



READ USA

Fifth Annual Peace in the Pages

September 28, 2023

*Presented by
David & Monique Miller*

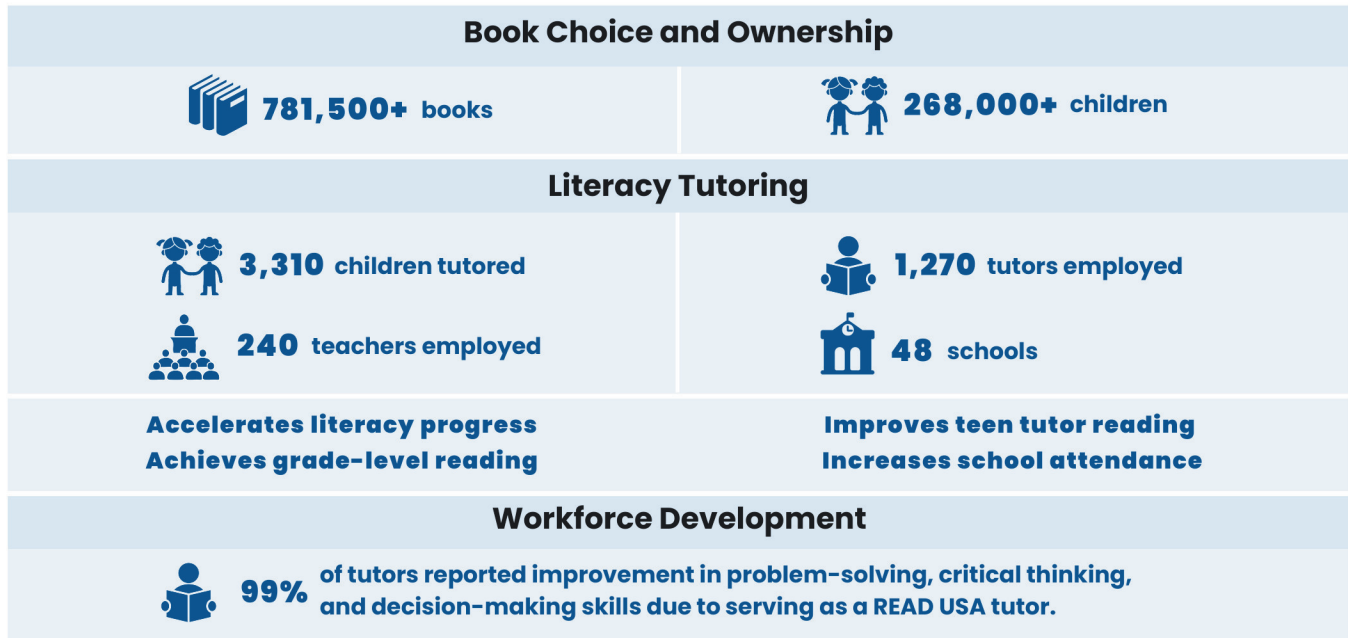


Once you learn to read, you will be forever free.

- Frederick Douglass

Turning the Page on Literacy

Our Impact | 2011 – 2023 Results



Our nation continues to experience a literacy crisis. In Duval County, nearly 54% of students are reading below grade level at the end of 3rd grade (FLDOE), and that percentage is higher for students in Title I schools, further exacerbating the problem of illiteracy. Relatedly, children of parents with low literacy have about a 70% chance of experiencing reading difficulties, developing poor behaviors, and dropping out of school (National Bureau of Economic Research, 2022).



While these statistics are dismal, there is hope. READ USA has demonstrated that illiteracy is solvable through high-quality teaching and high-interest books.

High-Quality Teaching

A key ingredient of successful literacy growth is educator knowledge. Teachers and tutors must be equipped with specific, evidence-based skills to effectively support children in becoming literate. READ USA infuses teacher and teen professional development across all programs and cultivates workforce development skills in our teen tutors. Our unique approach prepares teachers and teen tutors to teach any child, at any time, to reach grade-level reading proficiency.

High-Interest Books

The other critical ingredient is book choice. Choice is tethered to interest; interest unleashes internal motivation; and internal motivation fuels reading volume. As the adage goes, the more you read, the better you get. Book choice is strongly linked to literacy progress, which is why READ USA infuses book choice into all programming. For example, in each READ USA Literacy Tutoring session, elementary students choose the book they will read from over 900 curated books. At READ USA book events, children choose free books to keep.

READ USA Programs

Book Choice & Ownership

Literacy Tutoring

Multicultural Literacy

Literacy Professional Development

Family Engagement



READ USA

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OUR MISSION

READ USA works to solve illiteracy through high-interest books and high-quality teaching.

PROGRAM

11:30 A.M. WELCOME

Emcee

Melanie Lawson-Minor, Anchor, News4JAX

Invocation

Reverend Kyle Reese, OneJax

Welcome Video

Mayor Donna Deegan

Presenting Sponsors Video

David & Monique Miller

READ USA Program Testimonials

Keynote Speaker

Shelley Read, Educator and Author, *Go as a River*

AWARDS PRESENTATIONS

Mark Landen Memorial Award for Democracy through Journalism

Mark Woods, Columnist, Florida Times-Union

Marjorie Broward Memorial Scholarship Award

Paula Findlay, Principal, Arlington Elementary School

Read To Lead Award

Betty Seabrook Burney, Founder and Board Chair, I'm a Star Foundation

Read To Heal Award

Nicole B. Thomas, Hospital President, Baptist Medical Center Jacksonville

Read To Succeed Award

Tim Cost, President, Jacksonville University

Read To Remember Award

Dr. Floyd Willis, Physician, Mayo Clinic

Read To Be Free Award

Kevin Gay, Founder, Operation New Hope

Closing Remarks

Dr. Robert Kelly, CEO, READ USA

Peace in the Pages Profiles

The generous support of David & Monique Miller, our presenting sponsors, has underwritten the Peace in the Pages luncheon, making it possible for all other donations and sponsorships to go directly to READ USA's programming and community impact.

