> <li>• Tickets</li> </ul> <p><b>Community</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Arlington</li> <li>• Beaches</li> <li>• Clay County</li> <li>• Community Calendar</li> <li>• Community Express</li> </ul>	<p><b>Games</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Horoscopes</li> <li>• Lifestyles</li> <li>• Lottery</li> <li>• Movies</li> <li>• Personals</li> <li>• Visitor's TV</li> <li>• What's on TV</li> </ul> <p><b>Classifieds</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Apartment Finder</li> <li>• Autos</li> <li>• Jobs</li> <li>• Legal Notices</li> <li>• Real Estate</li> </ul> <p><b>Directories</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Business Finder</li> <li>• Autos Directory</li> <li>• Health &amp; Medicine Directory</li> <li>• Internet Directory</li> <li>• Travel Directory</li> </ul> <p><b>Shopping</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Circulars</li> <li>• Company Store</li> <li>• Newspaper Ads</li> <li>• Photos</li> <li>• Tickets</li> </ul> <p><b>Special Interests</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Blogs</li> <li>• Columnists</li> </ul>	<p><b>Publications</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• CBWW Buyer's Guide</li> <li>• Discover Jacksonville</li> <li>• Eco Latino</li> <li>• H for Health</li> <li>• Jax Air News</li> <li>• Kings Bay Periscope</li> <li>• Mayport Mirror</li> <li>• Newspapers</li> <li>• Newspapers In Education</li> <li>• Prime Time</li> <li>• Print Publications</li> <li>• Skirt! Magazine</li> <li>• Special Sections</li> <li>• Water's Edge</li> </ul> <p><b>Our Partners</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• First Coast News</li> <li>• St. Augustine Record</li> <li>• National Diversity Newspaper Job Bank</li> <li>• WJCT</li> </ul>