

# LOCAL&STATE

## Dunbar housing initiative derailed

Construction halted amid dispute with contractor

**Bill Smith**  
Fort Myers News-Press  
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

The slowly paced construction aimed at creating a community of affordable and market rate homes, in a city site known as Towles Gardens in east Fort Myers, abruptly shut down more than a month ago.

The building contractor pulled off the job claiming developer Robert Macfarlane came up short in payments for work performed on the site in the Dunbar community.

Macfarlane was not available for comment this week, but employees of his firm have said that there has been an issue with the contractor on the project and no construction activity has taken place for several weeks.

Phillip Springer, took his Easy Shell Construction crews off the Towles Gardens jobs because, he said, Macfarlane had failed to pay the construction company for initial site work for what was to become affordable, resident-owned housing for east Fort Myers, Dunbar and other communities in Lee County.

Easy Shell Construction is based in Sebring, some 75 miles from the Fort Myers construction site.

The company started its work on Towles Gardens by doing ground work on the project, including removal of an overgrowth of trees and performing other jobs to prep it for what is known in the building industry as “vertical” construction.

The company also built a core

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A makeshift structure stands on the property where the Towles Gardens apartment complex is supposed to be built. Work has stopped because of a dispute between the contractor and the developer. ANDREW WEST/THE NEWS-PRESS



Vice President Kamala Harris and Second Gentleman Douglas Emhoff pose for photos at an Eid-Al-Adha reception July 11 at the Vice President's Residence in Washington. OFFICIAL WHITE HOUSE PHOTO BY LAWRENCE JACKSON

## What did Naples chef cook at VP's residence?

21 Spices' Asif Syed and crew prepared feast for Eid-Al-Adha celebration

**Diana Biederman**  
Naples Daily News  
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Chef-owner Asif Syed of 21 Spices made his third return to the nation's capital, this time to cook for Vice President Kamala Harris at a reception earlier this month.

The owner of the East Naples restaurant cooked for an official reception recognizing Eid-Al-Adha, the second and the largest of the two main Muslim holidays. The July 11 celebration was co-hosted with First Gentleman Douglas Emhoff in collaboration with nonprofit El-Hibri Foundation.

Harris said the event was the first of its kind observance at the residence. When addressing her guests in the beautifully decorated reception space, Harris said, “There's plenty of food. My mother raised me right.”

The line earned audible laughter from her guests.

Sworn to secrecy but food was delicious

Indeed. Syed prepared a multi-course feast, including many passed hors d'oeuvres preceding the sit-down dinner. On hand to help: members from his 21 Spices culinary team and the residence's chefs.

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Nawaabi Paneer Tikka was among the passed hors d'oeuvres. ASIF SYED

## Fellowships fill social worker vacancies

Program at Baker Senior Center entering 2nd year

**Liz Freeman**  
Naples Daily News  
USA TODAY NETWORK – FLORIDA

Baker Senior Center Naples is tackling its need for social workers with recruits who know clearly what the job entails.

The first year of a new fellowship program that debuted last fall has wrapped up with two master's degree students who graduated this past spring from Florida Gulf Coast University.

The second year of the fellowship program is set to start in August.

The two students in the inaugural program have switched hats from fellows to enthusiastic full-time employees and that's mission accomplished

to Jaclynn Faffer, president and chief executive officer of the private, nonprofit organization.

The senior center has signed up 1,200 new members in the eight months since moving into its spacious new center at 6200 Autumn Oaks Lane in North Naples.

That's a testament to how the center's programs are filling a critical need for services for an increasing aging population.

It also means needing licensed clinical social workers who are not easy to come by, so establishing an in-house fellowship program as a training and recruiting mechanism became the creative solution.

Roughly 37% of Collier's population of just under 400,000 residents are seniors and the region remains a retirement mecca; the senior center doesn't anticipate any slow down in growth. It's membership roll stands at 1,800 after a severe drop during the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It is hard to get social workers in this area,” Faffer said. “It is very hard to get social workers who want to work with an older population.”

Some people have the impression that working with seniors is depressing but that's not necessarily true and it can be quite rewarding, she said.

“In some ways, it is a calling,” Faffer said.

The Baker center is the only human services agency of its kind in Collier County with 40 programs that are educational, social and wellness focused. The services included dementia respite support, geriatric case management and mental health counseling by licensed professionals.