Peace in the Pages Presenting Sponsors: David & Monique Miller



David Miller, Co-Founder of Brightway Insurance, and his wife, Monique, are the generous presenting sponsors of READ USA's Peace in the Pages event for 2023.

Brightway Insurance is one of the largest property and casualty insurance retailers in our nation, has earned recognition from Forbes as the #1 Franchise to Buy in the U.S., and has been named ten times by Inc. Magazine as one of the fastest growing privately held companies in the country.

“Our company has achieved success only because we focus on each person involved reaching their own personal potential,

says David Miller, who has kept his and his company's goals aimed at improving the lives of others. Brightway's motto is WIN³ symbolizing “Win, Win, Win!” Miller's personal wins include making positive strides toward addressing public discourse, poverty, education, and social justice.

David Miller was an early investor in LIFT JAX, working to help eradicate poverty and re-energize Jacksonville's historic Eastside neighborhood. He is an Emerald Trail Champion, tirelessly advocating to ensure necessary government funding for this environmentally healthy project. Serving on the Senior

Advisory Council for OneJax, David recently invested in the Sandy Miller Metrotown Institute, named after his late mother and carrying on her lifetime dedication to building character and developing future leaders. In November 2022, David created the Together Strong Community Fund, promoting education, conversation, and interaction to combat the root causes of bias in today's society. The Fund is to be administered by the Jewish Federation & Foundation of Northeast Florida with the hope of securing a safe environment in which all can gather to pray, learn, and play.

As to addressing education, both David and Monique Miller were raised by readers and educators and consider READ USA to be a major factor in improving the quality of education in our community.

“My brothers and I were surrounded by books in our home. Our parents were always reading and discussing what was being read,

recalls David, whose mother, Sandy Miller, was a music teacher as well as being a widely known and respected community activist. “My wife, Monique, taught kindergarten, first, and second grades. Her father was a history teacher, and her grandfather a school principal,” David says. “She literally grew up in a family of educators.”

Passionate about bringing people together to address the complex issue of improving educational outcomes, David and Monique Miller are excited to be hosting READ USA's 2023 Peace in the Pages. This event annually attracts and informs hundreds of supporters about the innovative READ USA programs currently underway.

Holding family always at the center of their lives, David and Monique are the parents of son Josh, and daughter Leah, and yet, they feel a deep kinship to all of the children served by READ USA.

“We are firmly invested in the future of our community, and through READ USA's fabulous approach to closing the literacy gap by paving the path for youth to choose, own, and learn to read books, we see a brighter way ahead for all!

David Miller

READ USA is honored that Ashley Szczukowski and Laura Phillips Edgecombe led the READ USA Peace in the Pages Host Committee for 2023.

Celebrating our 12th year of supporting children and teens across Duval County, READ USA's 2023 Peace in the Pages event is emceed by News4JAX's The Morning Show Anchor Melanie Lawson-Minor. We are so grateful for these stellar Reader Leaders in our community!

Host Committee Event Co-Chairs

Ashley Szczukowski



Ashley Szczukowski grew up in a large family (five children and two foster children) in Charlotte, North Carolina. "Our house was filled with commotion," remembers Ashley, "and, although my mother was a reader, I was not." The fact that Ashley was not a strong

reader posed some challenges for her in school, but she was not going to fail. "I always read to the bottom of the page and as I got a bit older, I discovered that reading was a wonderful way to escape from reality." One of the books she found inspiring was *Jonathan Livingston Seagull* by Richard Bach.

Since moving to Jacksonville in 2001, Ashley has distinguished herself as a passionate community leader both in business and philanthropy. She is the Director of Business Development for Danis Construction, vice chair for Gateway Community Services' Board of Directors, vice president of the Jax Chamber Health Council Board, and an active Chamber Trustee member. She was a Founding Member of the Healthcare Business Round Table, Jacksonville Business Women's Group, and the Ladies Executive Golf Society, and is a member of the Leadership Jacksonville Class of 2022.

In recognition of her community leadership and volunteerism, Ashley received a full-ride scholarship to the University of North Florida through the Scheidel Foundation. She majored in public relations and minored in community leadership, graduating Magna Cum Laude in 2013.

While pursuing her successful career, Ashley Szczukowski was also raising her daughter Alexis. "I always encouraged Alexis to read books and excel at school, and she has done that," says Ashley, proudly. "Alexis attended LaVilla and Douglas Anderson School of the Arts, focusing on stagecraft, and she is currently a junior at the University of South Florida majoring in applied behavioral analysis and working with children on the autism spectrum."

Last year, Ashley was a member of the Host Committee for READ USA's Peace in the Pages and this year she has stepped up to leadership of the Host Committee with Laura Phillips Edgecombe. "I'm excited to be leading this special effort to raise funds and awareness of the great service READ USA is doing for the children of Duval County," said Ashley, who has been a READ USA volunteer since its beginning, working at book fairs and at the BEAM Back to School annual events.

