

## Washington High teacher more than just a Mason

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(Photo: Ben Twingley/btwingley@pnj.com)

Walter Gulley Jr. is a "difference maker" in the classroom and the community.

A Booker T. Washington High teacher for 33 years, the Pensacola native has influenced the minds of countless students who have traversed the halls of the school.

Gulley also has been very influential in the black community. In April, he was elected the 18th Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge of Florida, Belize, Central American and Jurisdiction Inc., Prince Hall Affiliated.

In the top leadership position for the Florida chapter of the African American affiliate of Freemasonry, Gulley governs more than 8,000 men and women who make up the Blue Lodge and Eastern Stars, Holy Royal Arch Masons and Heroines of Jericho, Royal and Select Masons and Ladies of the Circle of Perfection, Knight Templar Masons and Heroines of Temple Crusaders, and the 32nd and 33rd degree Florida Council of Deliberation and Loyal Lady Rulers.

A 33rd degree Mason, Gully also oversees three youth groups: The Knights of Pythagoras, Starlights

and Youth Palace which are made up of about 400 6- to 18-year-old girls and boys. He also has been instrumental in setting up lodges in St. Thomas, U.S. Virgin Islands; Tortola, British Virgin Islands; Cote D'Ivoire, Ivory Coast; and Germany.

Gulley said he became interested in the organization as a young boy.

"It was something that happened at my great-uncle's (Jesse Gregory) funeral when I was 8 or 9. His (Mason) dues were paid up for two years in advance. As a child, I wondered what type of organization would make someone want to pay their dues up two years in advance," Gulley said. "I also was so impressed with the ceremony — the final rites."

In 1983 at age 18, Gulley became a Master Mason when he joined the Excelsior Lodge No. 43 in Pensacola. He later moved to George Washington III Lodge No. 15 but eventually came back to the Excelsior Lodge.

Gulley also is one of only three Grand Masters from Pensacola — Tillman Valentine served in the 1880s and George Washington III in the 1980s. Grand Masters serve five-year terms and are elected during state conventions. And the three men joined a storied list of African Americans who have been Masons — from Thurgood Marshall and W.E.B. DuBois to Benjamin Hooks, Andrew Young and even Scottie Pippen.

"There is a lot of misconception about Masons — we're a cult or devil worshipers," Gulley explained. "We are not a religion but built upon Biblical principles. We're not a secret organization but an organization with secrets, but all of those secrets are in the Bible."

Gulley said it was that Biblical foundation that initially attracted him to the organization.

"Most of our membership comes out of the church — members are deacons, trustees, preachers. This type of moral fiber make up our organization," he said, adding Freemasons are not recruited but are relatives and friends of existing members.

"A person must show an interest, and if they are genuinely interested — they will keep asking."

Gulley said growing the membership is important — but he has placed a moratorium on new members at this time.

"Old school — it was hard not to find a person who did not want to be a Mason — lawyers, teachers, judges, ministers. There was and is a code of respect because Masons are held to a higher standard," he said. ... Now we should look at more time in the development of members — cultivating new members, indoctrination the membership."

He said Masons' goals have evolved with the changing times — noting the organization has awarded hundreds of thousands of dollars in scholarships to college students and donated to breast cancer and sickle cell anemia research. The organization also educates its young or youth members on how to interact with law enforcement and the importance of first impressions.

Masons also cherish and honor their history — the Grand Lodge owns a six-story commercial building in downtown Jacksonville that houses its state headquarters. The organization has owned the structure — which is now valued at \$4.6 million — since 1912. The commercial property is also home to a barbershop and several attorney offices, Gulley said.

Wilbert Bunkley, District Deputy Grand Master of Districts 1 and 2, said he known Gulley since the 1980s sid he is not at all surprised by Gulley's achievements. The two Masons were in the George Washington III Lodge No. 15 together.

"He's always had that go-getter attitude and set goals for what he wanted to achieve," said Bunkley, a Mason since 1973. "I've known him from the beginning — he's an outstanding leader for this order. Since I've known him, he has been the type of individual who would be a leader because of his character and the way he carries himself."

Bunkley said Gulley also has been quite active in attracting young men to Freemasonry.

"We naturally want to make good men better and are trying to encourage young men to go in that direction. He's is really behind the young people in that respect," Bunkley added.

"He is an outstanding young leader who is headed in the right direction. He is will listen to anyone with good input and is always open to new ideas."

### Walter Gulley Jr.

Newly-elected 18th Most Worshipful Grand Master of the Most Worshipful Union Grand Lodge of Florida, Belize, Central American and Jurisdiction Inc., Prince Hall Affiliated

- Occupation: Social studies department chairman and teacher for 33 years at Booker T. Washington High School
- Education: 1976 graduate of Booker T. Washington High, 1980 graduate of Florida A&M University, earned certifications at the University of Florida and Troy State University
- Family: Wife, Linda; two sons, Walter III and Darren; one daughter, Demetrius; five grandchildren: Dyon, Darrell, Akila, Shaniqua and Cameron; and several siblings
- Other: Member of Omega Psi Phi Fraternity and Sovereign Grand Inspector General Emeritus