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[FRONT PAGE SLIDER](#) | [HISTORY & CULTURE](#)  [OCTOBER 9, 2015](#)

Midtown's African American Heritage Trail

BY RIM SHUMAN

NNB Reporter

ST. PETERSBURG – “Many people remember the 50’s and 60’s, but not a lot of people, especially not children, remember the times before it as well. So, I think that the boards are great to preserve information that could have been lost or forgotten in case they were not there,” said Kimberly Hinder, Historic Preservation Planner for the City of St. Petersburg.



The African American Heritage Trail Map of Boards [Photograph Courtesy of St.Pete.org]

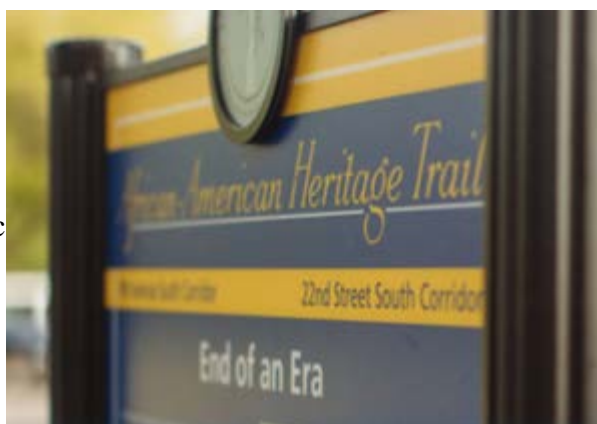
The idea of the trail was first initiated by former Mayor Bill Foster of the City of St. Petersburg. Foster established an advisory committee that the board members, consisting of involved and interested

community members, to discover the important places, people and events that shaped the surrounding neighborhood.

This helped board members establish the themes for the corridor such as focusing on the commercial corridor with the African American businesses during segregation, Civil Rights, education and the role of family, clubs and religion.

“We had to gather the initial list of places and people through the advisory board meetings and public meetings but the detailed information on the boards was found through interviews and archival research.” said Hinder.

The City of St. Petersburg applied for a grant offered by the State Division of Historic Resources. Once the City was granted the award, St. Petersburg City



Council approved the grant agreement. This grant was available to municipalities with historic preservation programs approved by the state as a Certified Local Government.

The African American Heritage Trail Board titled End of an Era. [Photo Courtesy of StPete.Org]

The grant could not be used for future maintenance, only initial development and installation, said Hinder.

“The boards are graffiti resistant and sun damage proof – we tried to get the best materials that last as long as it can possibly last for. The materials are the same materials that the National Park Service uses. The boards are warranted for ten years from the manufacturer so damage will be replaced if necessary,” said Hinder.



David Mourra, from left, Steve Harris and Greg Keller place African American Heritage Trail Board in front of the Carter G. Woodson African American History Museum. [Photo Courtesy of Melissa Lyttle of Tampa Bay Times]

The African American Heritage Trail became a public walking attraction in October 2014. The two-mile trail is located at the main point of the Carter G. Woodson Museum at 2240 9th Ave. S. A trail of 10 boards run along the North and

South of 22nd Street South, while the intersection of 9th Avenue includes another 10 boards along the East to West of Midtown.

The Trail received the Meritorious Achievement Award in 2015 for its preservational value.

The 20 detailed boards include background information and illustration of the African-American heritage that has flourished in the city of St. Petersburg; this attraction is a walking tour provided by the City of St. Petersburg in an area where black culture is embraced. They are placed in front of areas in Historic Midtown such as the Manhattan Casino, the Johnnie Ruth Clarke Center, formerly known as the Mercy Hospital, and the Royal Theater.

These boards are titled as the “Faith, Family and Education” on 9th Avenue which includes rich African-American heritage details that consist of the community, schools, organizations, religious centers and enrichment of the black society starting from the Jim Crow-era. There are approximately nine religious centers on this side of the trail, where the board focuses on such details of the now restored Jordan Elementary School.

The boards are titled: “Community, Culture and Commerce” on the 22nd Street trail, which includes the important and history-making information about racial segregation.



The shops and places that are featured on these trail boards include information

The Logo used for the African American Heritage Trail. [Photo Courtesy of Melissa Lyttle of Tampa Bay Times]

pertaining to the places where African-Americans couldn't shop, sit, enjoy, contribute to or receive services during the time of racial segregation in America. These boards elaborate on iconic figures such as Louis Armstrong, Ray Charles and James Brown as their jazz music was a significant factor in placing a board in front of the Royal Theater and the Manhattan Casino.

The African American Heritage Association wants to found more boards though it will require another grant. There are many other sites in St. Petersburg that have potential for these markers including the South Mole, which served as a beach for African Americans in St. Petersburg; the Gas Plant, Pepper Town and Methodist Town.

“Little remains of these African American communities,” said Hinder.

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When: Oct. 16- 25

Where: Downtown and Midtown St. Petersburg. Tours of the African American Heritage Trail are part of the event-filled week. For more information visit: <http://keepsaintpetersburglocal.org/localicious>.

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