Ashley is especially impressed with the growth of READ USA's outreach, which, through partnering with Duval County Public Schools and the private sector, now includes year-round teen tutoring and teacher development in addition to book fairs in all Duval County elementary schools. "And now, READ USA has added another component ... its own Jeremy's Journey book series about leadership!" declared Ashley. "READ USA is stepping up to close the reading gap brought on by the pandemic and continues to target poverty through promoting literacy. I'm thankful to God that I am privileged to be an instrument of this great work in our community!"

Laura Phillips Edgecombe



Laura Phillips Edgecombe is a third-generation Jaxson, having grown up in Mandarin, the daughter and granddaughter of Jacksonville natives. Her dedication to this community runs deep and, as

the Director of Development for Build Up Downtown (BUD), she is a champion of positive change.

With a degree from the University of Florida and a proven career in community development, event production, and fundraising for the past decade, Laura is uniquely qualified to conceptualize the "Big Picture" leading BUD, a privately funded, nonprofit resource and supporter of the Downtown Investment Authority (DIA) and Downtown Vision, Inc. (DVI). In facilitating and advocating for preservation, smart development, and great public spaces in Downtown Jacksonville, Laura Phillips Edgecombe is following her heart and working toward her lifelong goal. "Our Downtown is the heartbeat of the city," Laura says, "and I am committed to doing something for Jacksonville that will be impactful 100 years from now."

Laura serves as a JAX Chamber Downtown Council Board Member and as the organization's Speaker Programming & Engagement Liaison, for which she was recently honored by the Professional Women's Council with the "Engagement Award." A JAX Chamber Hightower Emerging Leaders Fellow, Class V (2021), she is a member of the Jacksonville Women's Network, an Urban Land Institute Urban Plan Facilitator, and a UNF Taylor Institute of Leadership Mentor. She is also an actively engaged member of NEFBA, ULI, and Gator Bowl Sports. She donates her time and support to local organizations such as Riverfront Parks Now, James Weldon Johnson Park, READ USA, the Child Guidance Center, The Jacksonville Zoo & Gardens, UF Health, the Cultural Council of Greater Jacksonville, and others. Her husband, attorney Adam Edgecombe and their teenage son, Holden, are equally committed to this community.

As to co-hosting READ USA's Peace in the Pages event, Laura is enthusiastically supportive! "I was the kid who had a book at the dinner table," she recalls. "Literacy is pivotal in the success of our future. Everyone deserves the same opportunities, and READ USA is working to make that happen." Laura's favorite book to this day is one she read as a girl, titled *Roll of Thunder Hear My Cry* by Mildred D. Taylor. A 1977 novel that won the Newberry Medal, it was the story of the struggles of African Americans in the 1930s in Mississippi, written from the perspective of a little black girl named Cassie Logan. "It was my first understanding of racial prejudice and the truth about history. It was one of the reasons I strive for diversity, inclusion, and equity today," says Laura, noting that READ USA's culturally sensitive programs, which include book choice and teen tutoring, are essential. "I believe we have to rally around READ USA and help them promote liberty through literacy in our schools."

Peace in the Pages Event Emcee



Melanie Lawson-Minor

A native Floridian, Melanie Lawson-Minor is an Emmy winning journalist at News4JAX in Jacksonville and one of the city's earliest risers, kicking off the 5 a.m. show.

She graduated with honors in Broadcast Journalism from Hampton University in Virginia and says she feels a great responsibility to give back through public speaking, mentoring, and being a vocal leader in the Jacksonville community. In summer of 2023, she earned her master's degree in Communication Management from the University of North Florida.

Melanie is the mother of an 11-year-old son and 9-year-old daughter and considers herself blessed to have a sister whose kids are older than hers.

“ Thanks to my sister, and our public library, we have our own full library of hand-me-down and new books in our playroom. Interacting with my children helps me understand their deep connection with books and reading, especially in this day and age, where we're in competition with everything that lights up. We make up stories – my children make up stories – they are very creative – it's exciting to see their imagination played out through books! ”

Growing up, one of Melanie's favorite books was *The Giving Tree* by Shel Silverstein, a book about unconditional love like that of God and parents. She has also introduced Dr. Seuss books to her children – especially the *Happy Birthday to You!* book. “As they get older, their tastes are changing,” she says. “They still like short books, but go after books about historical figures, science and women. They love *Ada Twist, Scientist!*” Melanie's mother is a retired principal with her doctorate in education. “Mom made sure we had access to books always,” she says.

Melanie is excited about what READ USA is doing by giving all elementary children access to books and encouraging them to start their own libraries. “READ USA is a perfect name for a perfect platform,” she declared. “It needs to go nationwide.”

As a journalist, Melanie feels that God has given her a gift to connect to people, and with each interview, she works to make a positive difference. “I've been in this community for 18 years and I'm blessed that I can continue to give back. I'll do all that I can – and when appropriate – report on READ USA and the good work they are doing in the community. We're all better people when we work for good.”

