

Charleston Club Tattler

Volume 19, Issue 96

A publication of The Charleston S.C. Club of Washington, D.C. Area

Website: <http://charlestonclub.org>

November 1, 2016



Modie Risher Dies at 88 y.o.

Legendary Burke Educator and Coach, Dies at 88

The greater Charleston community mourns the passing of former Burke High School coach, Modie Lee Risher, Sr. Risher was an exemplary educator, mentor and coach at Burke High School for over three decades, he died on Monday, October 17th.

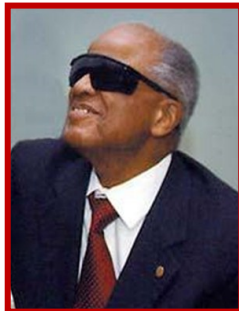
Modie L. Risher, Sr. was born on September 6, 1928 in Charleston, he graduated from Burke H.S. in 1946.

During his time at Burke, he was a very popular student-athlete playing football, basketball and baseball. Risher attended Allen University where he earned a Bachelor's degree, and later Columbia University where he earned a Master's degree. After college, Risher played professional baseball for the Jacksonville Eagles of the old Negro Leagues where he faced legends such as Jackie Robinson, Josh Gibson, and Satchel Paige.

Following his professional athletic career, Risher returned to "the Holy City" and served as an educator at Burke where he taught health, physical education (P.E.), creative dance, and gymnastics. During his time at Burke, Risher became one of the most successful multi-sport coaches in school history; he led the Bulldogs to the 1955 S.C. AAA state championship in football. He also served as athletic director, department chair, consultant and school evaluator for the South Carolina Department of Education & Health and P.E. curriculum writer for CCSD.

"Coach Risher had a profound impact on my life," said Earl Brown, Sr., former Athletic Director and career leader in wins for basketball at Burke. "He was my ninth grade P.E. teacher. He was strict and made sure everything was done right; very meticulous. I took that approach to life and coaching with me when I started my career as a coach. He instilled in me a desire to execute the finest detail in everything I did. Modie was one of the few guys who played all the main sports... football, basketball and baseball; and played them at a high level. His influence didn't stop off the court. Coach Risher was a great speaker and a poet. He was great in all that he did. Coach Risher will be missed because he stayed involved with the Burke community until the very end of his life. He was one of my biggest supporters. He was the greatest."

Risher also served as an official in the South Carolina High School League, Dixie Professional Football League, Southern College Conference, and more over the course of 32 years. He was an active member in the Charleston community, serving as president and executive committee-man for Charleston County Precinct #13, and volunteering his services to a number community organizations in-



cluding Jack and Jill of America and the Charleston Chapter of the National Federation of the Blind.

Risher also was a member of Morris Brown A.M.E. Church, where he served as junior trustee, director of recreation, and a school mentor at Mitchell Elementary throughout the years. Modie received numerous awards and honors during his lifetime including the South Carolina Palmetto Patriot Award, the 2007 Charleston Metro Sports Council Lifetime Achievement Award, the Burke High School Gym Facility Name, the Burke High School Holiday Basketball Tournament, a S.C. House Resolution, and the 2007 MOJA Community Tribute Award (Education).

"Modie Risher was a true Charleston sports legend. People outside of our area don't understand the difficulty he faced in serving as a bridge for Burke as the school district transitioned from segregation to integration," said retired CCSD Director of Athletics, Dave Spurlock. "I enjoyed facing him as an athlete, then as a coach. Being the amazing individual he was, he was not only able to serve the needs of his student-athletes, but helped them succeed in competition, and led his teams to prominence. Modie truly was one of the greatest high school coaches ever in our state. His physical presence will be missed in the stands and on the sidelines, but I am confident his memory will always live on at Burke and in Charleston."

