



## **City of Fort Pierce Florida Highwaymen Museum Demonstrated Need**

A museum dedicated to the Florida Highwaymen artist is a project that is long overdue. As young burgeoning African American artists, these twenty-five men and one woman were denied the opportunity to market and sell their work in galleries and other venues that were afforded to their white counterparts. This rejection was solely due to a society that treated them differently because of their skin color. The structure of embedded societal racism forced the Highwaymen to market and sell their works from their car trunks, rather than via traditional outlets. Creating a space that celebrates the Highwaymen artists in their hometown of the City of Fort Pierce, is an esteemed recognition of the contributions these artists made to their country, despite the difficulty of being treated differently.

Located in the historically African American Community of Lincoln Park, an area that is predominantly low income, this project ~~also~~ responds to the need for people of color to have positive cultural influences in a region where this type of edifying representation is sparse. The creation of a museum dedicated to this group of prominent Black artists from the local community, would inject a level of pride and aspiration for future young, black artists and would serve as a catalyst for current and future redevelopment efforts.

The impetus for utilizing an existing city asset to establish a Highwaymen Museum was due in part to the authorization of a specialty license plate honoring the remarkable legacy of the artists during the 2020 Legislative Session. The city of Fort Pierce is the fiscal agent for the annual use fees from the Highwaymen specialty license plate, which may be used for the construction, day-to-day operations of a Highwaymen Museum and African American Cultural Center and funding art education and art projects in public schools within St. Lucie County via the St. Lucie County Education Foundation. The legislation also required that starting October 16, 2020, 3,000 pre-sale vouchers must be purchased within 24 months before the tag will be manufactured and available to Floridians. As of October 4, 2021, 98 presale vouchers have been purchased for the Highwaymen



tag. A year has passed, and 2,902 pre-sale vouchers still need to be purchased in order to meet the presale requirement.

In adherence to CDC guidelines and desiring to avoid the risk of transmitting COVID-19 to their supporters, potential donors and customers as the pandemic continued to ravage our beautiful city, the Highwaymen were forced to delay planned fundraising efforts and events to raise awareness about the specialty tag. This grant presents a rare opportunity for our community to create a first-class facility, to house memorable works of art.

Finally, there is an overwhelming to discuss the importance of caring for the mental health of a community in this current day of COVID-19. An abundance of research points to the positive impact of art on one's mental health. An article in *The American Journal of Public Health* (APHA, 2010), states that "...there is evidence that engagement with artistic activities, either as an observer of the creative efforts of others or as an initiator of one's own creative efforts, can enhance one's moods, emotions, and other psychological states..." (Stuckey & Nobel, 2010). The Lincoln Park community, like many lower-income communities of color facing economic and social challenges, would greatly benefit from the beauty of landscape art, especially when this art depicts the beauty of their surrounding Floridian landscapes.

**The Connection Between Art, Healing, and Public Health: A Review of Current Literature**

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