Thank You, Sponsors and Donors

Literacy Game Changer (\$30,000 and above)

Accelerate	Delores Barr Weaver Legacy Fund*	Michael Ward & Jennifer Glock Foundation*
AmeriCorps	Duval County Public Schools (DCPS)	Scholastic Book Fairs
Anonymous*	Ellen & James Wiss Family Fund*	United Way of Northeast Florida
AT&T	Florida Blue	Volunteer Florida
CareerSource of Northeast Florida	Kids Hope Alliance (KHA)	
David & Monique Miller Family Fund*		

Literacy Champion (\$20,000 to \$29,999)

DuBow Family Foundation*	The Chartrand Family Fund*
Edelman Family Advised Fund*	VyStar Credit Union*
Jacksonville Public Education Fund (JPEF)	

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**Founders for the Future are donors who pledged one-time gifts at \$25,000 or greater and multi-year gifts in response to the 2020 Delores Barr Weaver \$225,000 matching challenge and the 2022 Michael Ward and Jennifer Glock Foundation \$1 million matching challenge.*

Peace in the Pages Award Honorees

Mark Landen Memorial Award for Democracy Through Journalism

For moving the need on equity and democracy through journalistic work.

Mark Woods, Columnist, Florida Times-Union



Mark Woods has been the Metro columnist for the Florida Times-Union in Jacksonville, Florida for two decades, writing about slices of life, news of the city, our natural resources, our challenges and triumphs, always with words that are honest, insightful, and heartfelt.

After graduating from the University of Missouri with a master's in journalism, Woods worked as a sportswriter for 20 years at newspapers in several states before taking on his present role. He has walked across Jacksonville and written a series of columns about it, covered the earthquake in Haiti, Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans, political conventions, the Olympics, Wimbledon, the Masters, the World Cup, and 11 Super Bowls. By far, his most exciting assignment occurred when Woods won the 2011 Eugene C. Pullman Fellowship awarded to one writer in America from the Society of Professional Journalists. As a result of the fellowship, Woods journeyed through America's National Parks from "sunrise in Maine to sunset in Hawaii," and wrote his book, *Lassoing the Sun* (Thomas Dunne Books, June 2016).

Although *Lassoing the Sun* began as an ambitious project to explore the future of our nation's parks, the book evolved into a beautiful memoir when he lost his mother to cancer during his journey. Woods wrote from his heart about finding solace in the serenity of the parks and developing a deeper understanding of what it truly means to be alive.

Woods' formative memories of summers spent in the family station wagon with his parents and two sisters heading toward America's National Parks also include memories of his mother "zipping through several books while on the road." According to Woods, his mother (a social worker) was a fast reader, while his father, a minister, read *A Christmas Carol* to the family at the dinner table annually and set reading goals for himself. "Dad once announced that he would read all the works of Shakespeare that year." Books were integral in Woods' upbringing. A trip to the library in town was considered a family outing. "Being read to was something that was part of my childhood," he says.

Woods says he is honored and humbled to receive the Mark Landen Memorial Award for Democracy through Journalism. "I'm glad that READ USA is doing the work you're doing," he says. "Literacy has a profound lasting impact."

Marjorie Broward Memorial Scholarship Award

Paula Findlay, Principal, Arlington Elementary School



When she was a young girl growing up on Jacksonville's east side, Principal Paula Findlay's grandmother, Anne Marie Bright, had a daycare in her home on 12th Street. As the second oldest grandchild in a large family, Paula often helped her grandmother.

"I loved pretending to have school in my grandparents' house - teaching all my baby cousins," says Findlay. "I just had an innate love for children." Innate, indeed. Today, after 28 years as an educator, 15 of them as an elementary school principal, Findlay's love for children is legendary.

At Arlington Elementary School, there is an atmosphere of passion and positivity that emanates from Principal Findlay's office and touches everyone who enters through the doors. "Thank you for teaching my Dolphins!" shouts the Principal as teachers and tutors walk by in the halls. Wearing her tall, wide-brimmed READ hat and a READ JAX T-shirt emblazoned with the words "20 Minutes a Day Paves the Way," Principal Findlay is visibly dedicated to making sure that all of her students receive the best education possible.

"I'm blessed to have grown up in Jacksonville, and I have stayed with my roots," says Findlay, noting that she has a "13th Street Story." Having attended St. Pius Catholic Elementary on 13th Street for her first six years of schooling, then Stanton Prep on 13th and Moncrief from 7th through 12th Grade, she started her teaching career at Susie Tolbert Elementary on 13th Street in 1994 - full circle. She earned both her B.A. degree in Elementary Education and her master's degree in Administration and Supervision from the University of North Florida, and received specialized certification at The Principals Institute - Harvard Graduate School of Education, the National Institute of School Leaders, and the Principals Academy.

During her nearly 30 years with the Duval County School District, Principal Paula Findlay has increased her large family a thousand-fold. "My students are part of my family," she declares adamantly, remembering that as a novice teacher, her classroom was her "sweet spot" and she had no interest in administration until her principal at Susie Tolbert, Dr. Pat Willis, convinced her that she could and should work for the greater good by becoming a principal.

"I love what READ USA is doing in my school," she says. "I love it, love it, love it! The fact that teenagers are working with my elementary students - teens who look like them and truly care ... I've seen the improvement. Their excitement is tangible!" Being recognized by READ USA is a plus for Principal Findlay and she is happy about it - especially happy that she will be able to help her teachers with new materials. "Teachers are not always valued as much as they should be," she says. "We are all doing the best we can for this community, and I thank READ USA for all you are doing for my Dolphins!"

