



WHAT'S WORKING

A Message From DJJ Director Andy Block

Nov. 2, 2015

Honoring Barrett's Legacy Of Caring



Above: Dr. Vanessa Owens sings "There Is A Balm In Gilead" to begin her keynote address at the event commemorating the 100th anniversary of the founding of the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls. Below: Guests assembled in the gymnasium at the former Barrett JCC.

Methods Still Resonate 100 Years After Founding Of Girls' School In 1915

As soon as Dr. Vanessa Owens began her keynote presentation by singing a heartfelt rendition of "There Is A Balm In Gilead," the 100 guests who gathered Oct. 28 at the former Barrett Juvenile Correctional Center to honor the memory of Janie Porter Barrett knew this would be no ordinary anniversary observance.

In late 1966, Dr. Owens arrived at what was then known as the Janie Porter Barrett School For Girls as an angry 14-year-old. Ever since Ms. Barrett founded the Virginia Industrial School for Colored Girls in 1915 to serve wayward African American girls, it had demonstrated an impressive record of success using a fraction of the resources available to its white counterparts. Fifty years on, Vanessa Owens would return to the same stage to sing the same song she performed as a teenager as part of her life-changing experience at the school Ms. Barrett first envisioned.

On the occasion of the 100th anniversary of the school's founding, Wednesday's ceremony paid homage to Ms. Barrett, whose work "influenced individuals, groups and institutions," according to Dr. Karen Ford of James Madison University who has studied Barrett's legacy. "Her accomplishments demonstrate the qualities and successes of a transformational leader. She provided a model of effective institution building in a less-than-ideal environment. She also showed the importance of creating a vision and advocating for that vision at the macro level. She had an extraordinary ability to pull others into the task at hand with energy and vision."



*Janie Porter Barrett
1865-1948*





Left: Del. Buddy Fowler (55th District) presents resolution commemorating the anniversary of the school's founding, and the 150th anniversary of Janie Porter Barrett's birth, to Dr. Karen Ford of the Hanover Heritage Alliance. Above: Dr. Vanessa Owens greets members of Bon Air JCC's Cadet Corps, who served as color guard for the event.

Even current DJJ residents understand the profound effect Ms. Barrett had. "Ms. Barrett is the reason African American females, myself included, can receive our education while incarcerated," Bon Air resident P.S. told the guests. "I appreciate Ms. Barrett because ... she never lost hope and continued to inspire people by helping and caring for the lives of others. She has given me the determination to want to become someone successful in life."

"I believe that if Ms. Barrett were here today, she would be pleased with the direction our agency is heading as we seek to transform the way we work with court-involved youth," said Director Andy Block.

COLORED BLUES

She projects thick skin with elastic heart
 For she will not break to anyone.
 She will show no weakness to her strength.
 The daughter of former slaves, a world so small.
 She calls upon her nature to reunite the soul sisters of color.
 Together fighting the obstacle to become one.
 Illuminating the mind to be free without judgment.
 Giving voices to the worn out minds.
 Voices that echo, "I am not my hair, I am not my skin.
 I am not my smile, I am not my past, but the heart within."
 From the roots to remind you where you are from,
 To the wings to show you what you can become.

- Z.B., Bon Air Resident



Above, from left: Rev. Dwight Fields, Del. Buddy Fowler (55th District), DJJ Director Andy Block, Deputy Secretary of Public Safety and Homeland Security Victoria Cochran, Keynote Speaker Dr. Vanessa Owens, and DJJ Residential Coordinator Joyce Holmon, who served as the event's facilitator. Right: DJJ Instructor Kathy Reed sang the National Anthem and the song "I Look To You."