Risher was married to DeLaris Johnson Risher of Orangeburg for 57 years, they had two children, Modie, Jr. and Devonne R. Smalls, and two grandchildren, James II and De Ana Smalls. Modie Risher touched many lives and will be greatly missed by all. Funeral services were October 24th (Modie Risher Day in Chasn) at Morris Brown A.M.E. Church on Morris Street. Wake services were at Burke's athletic center on Sunday evening, Oct. 23rd with hundreds in attendance to celebrate Risher's life. Former students, athletes, colleagues, and classmates filled the auditorium to talk about the legacy he leaves and what he will be remembered for. Internment was at Sunset Memorial Gardens in North Charleston. **Rest in Peace, Coach!**

A Roast for Jim French & The Chronicle



There was a gala surprise celebration (Birthday Party Roast) for Charleston Chronicle founder James J. 'Jim' French's 90th birthday and The Chronicle's 45th anniversary at the Hilton Garden Inn at the Charleston Airport on Saturday, October 22nd. The celebration was originally scheduled for October 8th, but had to be rescheduled because of Hurricane Matthew. The Chronicle advertised on

Facebook and Twitter that the entire community was invited to join in and take part in **The Roast of Mr. French!**

Jim French was born October 7, 1926 in Kansas City, KS. His father who was raised in Greenville, SC moved to Kansas City in the 1920s. As a youth, Jim had an obsessive interest in writing and his early exposure to journalism, working with black weekly newspapers in Kansas and later with the Michigan Chronicle in Detroit.

While in the military, French was a photo-journalist with the Navy's **"All Hands"** magazine. He was a station manager for both radio and television stations on naval bases in Spain, Cuba and Puerto Rico. Jim French has interviewed such world-famous personalities as President Eisenhower, Fidel Castro, and actress Ava Gardner. He has filed stories and photographs from the decks of several aircraft carriers and a nuclear submarine, and was the first photo-journalist assigned to the Mekong Delta with the U.S. Army's 9th Infantry Division. Among his citations are the Bronze Star and the Presidential Citation.

Jim found his calling in the Navy, as he petitioned successfully to leave behind a job in the mess hall for a spot behind a typewriter. His military career took him around the world, from sharing beers with future Cuban dictator Fidel Castro in 1959, to being the public information officer of what was then the Charleston Naval Base.

When his stint in the Vietnam War ended, he returned to Charleston in the late-'60s, and began working at the Naval Base. When he retired in 1971, French was unable to get the ink out of his blood, and began searching for financial backing to open a black weekly newspaper. He needed some money. Anybody's money. "I didn't have a bag of dirt," French has quipped, with the practiced comedic timing of a man who'd dropped that line a hundred times before. A handful of prominent local businessmen stepped forward and gave local bankers the nod that he was a "safe bet." French was given 45 days to reimburse the \$2,000 loan, and he paid it off in 30 days.

With the then-princely loan, French said he began publishing the "Checkerboard" newspaper "from my wife's (Olivia Jackson French) kitchen," the name taken from Charleston's presence of black neighborhoods abutting whiter ones. That paper morphed into "The Chronicle," which aims to cover the local black community. "We've always been an integrated city," said French, who credits the remnants of slavery-era attitudes that have helped whites and blacks get along. "We know we've got a good thing here," he said, saying that proximity between the races helped create opportunities for dialogue during turbulent times, tamping down bigger skirmishes.

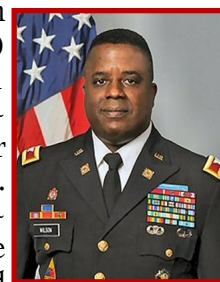
For the past 45 years, French has been the owner and publisher of "The Charleston Chronicle," a black-centric newspaper put together every week at his trophy shop located on upper King Street. During the past year, he has turned over the day to day operations of the newspaper to his grandsons, Tolbert Smalls Jr. and Damion Smalls.

French won't align himself with either of the two major political parties. He calls himself a conservative. "Black

people in Charleston are the most 'conservative' people you'll ever find," he says. With an unadorned crossroads in West Ashley named for him, where merchants' growth is impinging on nearby neighborhoods, French says America and Charleston are still at its own crossroads. The fight for Civil Rights isn't finished, in French's eyes, as he looks out the windows of his office and sees "white" hotels and businesses and homeownership slashing black representation on the peninsula by two-thirds since he opened up shop there. "We've not reached that goal," said French.