Read to Lead Award

Betty Seabrook Burney, Founder and Board Chair, I'm A Star Foundation



Betty Seabrook Burney is the founder and Executive Director of the "I'M A STAR" Foundation. A foundation committed to empowering and equipping youth to transform themselves into solution-oriented leaders in their schools and respective communities, "I'M A STAR"

recently won 1st place among America's largest cities in the U. S. Conference of Mayor's Childhood Obesity grant awards and was recognized by the NAACP for dedicated civic engagement. Betty joined the Duval County School Board in November 2004 and held the distinction of serving as a two-time Board Chairman (2006 and 2011) and a two-time Vice Chairman (2005 and 2010). At the end of her term as Chairman, Duval County achieved the distinction of having all chronically low-performing schools exit the state of Florida's intervention list. She counts being the School Board representative for her alma mater, William M. Raines High School, as one of her greatest honors. Burney serves as a consultant for the Center for Reform of School Systems, working with School Boards and Superintendents throughout the country to provide technical assistance on governance strategies and practices designed to impact student achievement and to narrow the academic achievement gap. She is the recipient of the WJCT Public Television's American Graduate Champion Award and was the United Negro College Funds Educator of the Year award, and serves on the Board of Directors for the Jacksonville Historical Society.

Betty Seabrook Burney earned her bachelor's degree at the University of Miami and her Master of Arts in Public Administration at Northern Illinois University. She is a member of Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and St. Paul AME Church. She deeply cherishes her family - sons Dr. Calvin and Craig, daughter-in-law Dr. Tashlai and grandson, Calvin III.

Growing up on the Eastside of Jacksonville, Betty was the youngest of Oliver Seabrook, Sr. and Helen Robinson Seabrook's nine children, eight of whom earned college degrees. "My parents were born in 1914 and 1919 respectively and raised in rural South Carolina where their schooling only went to 6th grade, due to segregation. They both yearned for an education and pushed us to go to college," recalls Betty. "They believed that education was the great equalizer." Betty's father used to put up a bookshelf with a small number of books on each shelf and challenge his kids to read as many as possible - the one reading the most books to be awarded a quarter (big money back then!). The Seabrooks also had a Wall of Respect where their children eagerly posted certificates and awards from school. The love of reading was tangible in the Seabrook household.

"My father would have been over the moon if he could have been in 7th grade," notes Betty, whose "I'M A STAR" Foundation works with Duval County middle school students in programs such as GEAR UP (Gaining Early Awareness and Readiness for Undergraduate Programs) and sponsors a Youth Leadership Initiative for middle and high school students, and much more. "I love READ USA," said Betty, "Especially the teen tutoring reading program that helps both the tutors and the students they are tutoring." She is grateful and honored to be chosen by READ USA to receive the 2023 READ TO LEAD Award, particularly at this time of educational turmoil. "My life's mission is to empower children," she says. "Reading is education and education is knowledge and knowledge is power."

Read to Heal Award

Nicole B. Thomas, Hospital President, Baptist Medical Center Jacksonville



Nicole Thomas, FACHE, is hospital president of Baptist Medical Center Jacksonville, responsible for the operational and strategic direction of the largest hospital in the health system. Thomas joined Baptist Health in 2011 and in 2016 was named Baptist Medical Center South's president, becoming the first female and

first African American to lead a hospital in Baptist Health's history. Through the years, Thomas has held several system roles at Baptist Health, including co-chairing its diversity, equity, and inclusion council; chairing its transformation council; stepping in as interim chief human resources officer; and serving as senior vice president of specialty services overseeing neurosciences, orthopedics, and oncology, with primary executive responsibility for the formation of Baptist MD Anderson Cancer Center in 2015.

Thomas has a Master of Healthcare Administration from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, and she received a Bachelor of Science in Public Health Administration from Dillard University in New Orleans. A fellow in the American College of Healthcare Executives, Thomas was named among Modern Healthcare magazine's Top 25 Minority Executives in Healthcare in 2018 and 2020 and one of 70 African American leaders in healthcare to know by *Becker's Hospital Review* in 2020.

Born to teenage parents in Houston, Texas, Thomas was raised by her grandparents, who doted on their smart little granddaughter and sent her to private school from kindergarten to third grade. There, reading was emphasized and encouraged at every opportunity. For instance, students who could read out loud in front of the class without pausing to sound out words were awarded with a Burger King Whopper. By the time Nicole began attending public school, she was so far advanced that she skipped a grade. "I loved school so much that I held my own private summer school, spreading out my books and treating them like my students," she recalls. When she got to high school, her grandparents again encouraged excellence, making sure she attended a magnet school that focused on choosing a profession. Her grandmother hoped that Nicole would become a doctor, however, Nicole found her leadership niche in the business of healthcare and has succeeded admirably as a Senior Healthcare Executive.

Today, Nicole Thomas and her husband, Michael, consider her beloved 88-year-old grandmother, Laverne Laviolette, their "Elder Baby," giving her the daily affection, credit, and respect she deserves.

"Because books played such an important role in my life growing up, I continue to use them as vital tools in my profession," says Nicole, noting that she gives two impactful books to new members of her team at Baptist Health: *Crucial Conversations* by Patterson, Grenny, McMillan and Switzler, and *Power of Moments* by Heath and Heath. Both of these books promote better understanding and positive interaction between team members and, to further emphasize the power of the written word, President Thomas holds an annual "Book Club" for her leadership team. Her last book club featured *Change the Culture, Change the Game* by Connors and Smith.

An avid reader leader who uses books to encourage and heal working relationships and thus, strengthen the good work done for our community at Baptist Health, Nicole Thomas is a deserving recipient of READ USA's 2023 READ TO HEAL Award. "I'm honored to be chosen for this recognition by READ USA," said Thomas, "and I want to convey my congratulations to READ USA for the huge impact you are having on the lives of children."

