



Manasota Branch

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\$200,000 Grant from Community Foundation of Sarasota County Expands Manasota ASALH Freedom School

SARASOTA, FL — The Manasota ASALH Freedom School (MAFS), which provides accurate, engaging lessons in African and African American history, is set to expand its reach thanks to a second round of funding — a \$200,000 grant from the Marilyn G. Harwell Fungible Fund, a component fund of the Community Foundation of Sarasota County.

Launched in 2023 by the Manasota Branch of ASALH (the Association for the Study of African American Life and History), the Freedom School empowers K-12 students with knowledge of Black history — history that is increasingly restricted in Florida's public schools.

Freedom Schools were established during the Civil Rights Movement to significantly augment Black history education in the segregated South at a time when it was nearly absent from public school curriculum. In selecting the curriculum for our Freedom School program, we were intentional about choosing content that is both historically accurate and culturally responsive.

Inspired by the original Freedom School movement, MAFS continues the tradition and carries forward its legacy in the Sarasota and Manatee communities by offering any and all K-12 students an honest and enriching education in African and African American history. This curriculum is not just about teaching Black history—it's about cultivating critical thinking, identity development, and civic engagement in all students, regardless of background.

This new grant builds on initial support provided during the pilot program and will allow for continued growth through a mobile Freedom School model. Manasota ASALH will partner with three community organizations to bring history education directly into neighborhoods:

- **Roy McBean Boys & Girls Club** (Sarasota)
- **Sarasota Housing Authority** (Sarasota)
- **13th AV Dream Center** (Manatee County)

These partnerships will expand access to free, high-quality education and deepen community connections across the region. Manasota ASALH Freedom School will also continue its valued partnership with **Girls Inc. of Sarasota County**.

Further, a grant through the Community Foundation of Sarasota County Allen Wirtz Nobbe and Jo Bowen Nobbe Fund in the amount of \$10,000 will directly support the work at the Roy McBean Boys & Girls Club this summer.

“We are honored to expand our Freedom School and reach even more students thanks to the generosity of the Harwell Fungible Fund and the Community Foundation,” said Jada Wright-Greene, Executive Director of Manasota ASALH. “Teaching Black history is not just about the past — it’s about creating a better-informed, more just future for everyone in our community.”

The grant is provided by the Community Foundation of Sarasota County’s Marilyn G. Harwell Fundgible Fund. Marilyn Harwell was in the vanguard of women in publishing in New York City and she became a prominent Sarasota philanthropist and a highly impactful community leader and volunteer.

“Marilyn Harwell was dedicated to advancing the teaching of comprehensive Black American history as a means to open doors to lifelong success and I am confident she would applaud and encourage others to support the work of Manasota ASALH’s Freedom School that is filling the critical gap in our public education,” says Caren Lobo.

The curriculum covers topics such as the history of Africa, the Middle Passage, Reconstruction, the Civil Rights Movement, and the ongoing contributions of Black Americans.

The Freedom School is free and led by certified teachers and trained volunteers.

About Manasota ASALH:

Manasota ASALH is a local branch of the National Association for the Study of African American Life and History (ASALH)—the organization founded in 1915 by Dr. Carter G. Woodson, who is credited with establishing Black History Month. Since its founding in 1995, the Manasota Branch has remained committed to promoting, researching, preserving, interpreting, and sharing the rich history and culture of people of African descent with both local and global communities. Manasota ASALH fulfills its mission through impactful programs such as the Manasota ASALH Freedom School—a community-based initiative that provides K–12 students with an honest and empowering education about the history and contributions of African and African American people. To date, more than 100 students have completed the program, which is led by certified teachers. The branch also supports academic advancement through its robust scholarship program, which awards scholarships to Black high school students accepted to accredited colleges or universities. Over the past 23 years, Manasota ASALH has awarded more than \$645,000 in scholarships to 316 scholars in Manatee and Sarasota counties. For more information about Manasota ASALH, visit www.asalh-manasotafl.org

About the Community Foundation of Sarasota County: The Community Foundation of Sarasota County is a public charity founded in 1979 by the Southwest Florida Estate Planning Council as a resource for caring individuals and the causes they support, enabling them to make a charitable impact on the community. With assets of \$544 million in more than 1,590 charitable funds, the Community Foundation awarded grants and scholarships totaling \$56 million dollars last year in the areas of education, the arts, health and human services, civic engagement, animal welfare and the environment. Since its founding, the Community Foundation has been able to grant more than \$500 million to area nonprofit organizations in our community thanks to the generosity of charitable individuals, families, and businesses. For more information, visit www.CFSarasota.org or call (941) 955-3000.