East Side Native, Citadel Grad Rises to Army General

An Army officer who grew up on Isabella Street (Charleston's East Side) and graduated from The Citadel in 1991 has been promoted to a brigadier general. Congress approved the one-star rank promotion on Sept. 28th for Brig. Gen. David Wilson, who is the first African-American Citadel alum to wear the rank in active duty. He graduated and received his commission with a B.S. degree in Business Administration from The Citadel, then a Master's degree in General Administration from Central Michigan University, and a Master's in National Resource Strategy from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces. His first assignment took him to the Republic of Korea as a Fire Support Officer at Camp Hovey, Korea.



Wilson's news about becoming a general came a month after he was named chief of ordnance and commandant at the U.S. Army Ordnance School in Fort Lee, VA. He was born and raised on Isabella Street (between Meeting St. and Morrison Drive) on Charleston's East Side. He attended Burke High School (1987) and Rivers Middle School. Wilson said he never intended to join the Army. He originally looked at enlisting in the U.S. Navy after receiving a college scholarship sponsored by the sea-going military branch, but Wilson later decided he wanted to serve in the Airborne infantry. "I went to Fort Jackson and headed to do the military in-process," he said. "Then flew out of there to Fort Benning, and the rest is history."

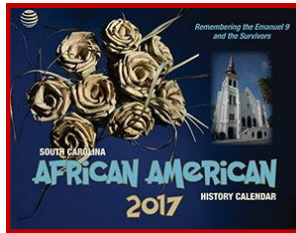
General Wilson is married and has two daughters. He is the fourth "Charleston Home-boy" to become a General: Brig. Gen. Walter F. "Wally" Johnson, III; Maj. Gen. Abraham J. Turner and Brig. Gen. Henry L. "Hank" Taylor.

AT&T 2017 S.C. History Calendar Features Emanuel 9

AT&T unveiled its 2017 South Carolina African American History Calendar on October 4th in Columbia. The 12-month calendar typically profiles individuals from across the state who have had a positive, compelling impact on South Carolina and, often, across the country.

This year, however, the calendar is devoted to remembering the lives irreparably changed by the shooting at Emanuel A.M.E. Church on June 17th of last year. Profiles will honor the Emanuel 9, who lost their lives, as well as victims who survived. Other months will examine the

heritage of the historic Emanuel Church and how the state astonished the world in its reaction to the tragedy. "The men and women whose lives were cut short will forever have a place in South Carolina's history and in our hearts," said Pamela Lackey, president of AT&T South Carolina. "While some had lived their lives very much in the public eye and were well-known individuals, others embraced lives behind the scenes filled with family, friends and community. It is a privilege to honor them, and those who survived that horrible night, in the 2017 South Carolina African American History Calendar."



The biographies printed in the calendar are also preserved online and are used by educators from across the state in incorporating African-American history into classroom curriculum. For nearly three decades, the project has developed into a virtual hall of fame and attracts online visitors from around the globe. AT&T is committed to advancing education, strengthening communities and improving lives. Through its philanthropic initiatives and partnerships, AT&T supports projects, such as the South Carolina African-American History Calendar, that create learning opportunities, promote academic and economic achievement, and address community needs. The 2017 calendar is available for download beginning Oct. 5, 2016 at www.scafricanamericanhistory.com.

Lady that Lived in the A-A Museum's Slave Cabin

For the millions of visitors to the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture, the small (slave) cabin on the ground floor, is a vivid image of America's slave-holding past. But for Isabell Meggett Lucas, an 86-year-old Green Pond (SC) woman, the tiny two-room wood frame cabin signifies much more. She doesn't refer to it as a cabin, much less a slave cabin. She simply calls it "the house."