Read to Succeed Award

Tim Cost, President, Jacksonville University



Having recently celebrated his tenth year as President of Jacksonville University, Tim Cost is gratified by all the tremendous work so many people have done to help the university achieve the success it has enjoyed over the past decade, particularly considering that his original career goals never included returning as President to his undergraduate

alma-mater. "I'm a corporate guy," he protested when the late great former JU President Dr. Frances Kinne insistently recruited him for the position back in 2013, saying, "You must do this."

Former Executive Vice President for Pepsico, with revenues of \$60 billion and 300,000 employees, Cost had 32 years of senior executive leadership experience at many of the world's top public companies, including Bristol Myers, Squibb, Kodak, ARAMARK, Pharmacia, Wyeth/Pfizer, and Centocor/Johnson & Johnson. He was also Chairman of Global Health Care for Washington-based consulting firm, APCO Worldwide. While he was certainly a "corporate guy" of the first order, President Tim Cost was no match for his mentor, the legendary Dr. Fran Kinne, and today, he considers his decision to become President of JU to be one of his best decisions ever.

Since 2013, the University has added more than 50 new programs in health education, engineering, information technology, cyber security, kinesiology, and data/computer sciences. The endowment has increased more than 25%, as has the University's campus footprint. JU is consistently ranked as a premier institution (top 10%) for students' return on investment and has been selected one of "America's Best Colleges" by *U. S. News & World Report* for the past 15 years. *CEO Magazine* has ranked the University's Davis College of Business in the Top 25 in the world for value/return on investment. President Cost has led the investment of \$80 million into the University's campus, led a successful \$120 million ASPIRE comprehensive development campaign, and has launched the Florida EPIC program to support STEAM education, regional economic investment, and job creation.

A 1981 Magna Cum Laude Jacksonville University graduate, President Cost received his MBA in Finance and Economics from the Simon Business School at the University of Rochester and is a graduate of Harvard University's Presidential Leadership Program. As a collegiate athlete, Cost remains one of the top 10 winningest pitchers in JU Baseball history, pitching the only 9-inning no-hitter in Jacksonville University history. He received the Jacksonville University Distinguished Alumni Award in 2006, was selected a "Distinguished Dolphin" in recognition of JU's 75th Anniversary, and has been named one of Florida's "Most Influential Business Leaders" by *Florida Trend* and "Guardian of the Arts" by Cathedral Arts. During his decade at JU, President Cost has become an active member of many civic, cultural, education, and business boards, chairing several of them. He and his wife of 40 years, Stephanie, are the parents of two children, Melanie and Drew.

Relative to READ USA, President Cost is impressed by the evolution of this powerful force for good. He notes that READ USA's founder Ellen Wiss and CEO Rob Kelly have established meaningful programs and ongoing partnerships that are enhancing the quality of education in Jacksonville. "By marshaling the resources of the community to give students the comfort, confidence, and agility they must have around their own set of literacy, READ USA is helping to make this university better equipped and better prepared for the future," Cost says. "We feel strongly here at JU that having comfort with literacy is essential to education. CEO Rob Kelly is a tremendous talent - one of our esteemed former professors, and an outstanding educator to lead READ USA in closing the gap on literacy comprehension."

Honored to be recognized with the READ TO SUCCEED Award, President Tim Cost notes that he is proud to be a fellow traveler with READ USA in "the art of the possible - through literacy - opening the world to students."

Read to Remember Award

Dr. Floyd Willis, Physician, Mayo Clinic



Dr. Floyd Willis grew up in Forsyth, Georgia, where his father owned and ran the local funeral home and wanted his son to follow in his footsteps. Back in the 1970's, ambulance service was provided by funeral homes and when Floyd's father discovered that only

Caucasian funeral directors were getting paid for that service, he approached the county about the obvious racial discrimination and was told the Caucasian funeral directors were paid to be licensed medical technicians and "we didn't think you boys could take the test and pass it." Floyd's dad got other black funeral directors together and they went about becoming licensed medical technicians. "When Dad asked me to help him study the test questions, I really liked the medical aspect - the EKGs, blood pressure, and the rest," Floyd remembers, "So, after Dad passed the test, I told him I'd decided to go into the medical field on the living side."

As a funeral director who was married to an 8th grade English teacher, Floyd's parents were leading citizens in their small town. When voting initiatives and voting drives came along, they had a sample ballot machine in their home that was available to all. Funeral directors were responsible for insurance papers and getting people home from Germany and, as a teacher, Floyd's mother was a leader in education. "Mother had her class memorize poetry and then she brought it home and made me memorize it, too," he recalls. The one Floyd remembers to this day, and has lived by, is titled "Be the Best of Whatever You Are," by Douglas Malloch.

After graduating from Yale University, Dr. Floyd Willis went to medical school at Morehouse College in Atlanta and did his residency at Mayo Clinic in Minnesota. Having always wanted to be a family doctor in a small town, he settled in Carrollton, Georgia and opened his own practice, but in 1992, Mayo Clinic in Jacksonville enlisted him to start the first Department of Family Medicine. There were 100 doctors at Mayo in 1992 and Floyd Willis was the only African American doctor and the only family physician. Today, Mayo Clinic has four Family Medicine sites with over 40 physicians and 20 residents.

