

TEACH THEM THEIR HISTORY

Beatrice Shelby, executive director of BGACDC, shows off some artwork done by LaQuinton "Papa" Piggee, a former Marvell resident

BGACDC and the M.M. Tate Development Center recently sponsored a day of community service coordinated by VISTA volunteer Lavern Sims. BGACDC defines community service as work done by a person or a group of people that benefits others.

The event emphasized both the future and the past. We held an intergenerational meeting in the BFT Restaurant to discuss what we as citizens could do to help our community in many areas, particularly education and economic development. LaPearl Shelby, Youth Day facilitator, touched on the past in order to educate the youth on two important figures in the Civil Rights Movement whose stories are often overlooked: Clyde Kennard and Claudette Colvin.

In the 1950's, Clyde Kennard attempted to enroll at the all-white Mississippi Southern College (now the University of Southern Mississippi). He was denied enrollment and later was arrested on false charges after publishing a letter in a local paper about integrated education. He was sentenced to seven years at a high-security prison. He was paroled in 1963, shortly before he died. His conviction was finally overturned in 2006.

Claudette Colvin, who is still living, was arrested in 1955 at the age of 15 in Montgomery, Alabama for refusing to give up her seat on a bus to a white woman. She was handcuffed and forcibly removed from the bus. This was a few months before Rosa Parks became famous for the same action. She was one of the five plaintiffs in the court case that eventually went to the Supreme Court in 1956, resulting in an order to Montgomery and the state of Alabama to end bus segregation.



Focusing on the tenets of non-violence espoused by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., La Pearl Shelby engaged the youth in an interactive dialog, discussing, among other things, why it is that Rosa Parks is so well known, but Claudette Colvin is not. The youth participants felt that perhaps Ms. Colvin's arrest was more violent than Ms. Parks' arrest. They all agreed that it was very brave of her at the age of 15 to stand up for herself and the rights of others.