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House of Representatives

Mr. Speaker, I rise today during Black History Month to celebrate a change agent, community leader and lifelong Tampa Bay advocate, Carrie Jean Lofton Hurst.

Mrs. Hurst was born and raised in Tampa, Florida, as the youngest of six children. She graduated from Tampa Bay Technical High School in 1977, where she met Robert Hurst Sr. Afterwards, they became engaged but pursued different paths – Mrs. Hurst’s mother had always championed education as a priority, so Mrs. Hurst attended Hillsborough Community College (HCC) and Mr. Hurst started his military career. She worked in the library as a student assistant while pursuing her associate’s degree, which she earned in 1979.

Mrs. Hurst delayed completing her university studies to marry and join her husband on assignment. Soon after relocating and starting a family, Mrs. Hurst started at the library on base at Fort Stewart, Georgia, where they were stationed. She fell in love with the library and learned the skills she needed. Her husband was then reassigned overseas, and she went home to Tampa to await his return.

Back in Tampa, she obtained employment again at HCC’s library, where she remained for 18 years as a library technical assistant. During her time there, her love of the work rekindled her desire to further her education, so she worked full-time by day and attended classes by night. She completed her bachelor’s degree in 1998 from St. Leo University and then earned her master’s degree with honors in 2000 from the University of South Florida.

Mrs. Hurst started her career at Tampa Hillsborough Public Library in 2000 at the 78th Street Library then at the Ybor City Branch Library. In 2008, she became branch manager of the Seminole Heights Library and the guided modernization of the popular library. In 2015, Mrs. Hurst came back to the Ybor City location to now lead it as the new Robert W. Saunders, Sr. Library, named after a prominent Civil Rights leader.

Being selected to open and lead this library would become Mrs. Hurst’s greatest professional challenge and role, as this is no ordinary library. The Robert W. Saunders, Sr. Public Library is one of only two African American research libraries in the entire state of Florida. This library is near historical Central Avenue that once served as the hub of Black businesses, Black entertainment and culture for more than 100 years. The library encompasses a visual focus and collection focused on African American life and history. Mrs. Hurst was instrumental in developing initiatives that

support access to information and history of this culture and history. She developed community presentations and collaborations, and her efforts were supported by the Library Administration, the Ada T. Payne Friends of the Urban Libraries, the Robert Saunders Foundation and community partners and participants.

“Free and accessible information is a human right and a necessary part of the pathway to equality.” Mrs. Hurst yearns to share her knowledge and experience with others. She admires the spirit of service and egalitarianism inherent in librarianship. Librarians seek challenges and continue learning for themselves, to promote and enable the acquisition of knowledge of others and uphold libraries as institutions for betterment, all the things that Mrs. Hurst dedicated herself to.

Libraries have continued to evolve in the age of technology and in the face of the rapid change in the way that information is collected, distributed and preserved. It was compelling to her that access to information and technology could help lay the cultural groundwork for creating social change. Mrs. Hurst embraced this change and mobilized within her community, bringing members of her community to the library for informational and cultural activities. Mrs. Hurst sought to work in urban libraries where she could identify, engage and motivate people wherever they were in their lives. Her desire to assist, encourage and inspire others to use the resources of the library to rise above their circumstances helped to create a strong network of partnerships to touch and transform lives of many.

Mrs. Hurst is also a Charter Member of the Tampa Metropolitan Alumnae Chapter of Delta Sigma Theta Sorority, Inc., a Member of the NAACP Hillsborough County branch and the Beta Phi Mu, International Library Honor Society. In her retirement, she continues to assist in creating community initiatives and she motivates others by reminding them to: ***“Keep striving, reach for your dreams. It’s all attainable. Just put one foot in front of the other.”***

Mr. Speaker, on behalf of the Tampa Bay community, I am honored to recognize the outstanding accomplishments, leadership and service of Mrs. Carrie Jean Lofton Hurst, who stands as a shining example of the tremendous impact of hard work, nurturing others and providing service to the community to encourage others to reach their highest potential.

Sincerely,



Kathy Castor
United States Representative
Florida – District 14