



Communities of
COASTAL GEORGIA FOUNDATION

PHILANTHROPY
BY EXAMPLE

by Valerie A. Hepburn, PhD, President & CEO, Communities of Coastal Georgia Foundation

He came to practice law in Brunswick because it seemed a friendlier place for a Black professional than Atlanta in the early 1970s. Growing up in Savannah, Orion Douglass was very familiar with Brunswick. His family had been coming to Selden Park for years, because it was home to the only public swimming pool in all of Southeast Georgia which was open to Black families.

In Orion's early years of private practice, he crisscrossed the region, dressed in his dashiki, to find clients and work with the NAACP. On a visit to Waycross, he had the good fortune to tangle with a young Georgia Power employee from Valdosta, Shirley Hill. They married, built a home on St. Simons Island, and have been part of the fabric of this community for more than three decades.

Not long after moving to Glynn County, Orion was appointed to the Brunswick Municipal Court. By 1992, with the support of the Glynn



ABOVE: Orion Douglass (back row, center) with The Fourteen Black Men; **OPPOSITE PAGE:** Shirley Douglass (far left) with members of The Links

County legal community and path-forging federal judge Anthony A. Alaimo, Orion L. Douglas had been elected the county's first African American jurist. He held that elected office, without challenge, for two decades until retiring from the bench in 2012. Shirley Douglass continued her work with George Power Company, joining her husband in retirement in 2014.

Philanthropy comes in many shapes and sizes. The combined philanthropy of service, charitable deeds and the guiding light of a moral compass is often far more important and beneficial than writing the largest check. Though they have had significant home commitments as the parents of a now-adult child with disabilities,

Judge and Shirley Douglass have thrown themselves into serving and bettering their community – and bringing others to that table.

In 1990, alarmed by the fact that of the 364 Glynn Academy graduates only 10 were Black males, then-attorney Douglass joined with other Black professional men to

form The Fourteen Black Men of Glynn. In those early years, each of the men identified and mentored a young male through their high school graduation. Many youth successfully transitioned to college, and some have now returned to fill the same leadership roles. The Fourteen Black Men of Glynn continue to provide significant mentorship and financial support for Torchbearers, an African American male leadership club, as well as the Boys of Summer intensive academic enrichment program at the College of Coastal Georgia for African American middle school boys.

As Judge Douglass, he saw first-hand the challenges for young people particularly those from

less advantaged homes and neighborhoods. He used both “carrots and sticks” to get folks back on a path to self-sufficiency and away from the criminal justice system. What was clear to both Orion and Shirley Douglass was that the community needed more opportunities to intervene and kids and families needed more support to help them succeed. They became active



volunteers, givers of time, talents and tithes, and they steered colleagues and friends to their causes, focusing their greatest attention on the educational needs of young people and those who have fewer opportunities.

Orion was an organizing chair of Communities in Schools and he co-chaired the United Way’s Graduation Blueprint Committee. He also serves as a board member for the area Boy Scouts Council and the College of Coastal Georgia Foundation and its Athletic Futures Committee. Shirley has been an active leader with March of Dimes, the local YWCA/YMCA and the American Cancer Society. She currently serves as Vice President of the Board for the Brunswick Chapter of The Links, Inc. Founded in 1946, The Links is one of the nation’s oldest and largest volunteer service organizations of “extraordinary women who are committed to enriching, sustaining and ensuring the culture and economic survival of African Americans and other persons of African ancestry.”

The Douglasses are also passionate about the performing arts and cultural programs. Judge

Douglass performs with various regional choral groups. He also serves on the board of the Coastal Symphony of Georgia. Shirley has served on the board of the Coastal Georgia Historical Society and was a member of the Planning Committee for Cultural Arts and Life Lifelong Learning at the College of Coastal Georgia. They are also active members of Brunswick Second Presbyterian Church.

Fiercely proud of their heritage, they serve as vocal advocates for equality of opportunity – across community, race and economic sectors. In that advocacy, the public and business sector has comfortably embraced his leadership; Judge Douglass was elected president of the Georgia Council

of State Court Judges and serves on the board of the Coastal Bank of Georgia. He has been showered with numerous awards, from the Justice Benham Legacy Award from the Gate City Bar, and the Distinguished Alumni Award from Washington University School of Law, to the Alfred W. Jones Sr. Award from the Brunswick-Golden Isles Chamber of Commerce.

Judge Douglass currently chairs the newly appointed Coastal African American Historic Preservation Commission. Its purpose is to preserve and promote the abundant African American history across the coast. Among Judge Douglass’ personal goals is the recognition of the historical and community significance of his beloved Selden Park and its return to relevance. He and Shirley, drawing upon their wellspring of long-time friendships and lasting professional respect, serve to bring focus and resources to issues deserving consideration and investment. By giving voice and value to causes that champion our community and our children, the Douglasses demonstrate philanthropy through example and lifestyle.



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