Decades before it was dismantled, renovated and placed in a prominent position on the Mall, the house stood along a dirt road on the Point of Pines plantation. Inside its walls, Isabell Meggett was born on February 22, 1930, the first of her parents' 10 children. Her parents and grandparents also lived here, and other family members came and went over the years until the last one moved out in 1981.

When she recently heard that her modest childhood home was being moved to become a main focal point in the new museum, she was both surprised and pleased. "All kinds of things happen," she said. "I was glad they could do that and be a part of history."

The house never had electricity, running water or a bathroom, Lucas said. Family members spent most all of their time outside, either working on the farm picking cotton or playing games and jumping rope. She was raised

largely by her grandmother, as her young mother spent most of her days doing hard work in the fields. As a child, she also worked in the fields on the Mitchell Plantation, but did not like picking cotton. The family's meals would come from a nearby vegetable plot, the family's cow, and from nearby rivers and creeks, where her father would return with a croaker sack full of fish, crabs and shrimp. In the winter, the family would butcher a hog and make chitlins and hogs head cheese.

"Medicine was herbs we'd find in the woods," she said, as her parents knew how to boil or smoke them to release their healing power. Some aches were treated by heating up a brick, wrapping it in cloth and nestling it to a sore spot. At night, a kerosene lamp provided the only light, as the family slept together, finding a spot to sleep on the floor — or in winter, on a straw mattress.

Her father went to college. "He was the only one who could read and write in those four houses," she said. "Any time a letter came, he would read it." The Great Depression meant hard times, and Lucas remembers food rations and stamps and walking long distances to get to a small schoolhouse. "That one teacher taught everybody," she said. "It was crowded."

The Meggetts continued to live in the house even after some family members acquired property elsewhere. One reason was that the house was close to the available work. "I had to stay home and take care of my brothers and sisters," Lucas said. "My mother had to work. She had to go early in the morning." Eventually, Lucas also began working on the farm. "They planted cotton. I ain't never liked that. When I got to the field, I took sick," she said. "My mother told me to go back to the house, and I would and take sleep."

Workers often were paid based on how much they picked, and while Lucas remembers picking as much as 100 pounds in a day, that was rare. "I could never make no money," she said. Lucas eventually moved from the home when she was 19. She moved to Charleston, staying with an aunt and eventually making a living doing laundry and domestic work.

In the following decades, Lucas married and raised a family of her own. The memories of her childhood home began receding, at least until curators for the Smithsonian's National Museum came calling. The Point of Pines slave cabin once was listed on the National Register of Historic Places because it was typical of the hundreds of slave dwellings that once covered this sea island. Most of these cabins were torn down or left to deteriorate during the 20th century because the county considered them improvements and raised tax bills accordingly, said the director of the Edisto Island Preservation Society.

"People understandably didn't want to pay taxes on something they didn't use, she said, "so they tore them down or let them burn down." Because the Point of Pines cabin was occupied for so long, it was a rare survivor. It was the last intact slave cabin left on the island. Its owner didn't want to maintain it, however, and donated it to the

society, which originally hoped to restore it. But when the Smithsonian came calling, plans changed.

Across the Lowcountry, many former slave cabins also remained in use well after the Civil War, when slaves were given their freedom, if not much else. Magnolia Gardens won a preservation award for restoring its surviving cabins to reflect not only their use during slavery but also how freed blacks continued to occupy them as homes well into the 20th century. These cabins not only speak of slavery but also tell a much broader story of African-American life well into the 20th century. They speak of the paradox of the Civil War for slaves — of how much and how little life changed for them once the war wound to an end. “They had freedom,” Smith said, “but they didn’t necessarily have prosperity.”

Despite the difficult living conditions, Lucas has fond memories of her childhood. She said there was a strong sense of community among those living in the row houses. The families there fed and looked after each other’s children in a way people just don’t do these days. The families living there in the former slave cabins had so little contact with the outside world they were largely unaware of their conditions — or weren’t reminded often. Lucas said her main memories of life beyond Edisto were gazing at sailboats off Rockville along the North Edisto River and listening to soap operas on a battery-powered radio. “We were happy,” Lucas said. “I guess that’s all we knew.” One of Lucas’ other fond memories was much like those of children growing up all over the country, whether in mansions or slums. “We looked forward for Christmas,” she said. “It would take so long to come.”

