Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

—DR. MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.
Sarah Collins Rudolph was 12 years old on September 15, 1963, when dynamite planted by members of the Ku Klux Klan exploded just inches from where she and four other young black girls were congregating in the basement at 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. The blast blew glass and shrapnel at her face, leaving her blind in her right eye, and killing the other girls—her sister Addie Mae Collins (14) and their friends Carole Robertson (14), Cynthia Wesley (14), and Denise McNair (11).

Rudolph spent several months in the hospital, missing the funeral of her sister and friends and the opportunity to hear Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. give the eulogy. She has suffered physical and emotional trauma from the horrific event and still has glass fragments in her left eye today. She also had glass fragments in her chest and abdomen for decades after the explosion.

As the only survivor of the incident, Rudolph is on a mission to tell her story. Many are familiar with the story of “the four little girls,” whose untimely deaths became a turning point in the civil rights movement. In collaboration with Wright State University professor Tracy Snipe, Rudolph has released a memoir entitled *The Fifth Little Girl: Soul Survivor of the Sixteenth Street Baptist Church Bombing*. The 406-page book is a chronicle of her life growing up in the civil rights era in Birmingham. It’s also a deep dive into Rudolph’s relationship with her family and the aftermath of the bombing. She imparts her views on topics such as the 50th-year commemoration of the bombing, restitution, and racial terrorism.

Rudolph provided testimony that would bring three bombing suspects and Ku Klux Klan members—Robert “Dynamite Bob” Chambliss, Thomas E. Blanton Jr., and Bobby Frank Cherry—to justice decades later. A series of trials began in 1977 when Chambliss was convicted of murder. Blanton and Cherry both were arrested in 2000 on murder charges and would not be found guilty until 2001 and 2002 respectively. Blanton, who was the last surviving Ku Klux Klan member convicted in the 1963 bombing, died in prison in June of 2020.

In 2020, Rudolph lobbied for and received a formal apology from Governor Kay Ivey on behalf of the State of Alabama for not doing more to prevent the bombing. She has also been seeking restitution as she feels the State of Alabama owes her something for a lifetime of pain and suffering. Rudolph continues to be responsible for a lifetime of medical expenses related to her injuries.
Regina Berry Meadows is a two-time graduate of Troy University, she’s the wife of Corey Meadows and the mother of Connor S. Meadows - a 6th grader at Opelika Middle School. Mrs. Meadows is a native of Montgomery, and a resident of Opelika for approximately 12 years.

Mrs. Meadows is currently serving as the Director of Circles Opelika, a Poverty Reduction Program in the Opelika Area serving low income individuals and families that have expressed an interest in changing their outlook on life and becoming self-sufficient. Mrs. Meadows is very interested in serving the community in which she lives, works, and worship. She is a graduate of Leadership Lee County, an active member of the PTO, a member the Junior League of Lee County, a proud member of the oldest Greek letter Sorority for African American Women- Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. and actively involved in her church.

Mrs. Meadows is relatively new to the work world of Lee County, much of her work life has been spent in Montgomery, until she accepted the position as Director of Circles Opelika in December 2018. She is extremely excited about being able to be more involved in the Lee County community in the years to come.

Tamarcus Milner is a resident of Opelika Al and two-time graduate from Auburn University Montgomery. He is the father of 3 daughters (Kinsley, Makena, and Kamarlyn). Mr. Milner is a member of the Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity Inc. and founded the Alpha Upsilon Lambda’s Chapter Mentor program and Alpha P.H.I.R.T. (Perseverance, Humility, Integrity, Respect, and Trustworthiness) while attending Auburn University of Montgomery.

Tamarcus has served as educator for over 14 years in the capacities of teacher, administrator, and coach. His educational path began while an undergraduate student in Montgomery as the Assistant Athletic Director, Head JV Basketball Coach, Head Varsity Basketball Coach and P.E. teacher at Taylor Road Academy. Upon graduating he served at Resurrection Catholic School in Montgomery as Athletic Director and P.E./Health Teacher for 4 years. After leaving Resurrection, Tamarcus was employed as the Greek Coordinator at his alma mater but was led back to Resurrection as a principal for 4 years. While serving in this role, he increased student enrollment by 10% each year, introduced Google Classroom to families before it became a statewide initiative. He also provided mentor programs for the students and initiated the school’s Summer Enrichment Program.

After leaving Resurrection Catholic School, Tamarcus made the decision to return to his hometown of Opelika to give back to the very community that molded him. Since returning to Opelika, he has served as a Lead teacher at Lee County Youth Development Center and Career Prep teacher as well as Assistant Head Coach for the Boys Varsity Basketball team with Opelika City Schools. He was recently promoted to Assistant Principal at the Opelika Learning Center. Tamarcus is also the President of the Curtis House, a resource hub for low-income communities in Opelika and surrounding areas that provides a variety of services (YPIT-College Pipeline Program, Seeds of Expectation Gardening Program, Free Legal services and others).

Tamarcus is a member of the 2022-23 under 40 class, recipient of the Auburn University BGPSA and Graduate Student Council’s Unsung Hero Award, the Community Liaisons of Opelika Outstanding Community Leadership Award. Tamarcus’ passion is giving back to others and says he is the product of the quote, “it takes a village.”
Our scholarship recipient from Auburn High School is Jeremiah Leon Woods. Jeremiah has a cumulative GPA of 3.68 and plans to attend Auburn University and major in Psychology. Here are some comments that his counselor submitted on his letter of recommendation. “Jeremiah is a bright, introspective, and kind-hearted individual. He has maintained a strong A-B average throughout his years in high school, which has earned him the honor of being inducted into the National Honor Society. He is also actively involved in church and school organizations. He wears many hats as a member of Lord Our Righteousness Church and is fully involved in the Auburn High School Key Club. Jeremiah is the type of individual whose abilities could easily be underestimated. However, to do so would be a mistake. Upon a deeper review, Jeremiah emerges as an individual with strong moral values, who is confident and self-disciplined. He displays a sense of maturity that is not often found in teens today. Jeremiah appreciates and is willing to take advantage of opportunities to improve himself. For example, he created and follows his own structured physical workout plans because he values being healthy. Most importantly, he is always willing to share what he has with others. I am very impressed with the young man, Jeremiah Woods.”

Our scholarship recipient from Opelika High School is Ashleigh Pitts. Ashleigh has a cumulative GPA of 3.02 and plans to attend a 4-year university and major in elementary education. Here are some comments that her counselor submitted on her letter of recommendation. “Ashleigh is an intelligent, capable, and personable young woman. She has shown tremendous character and quality, not only as a student, but as a member of the community. She has consistently impressed me as a dedicated student, responsible young lady, and a genuine friend to her peers. During her time at Opelika High School, Ashleigh has been an active participant in many clubs and organizations, including Lee County Young Leaders, Opelika High School Broadcasting Production (as an anchor), Key Club, Varsity Track, HOSA, and Student Council. Ashleigh is also very active in our community. She works with Ward 2 Academy, Delta Gems, Girls STEPs, Inc., and Christian Care Ministries, where she volunteers her time through tutoring, being a camp assistant teacher, community service projects, and helping families affected by natural disasters. During her “free” time, Ashleigh was able to start her own photography business, AshP Photography, which has given her great exposure to the world of photography, as well as experience in managing a business. Ashleigh carries herself with a sense of patience, pride, and understanding of others. Furthermore, she is a young lady who is determined to accomplish any goals with leadership and service.”
THANK YOU

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The Hotel at Auburn University and Dixon Conference Center
National Forum of Black Public Administrators, East Central Alabama Chapter

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