



The John G. Riley Center/Museum for  
African American History & Culture, Inc.



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Attachment # 1

Page 1 of 2

To: Leon County Board of Commissioners

From: John Gilmore Riley Center/Museum for African American History & Culture Inc. (aka: Riley House Museum). *Walter D. Barnes, Director*

Date: June 10, 2008

Subject: Request for \$10,000 Contribution for Educational Exhibition Project

**Historical Background:** The Riley House is the only home in Florida of a freed slave that is still standing at its original location, has been restored, is being preserved and interpreted and is open to the public for viewing. It is the only African American historic property located in downtown Tallahassee and was the first African American community-based museum in Leon County. The Riley House was designated a National Register property in 1978 and locally designated in 2002. Constructed in 1890, the house was the home of the John Gilmore Riley family and is now the location of the Riley Center/Museum. Mr. Riley, born into slavery in Leon County in 1857, later became the first Black principal of the original Lincoln High School, serving for thirty-three years. He was also owner of multiple parcels of real estate, much of it in downtown Tallahassee and was a great statewide civic leader and churchman. Professor Riley died in 1954 at age 97. **Mission:** The mission of the organization is to enrich lives and improve the quality of life for all by presenting a more balanced view of history and cultural heritage through education, outreach and advocacy. Service to the community: Our organization provides programs that connect youth and adults to local, state, regional and national history and cultural heritage.

**Specific Project for which funding is requested—Animatronic Project:** In 2007, our organization requested and was awarded \$22,500 by the Council of Arts and Culture (City of Tallahassee local arts agency) to contract with a company in Jacksonville, Florida (Sally Foundation) to build a life-size model of the original owner of the Riley House, John Gilmore Riley, to be placed in the downstairs west room. This room was the private office of Mr. Riley until his death in 1954 at age 97. The city grant was match for a state special category grant that we were recommended for, thus covering the full cost of the animatronic (\$65,800). Unfortunately, the 2008 state legislature zeroed out state special category project funding. This places the project in jeopardy and also means that the city's funds cannot be released. **The city grant expires in September 2008.**

**What does this mean for the community:** The proposed exhibit would "breathe life" into the west room. The robotic replica would possess human-like movement, human features, and audio capabilities with Mr. Riley "welcoming visitors to his home". As visitors continue the tour, Mr. Riley will continue motions as if working at his desk, the same as during his lifetime. This type of exhibit is unprecedented in the City of Tallahassee and North Florida. It would bolster visitations significantly and broaden the interpretive experience for visitors.

20

*The mission of John G. Riley House is to enrich lives by increasing awareness of African American History and Culture and to share knowledge of people, places and events that help shape the foundations of our society*

The Sally Foundation created such a model of famous African Americans brothers, James Weldon and John Rosemond Johnson, for the LaVilla African American Museum in Jacksonville, Florida. The result, according to the Director, has been a tremendous increase in visitor-ship. It is anticipated that this model project will likewise attract new visitors, media sources, and tourists thereby stimulating the economy and generating additional revenue to help sustain the Riley House and its programs. Foremost, it will enhance all other components of the Riley House's heritage education programs.

Upon receiving the final word on Friday, May 2, 2008, that the legislature definitely did not approve state special category funding for the project, I began contacting supporters, businesses and corporations in an attempt to raise the additional \$43,300 needed to accomplish the project. **Committed** contributors/commitments to date are: Mike Pate (Knight Foundation) and Kathy Archibald \$10,000 each; Althemese Barnes, Marjorie Turnbull, and Spencer Ingram \$1,000 each; John Proctor, Maggie Lewis Butler, David Jackson, Julie Hare \$500 each; Dave Lang \$100; Shirley Gooding Butler \$200, Morris Miller \$100. Original amt needed was \$43,300. We've gotten commitments for \$25,300. Balance \$17,900.

Your support by granting the requested funds will put the goal in reach for us to begin the project. A couple of other solicitations look very promising to help finalize the fundraising effort. Your contribution will be acknowledged on a bronze plaque that will be placed beside the animatronic model, recognizing sponsors in perpetuity.

Thank you for your consideration. If additional information is needed, I can be reached at (850) 681-7881 or 681-7803, by cell (766-4266) or by e-mail to [abarnes37@comcast.net](mailto:abarnes37@comcast.net). Our address is [www.rileymuseum.org](http://www.rileymuseum.org) and [FAAHIPN.com](http://FAAHIPN.com).