Dr. Willis has become widely known for his in-depth research on inclusive Alzheimer's disease and other maladies affecting minorities, and he is also working with the Wilson Scholars Program that exposes mostly under-represented medical students to Mayo Clinic, creating a more diverse staff of physicians. Always a family physician at heart, Dr. Willis still sees patients daily. And, speaking of family, Dr. Willis's wife, Wanda, is a leader at The Community Foundation for Northeast Florida, and they have two successful adult children, Jackson and Joy.

As to being honored with the READ TO REMEMBER Award by READ USA, Dr. Willis is impressed with the teen tutoring program that has been initiated by READ USA. "When my children were growing up, I stressed to them that the most important profession on earth is teaching. That is what READ USA is doing - providing the free books and teaching students how to read and understand them. I've been an adjunct professor in three different medical schools and Mayo attracted me because it was said that we may have the opportunity to begin a teaching program. This was exciting to me," said Dr. Willis. "It is the reading, the learning, and the teaching that is really important in everything."

Read to Be Free Award



Kevin Gay, Founder, Operation New Hope

READ USA is proud to announce that Kevin T. Gay, Founder and retired CEO of Operation New Hope, will receive our 2023 READ TO BE FREE Award, a much-deserved tribute to his never-ending battle for equity and compassion in our criminal justice system.

A native of Jacksonville and a graduate of the University of Florida, Kevin has combined in his highly successful program his strong faith in God and his dedication to helping underserved communities find their way out of addiction, poverty, and incarceration.

Since founding Operation New Hope in 1999, the organization has achieved such phenomenal advances in providing second chances to formerly incarcerated citizens that it has repeatedly earned national attention. Kevin has been invited to the White House several times during the past two decades and has personally met with Presidents and members of their staff in every administration, serving in several capacities to promote and strengthen Operation New Hope's Ready4Work Re-entry program.

Kevin currently serves on the Board of the Kids Hope Alliance and also The Citizens Advisory Board for the Florida Bar. Kevin has served on numerous local and state boards and in 2013, was the only CEO from a non-profit organization to be honored by the *Jacksonville Business Journal* with the Ultimate CEO Award. In 2015, along with CNN's Van Jones, Kevin hosted Operation Reform in Jacksonville, a national bipartisan summit in criminal justice reform and re-entry solutions. In 2016 Kevin was the Recipient of the 2016 OneJax Humanitarian Award and was selected as the only non-attorney to receive the Medal of Honor Award from the Florida Bar Association. Kevin Gay reached out globally in 2019 when he was invited to South Africa to visit with Dr. Makaziwe Mandela, daughter of Nelson Mandela, and her daughter, Tukwini and then later in 2019 they came to Jacksonville to celebrate Nelson Mandela International Day. Kevin was honored at that time with the House of Mandela Reflecting Freedom Award for Community Impact, with Operation New Hope's Ready4Work program acknowledged as a model program for the world.

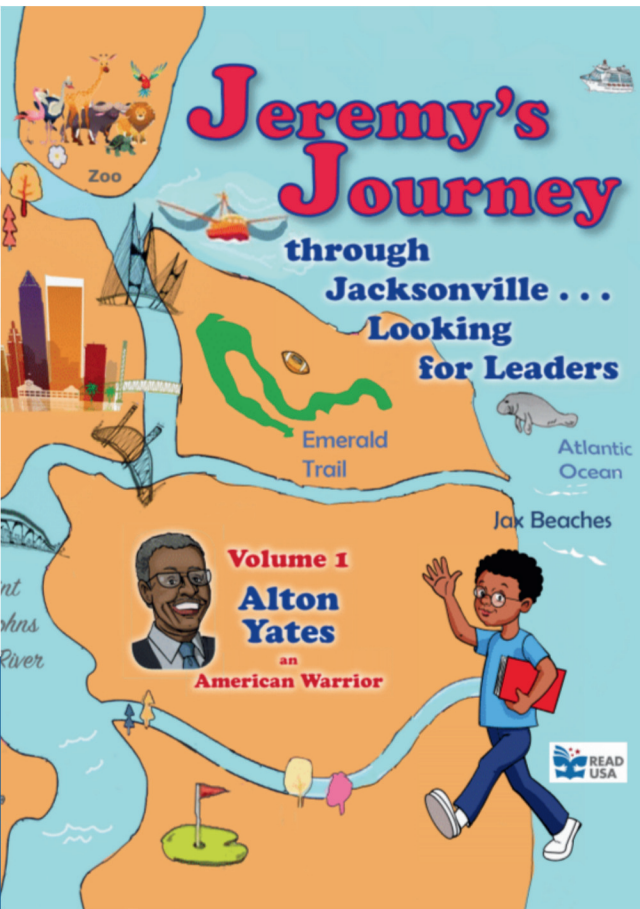
As an internationally recognized champion for the cause of criminal justice reform, Kevin believes that READ USA is critical to liberating the next generation from poverty and violence by making books available to all children and, through the teen tutoring program, teaching them to read and appreciate their books.

Today, Kevin Gay credits reading with providing him a gateway to knowledge that has allowed him to converse with people from all walks of life – prisoners to presidents – and to initiate programs that bring about positive change in this world. "When we read to be free, we develop the framework and foundation needed to succeed in life," says Kevin. "I'm excited to be honored by READ USA!"

“ READ USA has provided every opportunity, for every student, to have access to what they need to have that gap bridged.