Stephanie Cakov, one of the fellows who is now employed at the senior center, said she was interested in understanding and promoting age friendly environments and late-life

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# Fellowships

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wellness.

“Baker Senior Center was one of the first to fill that need in the community by offering so many services and programs,” she said in an email.

## How did the program come about?

Faffer, who is a licensed clinical social worker, developed the idea of establishing a fellowship program based on a similar program she did earlier in her career in New York.

She approached the Brookdale Foundation Group and its president, Stephen Schwartz for funding and secured a \$100,000 grant. Schwartz has a home in Naples and serves on the senior center’s board of directors, she said.

The Brookdale foundation, based in New Jersey, advances the fields of geriatrics and gerontology to enhance the lives of seniors.

Faffer hired someone to work with the future fellows at the center, developed course work that addresses a range of cognitive and aging issues, and hired an instructor.

The grant also covered providing \$10,000 stipends to the fellows who were working on their masters’ degrees at FGCU’s School of Social Work when they started their fellowships last fall.

“The fellows graduated this past May and started in their new jobs immediately,” Faffer said.

The senior center is gearing up for its next two fellows from FGCU who will start the second or third week in August.

“We have two who are ready to start,” Faffer said. “Word got around a little at FGCU.”

Before launching the fellowship program, the center had three licensed clinical social workers, including Faffer, and now is up to eight. The tally includes the fellow hires and a few other social workers brought in since the move in the new location.

Faffer sees a need for several more hires as membership continues to grow and the need climbs for case management services and for respite services.

Data from the U.S. Department of Labor Statistics shows a 9% growth in jobs for social workers from 2021 to 2031. The median pay is \$50,390.

The state Department of Health reports roughly 12,308 licensed clinical social workers are active in Florida yet the education doesn’t project job growth in the profession.

According to the website, Social-workguide.org, Florida’s need for social workers is expected to increase faster by

about 16% depending on the specialty.

“While the data does not specifically address aging and gerontology social work, given the growth of the older adult population in the U.S., it seems likely that this specialty will have strong growth,” according to the site.

## The draw for the FGCU students

Cakov, one of the two first fellows who finished in May, said the fellowship opened up to her how all the center programs operate, from case management to the respite care program, even the food pantry. It provided a well-rounded learning experience.

Some of her key takeaways is how large the need is in the community among seniors for support and service; another was the essential collaboration with the professionals from different backgrounds.

Through the dementia respite program, Cakov said she saw how socialization, engagement recall, and music have a positive impact on individuals.

“How engaging in discussions leads to those moments where everyone is fully engaged, sharing something that is meaningful to them, enjoying their time together and benefitting from the programs,” she said.

What also cannot be learned in a classroom is how the caregivers of loved ones with dementia are so thankful they have a place for their loved ones to come while they have a few hours of respite during the week.

The other fellow who was recently hired, who goes by Carpel as gender neutral name, said in an email that working at the senior center provided a renewed motivation and interest in working with older adults in a career path.

“It was through this internship that I was able to gain a little more insight into working with older adults, particularly those living with dementia,” Carpel said. “I could feel that there was an enhanced sense of compassion, patience and empathy that was needed to work with this population, and I was able to put that into practice.”

Carpel was able to learn of the challenges caregivers face on a daily basis.

“The experience allowed me to contribute to their comfort as well as offer them a sense of autonomy, and perhaps in some small way that made a huge difference in their lives,” Carpel said.

As an employee at the center, Cakov said her main role now is facilitating a group for dementia respite four times a week. “I hope to also support in other areas such as caregiver support groups and continue to enhance and grow services offered for those in the respite groups, and their loved ones,” she said.

# Black history

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“The new African-American standards in FL are good, robust, & accurate,” Donalds tweeted. “That being said, the attempt to feature the personal benefits of slavery is wrong & needs to be adjusted. That obviously wasn’t the goal & I have faith that FLDOE will correct this.”

Manny Diaz, the state’s education commissioner, tweeted in response that “the federal government won’t dictate Florida’s education standards.”

“This new curriculum is based on truth. We will not back down from teaching our nation’s true history at the behest of a woke @WhiteHouse, nor at the behest of a supposedly conservative congressman,” he wrote.

Jeremy Redfern, press secretary for the governor’s office, also jumped in.

