



NEWS RELEASE

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History Center Receives \$250,000 Grant to Expand Black History Gallery

(TAMPA, April 13, 2021) -- Tampa Electric and TECO Peoples Gas have awarded a \$250,000 grant to help the Tampa Bay History Center tell the more than 500-year story of the Black experience in Tampa Bay.

Funding will be used to replace and expand a portion of the History Center's permanent gallery space that will focus more fully on Black history in the Tampa Bay area.

"From Afro-Cuban cigar rollers in Ybor City to the Civil Rights era, Black history is currently woven into all of our galleries," said Rodney Kite-Powell, Director of the History Center's Touchton Map Library. "However, this expansion will allow us to go deeper and highlight even more voices."

The grant is part of Tampa Electric's and Peoples Gas' support of organizations and initiatives advancing inclusion and diversity in the community.

"Tampa has a rich and diverse cultural history, and those roots built the foundation for the Florida of today," said Laura Crouch, vice president of External Affairs for Tampa Electric and Peoples Gas. "TECO has a shared history, having been part of the fabric of this community since the 1890s. We are proud to make meaningful contributions to this community that help raise awareness of Black history."

The History Center has enlisted historian Fred Hearn to assist with the development of the new gallery space. Hearn has a long relationship with the History Center, serving on the museum's Board of Trustees from 2004 to 2008, and leading the History Center's Central Avenue Black History Walking Tour, which he started in 2017.

While final plans are still in development, the History Center's Kite-Powell is committed to bringing the breadth of Tampa Bay's Black history into focus and into the present. "We'll start with Esteban, who was among the first Africans to set foot in the New World, and go all the way to the recent discovery of Zion Cemetery, which was uncovered underneath the Robles Park neighborhood in 2019," he said.

One resource History Center staff will tap for the newly designed gallery is "Tampa Bay Stories," an initiative launched by the History Center in 2020 as Black Lives Matter protests gathered on the streets of Tampa. "It was a historic year by any measure, and we wanted to collect stories and artifacts that could help future historians illustrate what was happening in the city," said Kite-Powell.

Funding from TECO will be supplemented by the Lightning Foundation and a Hillsborough County Historic Preservation Grant, bringing the total investment to more than \$350,000.

“This is a major overhaul of one of our permanent gallery spaces,” said History Center President and CEO C.J. Roberts. “We opened in 2009, so after 12 years, it was time to revisit how we tell this story and see what we could improve upon.”

Work on the new permanent gallery space is scheduled to begin in the spring; History Center staff believes the project will take about one year to complete.

For more information, visit tampabayhistorycenter.org or call (813) 228-0097.

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Located on Tampa's Riverwalk, the **Tampa Bay History Center** includes three floors of permanent and temporary exhibition space focusing on 12,000 years of Florida's history and culture. A Smithsonian Affiliate museum and accredited by the American Alliance of Museums, the History Center includes the Touchton Map Library and Florida Center for Cartographic Education and the Witt Research Center, and is home to the Columbia Cafe. One of Tampa's premier cultural venues, the History Center's hands-on, interactive exhibits and theaters provide an entertaining and educational experience for visitors of all ages. For more information, visit www.tampabayhistorycenter.org.