**-Tracey Brown,
Educator, Don Brewer
Elementary School and
READ USA Tutoring
Program Specialist**

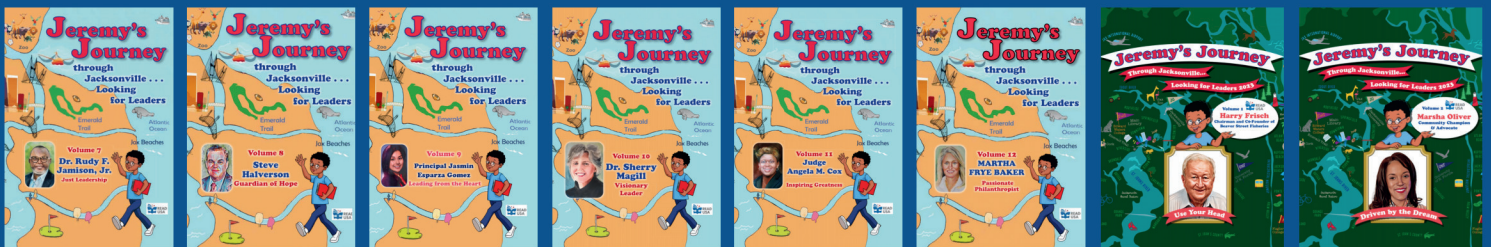
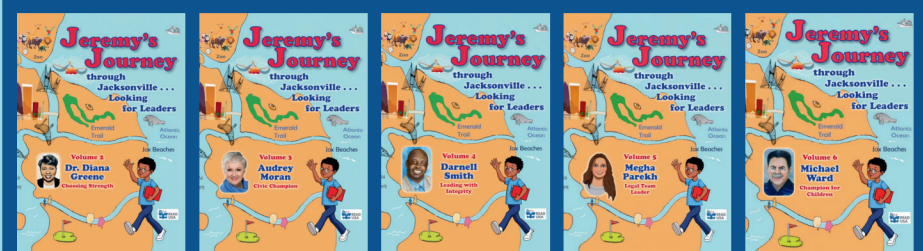




Jeremy's Journey Through Jacksonville...

...Purchase Your Copies Today!

Every month, READ USA publishes a new edition of *Jeremy's Journey*, a book that follows our fictional character, Jeremy, who meets with some of Northeast Florida's most well-known community leaders and learns their stories. The purpose is to showcase local, diverse leaders and perpetuate representation by connecting leaders and students through literacy. *Jeremy's Journey* books also meet elementary social studies requirements, thereby adding a locally created resource to educational curriculum.



To date, READ USA has published 22 volumes featuring these prominent leaders in our community:

Alton Yates
Dr. Diana Greene
Audrey Moran
Darnell Smith
Megha Parekh
Michael Ward

Dr. Rudy F. Jamison, Jr.
Steve Halverson
Principal Jasmin Esparza Gomez
Dr. Sherry Magill
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Martha Frye Baker
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Marsha Oliver
Jennifer Glock
David Miller
Adriel Rocha

Brian Wolfburg
Judge Brian J. Davis
Nina Waters
Mayor Donna Deegan
Dr. Johnnetta Betsch Cole

Jeremy's Journey books are available to order!

For \$20, you can receive your own copy of any *Jeremy's Journey* volume. For more details and to place an order, visit www.readusainc.com/jeremy





Our History: How it All Started

READ USA began as a small project between a community volunteer and a teacher at George Washington Carver Elementary School (GWCES) in Duval County. While volunteering as a tutor in Ms. Vanessa Tussey's classroom – where 100% of the students come from a high-poverty neighborhood – Ellen Wiss saw something different and unique occurring in her classroom: struggling students were transforming into engaged, curious learners.

Motivated by what she was seeing, Wiss initiated a dialogue with Ms. Tussey about the increased engagement and outcomes she was witnessing, and asked what was needed most to help more students make the same transformation and replicate this in other classrooms.

Ms. Tussey's response was the spark that ignited READ USA into being: "Books of interest for my students to inspire them to read; books they can choose and own. Reading is key to learning."

Together, Wiss and Tussey raised enough money to hold a free, colorful book fair with thousands of new and popular stories for every student at GWCES to take home. This was the school's very first book fair. The money barrier was removed, and every student was able to participate and went home with new books of their choosing to read and start building their home libraries. As demand and support for the book choice and ownership program grew, READ USA expanded into every Duval County Public School (DCPS) elementary school as well as several charter and Knowledge is Power Program (KIPP) Schools.

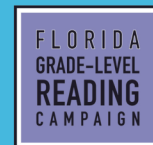
READ USA incorporated in 2016 and has since evolved into an established organization led by literacy experts and support staff all focused on closing the literacy gap in Duval County.

In 2019, Founder and Board Chair Ellen Wiss secured a grant from the City of Jacksonville's Kids Hope Alliance to pilot a peer-to-peer literacy intervention program involving certified teachers, teens, and elementary students. Along with independent evaluations of the program's efficacy from Jacksonville University's education department, Wiss combined these elements to create READ USA's robust model for a reading academy and teen workforce development program. This model became the foundation of READ USA's Literacy Tutoring program that is active in many schools across Duval County today.

Peace in the Pages Host Committee Members

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- Laura Phillips Edgecomb, *Co-chair*
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- Greg Burton, *Board member*
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- Angela Timberlake
- Rachel Welch
- Ellen A. Wiss, *Board Chair*

READ USA is a proud partner in the local, state, and national Grade-Level Reading Campaigns to help turn the page for a brighter future.



Contact Us

For more information about READ USA, please contact Dr. Rob Kelly, Chief Executive Officer, at (904)-READ USA (732-3872) or info@readusainc.com



READ USA

www.readusainc.com