“Supposed conservatives in the federal government are pushing the same false narrative that originated from the @WhiteHouse. Maybe the congressman shouldn’t swing for the liberal media fences like @VP,” a reference to a hasty vice presidential visit to Jacksonville last week in which Kamala Harris blasted the curriculum as one that “replaces history with lies.”

As the pushback grew, Donalds replied that “Anyone who can’t accurately interpret what I said is disingenuous and is desperately attempting to score political points.”

“What’s crazy to me is I expressed support for the vast majority of the new African American history standards and happened to oppose one sentence that seemed to dignify the skills gained by slaves as a result of their enslavement,” he wrote on X, formerly Twitter, on Wednesday evening. “Just another reason why I’m proud to have endorsed President Donald J. Trump!”

The new standards set r Florida’s African American history K-12 classes – specifically a line in the section for

grades 6-8 which says “how slaves developed skills which, in some instances, could be applied for their personal benefit” – has sparked criticism from beyond just Democrats, who say the instruction is misleading and harmful.

“This stance undermines the historical reality of slavery and the unimaginable hardships endured by millions of enslaved individuals,” the Black Conservative Federation said in a statement on Wednesday.

“Attributing their acquired skills as a benefit is an oversimplification and can obscure the true nature of their experiences,” the statement reads.

The Black Conservative Federation, a national organization that calls itself the “premier hub for Black conservatives in America,” warned DeSantis that the curriculum will alienate potential voters.

“In order to grow the party, the GOP must demonstrate a commitment to inclusivity, empathy, and an accurate understanding of our shared history,” the statement reads.

Redfern responded directly to Black Conservative Federation President Diante Johnson on X, saying, “Supposed conservatives in DC want Florida to commit to the principles of DEI. That’s not happening. Nor are we going to tell some politically easy version of history at the behest of false White House talking points.”

DeSantis, meanwhile, continued to defend the curriculum at a campaign stop in Chariton, Iowa, and took a dig at Donalds.

“So, at the end of the day, you’ve got to choose. Are you going to side with Kamala Harris and liberal media outlets? Or are you going to side with the state of Florida?” DeSantis asked. “And I think it’s very clear that these guys did a good job on those standards. It wasn’t anything that was politically motivated.”

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## Saw Palmetto - PROVEN Ingredient #2:

ProstaCare’s™ Saw Palmetto has been PROVEN to Boost Prostate Health by reducing inflammation and inhibiting the production of DHT (the unwanted hormone that makes your prostate gland enlarged, causing frequent urination, difficulty urinating, and weak urine flow). It has also been PROVEN to relax the smooth muscle in the prostate and bladder – so you can “turn on the pee faucet” and improve urine flow.

## Green Tea Leaf Extract - PROVEN Ingredient #4:

ProstaCare’s™ Green Tea Leaf Extract contains high levels of powerful, PROVEN antioxidants that protect against cellular damage caused by free radicals. These antioxidants have a protective effect on prostate cells and reduce oxidative stress, which can help ease frequent urination and urination difficulties. The extract also has PROVEN anti-inflammatory effects that work to reduce inflammation in the prostate tissue itself.

## Pygeum Bark - PROVEN Ingredient #5

ProstaCare’s™ Pygeum Bark has been PROVEN to boost prostate health by reducing inflammation and inhibiting the production of DHT. BPH is a condition causing frequent urination, difficulty urinating and weak urine flow. ProstaCare’s™ Pygeum Bark improves these symptoms by inhibiting 5-alpha-reductase, an enzyme involved in DHT production. This reduces DHT levels for overall prostate health.

## Pumpkin Seed - PROVEN Ingredient #6

ProstaCare’s™ Pumpkin seed contains essential fatty acids and phytosterols that have been PROVEN to boost prostate health by reducing inflammation and inhibiting DHT production to improve urinary issues in men (by improving bladder function and reducing prostate size).

## Nettle Leaf - PROVEN Ingredient #7

ProstaCare’s™ nettle leaf has been PROVEN to reduce inflammation in the prostate tissue and improve urinary symptoms in men with BPH. It also has been PROVEN to reduce levels of bad hormones – while improving

bladder function by reducing the size of the prostate gland.

## Lycopene - PROVEN Ingredient #8

ProstaCare’s™ Lycopene is a pigment found in fruits and vegetables, that has been PROVEN to have strong antioxidant properties to protect the prostate cells from oxidative stress and damage. It also has anti-inflammatory properties that have been PROVEN to lower the levels of hormones that are bad for prostate health.

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