

PEOPLE

# Community Service League's thinking 'Big' this season

BY MARY SCHENKEL  
Staff Writer

The John's Island Community Service League kicked off its 40th anniversary season with a record crowd of 225 people at its 40th Opening Luncheon last Monday, which featured guest speaker Stacey Watson-Mesley, CEO of Big Brothers Big Sisters, St. Lucie, Indian River and Okeechobee Counties.

At the start of the luncheon, Hope Woodhouse, JICSL board president, directed people's attention to a video tribute created by Pat Thompson that highlighted past and present members of the league, created in 1980 by Johnny Van Name. That first year, \$25,000 was raised, primarily through the newly opened Tambourine Shop. JICSL now provides more than \$1 million annually in grants and scholarships; a 40-year total of nearly \$13 million.

"We have come a long way," said Woodhouse. "But it's only because of the generosity of the John's Island



Susie Kasten, Baerbel O'Haire, Susan McCord and Sunny Nelson.



Carol Twyman and Andrea Thibodeau.

community and the John's Island Community Service League members, their ideas, their time and their money."

Woodhouse said funding today is raised through the Tambourine Shop, events and galas – such as the upcoming March 21 Queen-themed "We are the Champions" Gala – a more formal fundraising initiative and member-



Susan McConnell and Nancy Drury.



Vicki Aspbury and Buff Penrose.



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ship dues.

"It takes a lot of effort and a lot of volunteers to raise this million dollars," said Woodhouse, thanking the league's 250 active volunteers. She said most grants are distributed through their main account to help fund the operating expenses of 40-plus agencies that serve women, children and families in need. A newly renamed Marlynn Scully Strategic Fund is also available for new initiatives.

"This fund was started with the foresight and funding of Marlynn Scully in 2015 to enable us to be more entrepreneurial and flexible," said Woodhouse.

Introducing Stacey Watson-Mesley, Woodhouse noted that Big Brothers Big Sisters served 600 children in Indian River County last year, with a goal of reaching 1,000 children.

In Indian River County, Watson-Mesley said, 47 percent of children are not ready for kindergarten; they don't even have the basic skills needed to learn colors or letters.

It was while teaching English at Ni-

agara University that Watson-Mesley took a second job creating a "street school" in a high crime area. During the 12 years that she ran the school, 743 high school dropouts obtained their GEDs.

"These young people had no allies," said Watson-Mesley. "What I realized was those children had every capability in the world. And yet 80 percent of them had already been adjudicated."

As part of a new rebranding, she said BBBS nationwide has chosen the words, ignite, inspire and defend, adding, "Our new mission is that we are going to create and support one-to-one mentoring relationships that ignite the power and promise of youth."

Watson-Mesley shared how three powerful mentors had changed the trajectory of her own life; teaching her that her life mattered.

"This is mentorship. This is Big Brothers Big Sisters," she said. "Moving into the future, the question is, can we afford to not mentor; to lose the talent sitting in the back of the classroom?" ■

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Stacey Watson-Mesley with Hope Woodhouse and Pat Thompson.



Tina Nickle and Marlynn Scully.



Ann Jones and Sandy Rolf.



Vickie McLaughlin and Marlen Higgs.



Susan van der Stricht, Nancy Rosner and Leslie Westberry.



Anne Weinstock, Nancy Shoemate, Rosemary Haverland.



Charlene Connolly, Francesca Anderson, Claudia Morgan and Rita Murphy.



Susan Dake and Amy Conlee.



Kristen Harrow and Lynn Yardley.



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