Home-Boy Sings the National Anthem at 5K Run/Walk

On Sunday morning, October 23rd hundreds gathered for the Vida Thrive 5K Run and Walk at Hains Point, in order to raise money for a growing homeless population. The annual event brought in nearly \$16,000 for Thrive DC, which helps the vulnerable population. Charleston Club member **Jackie Grant** sang the National Anthem and was interviewed by Channel 9 news in support of Thrive DC, an organization that helps the homeless. Grant is the son of **Estelle Owens Perry** and **William Perry**.

In Washington, DC, there is an estimated 8,300 people who are battling homelessness. Advocates from Thrive DC said that the population grows larger each year. “Individuals and families are living on the streets.” The race was organized by Vida Fitness Gym. This was the second time for the race with nearly 600 people raced.

Jackie Grant, Sr, who has battled homelessness himself, sang the National Anthem, and said organizations like Thrive DC can make the difference, when it comes to picking up the pieces. “I was an at-risk individual,” he said. “Due to the death of my daughter. It was such a shock to me with no warnings... My life just fell out of balance and I knew it.”

Thrive DC is located at 1525 Newton St NW in Columbia Heights area, it was created 37 years ago (1979) as the Dinner Program for Homeless Women and to help the

homeless population. Staff members told WUSA9 that 200 to 250 people use their services on a daily basis.

Emmett Till sign to be replaced after riddled with bullets

A sign marking the spot where Emmett Till’s body was removed from the Tallahatchie River was riddled with bullet holes. A center dedicated to the memory of slain black teen Emmett Till has raised over \$20,000 to replace a bullet-riddled sign commemorating the 1955 Mississippi killing that helped spur the civil rights movement. The Center’s director, Patrick Weems said the new sign will cost between \$1,400 and \$2,000. He said the extra donations will be used to commemorate Till in other ways.



“In doing this work for 10 years and now seeing this outpouring from people who want to see Emmett Till’s memory sustained, that is incredible,” he said about the donations. The historical site has gotten a lot of online attention after Kevin Wilson Jr. posted a picture of the damage on Facebook. “That marker was just evidence that there are people who are still living in those areas who still hold those ideologies dear to their heart,” he said. “Ideology that we’re trying to get away from.”

The sign commemorating Till’s slaying has been a repeated target of vandals, and was recently found to be damaged with bullet holes. It was put up by the Emmett Till Memorial Commission in 2008 near the Tallahatchie River, the site where Till’s body was found 61 years ago. The 14-year-old Chicago teen was visiting relatives in the Mississippi Delta in August 1955 when witnesses said he whistled at a white woman working behind the counter of a store in the tiny town of Money.

Charleston Club Tattler ~ One liners ...

- The next **Charleston Club Regular Meeting** will be held on Saturday, **November 12th** at 2:00 p.m. at the **Original Ebenezer A.M.E. Church**, 7806 Allentown Road in Fort Washington, MD.
- With the closure of the **Meeting Street Bi-Los**, a new produce (veggie) stand has opened. Eastside Produce at Hampstead Square will operate on Saturdays and Tuesdays at Hampstead Square, across Columbus St. from the basketball court. The produce stand will begin with two local produce vendors, Joseph Fields Farm and Oliver Freeman Farm. Joseph Fields Farm offers a variety of local produce including Certified Organic produce and accepting cash, credit, and Senior Vouchers. Mayor Tecklenburg said, “The sudden closing of the Meeting Street Bi-Lo left our East Side residents without a convenient way to purchase fresh produce. We knew we had to move quickly to find a solution, and I am happy to announce that Eastside Produce @ Hampstead Square will begin providing quick and easy access to fresh fruits and vegetables every Saturday and Tuesday.” **Eastside Produce @ Hampstead Square** was an initiative of the City of Charleston and the City’s Parks Department.

~ The Fly on The Wall !