

Expanding Florida Heritage: Preserving the Legacy of Cultural Changemakers

Project Overview

The *Expanding Florida Heritage: Preserving the Legacy of Cultural Changemakers* project, funded by a \$25,000 grant from the Florida Department of Historical Resources, aims to preserve and showcase the contributions of influential historical figures such as **Blanche Ely** and **Florence Ali**. Through **digitization**, the **development of educational material**, and **permanent interpretive signage**, the **project seeks to enhance public access** to Pompano Beach's rich cultural history while addressing key operational challenges.

Project Context

A 2021 assessment by the Florida International University (FIU) Department of History provided a comprehensive analysis of the Blanche Ely House Museum's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and challenges (SWOC). The report highlighted key barriers to the museum's ability to fully realize its mission, including:

- **Connection with Local Youth:** Younger audiences, including students, often lack awareness of the contributions of Blanche and Joseph Ely.
- **Community Engagement and Outreach:** Efforts are needed to bridge the gap between the museum and the broader community, including young people and other local institutions. Strengthening partnerships and engaging audiences through targeted programming remains an ongoing challenge.

These challenges collectively limit the museum's ability to serve as a sustainable resource for African-American history and education in the region. This project directly addresses these gaps, building upon the FIU report's recommendations to strengthen the museum's operations and expand its offerings.

This project draws inspiration from the *African-American Women Changemakers* exhibit, curated by Dr. Juliana Forero, PhD. (2020), which featured over 30 photographs of African-American women educators, activists, and artists from the Library of Congress Prints and Photographs Division. The exhibition raised important questions about the broader national and statewide contexts that influenced changemakers like Blanche Ely and Florence Ali. By exploring these connections, **this project seeks to enhance and expand the museum's role as an educational and cultural hub, fostering community engagement, inspiring future generations, and attracting broader audiences.**

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Partners

To achieve its goals, the project will collaborate with the following organizations and experts:

- Rock Road Restoration Historical Group, Inc.
- Local Historians
- Pompano Beach Historical Society
- Florida International University (FIU)
- African American Research Library and Cultural Center (Broward County Libraries Division)

These partnerships will provide the expertise, resources, and community connections necessary to advance the project.

Resultant Work and Deliverables

1. **Preservation:** Digitization of approximately 200 photographs, 100 historical documents, and 50 artifacts to ensure long-term accessibility.
2. **Education:** Development of educational resources, including historical narratives, lesson plans, and teacher guides.
3. **Engagement:** Creation of three rotating exhibits and installation of two permanent interpretive signs.

Budget Breakdown

This **\$25,000** grant does not require matching funds. The budget is allocated as follows:

Budget Item	Amount
Research and Educational Content Development	\$9,000
Artifact Digitization (200 photographs, 100 documents, 50 artifacts)	\$1,000
Create educational materials including a minimum of two lessons	\$1,000
Exhibit Design and Development (3 floating exhibits)	\$4,000
Interpretive Signage (2 permanent signs)	\$10,000

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Why Blanche Ely and Florence Ali Were Selected as Cultural Icons

Blanche Ely and Florence Ali were pivotal figures Pompano Beach. Their legacies reflect the city's commitment to honoring influential African-American changemakers and preserving African-American history. By actively reimagining their former homes as cultural venues, the City of Pompano Beach ensures their stories inspire future generations while serving as hubs for community engagement.

1. **Blanche Ely**

As a renowned educator and community leader, Blanche Ely's contributions to education significantly shaped the Northwest Community of Pompano Beach. Her home, now the Blanche Ely House Museum, stands as a testament to her advocacy for equal education and her transformative impact on local history. The venue celebrates her legacy through exhibitions, workshops, and cultural programs.

2. **Florence Ali**

Florence Ali, along with her husband Frank, was a prominent figure in Pompano Beach's commercial and cultural life during the segregation era. Her home and business, now the Ali Cultural Arts Center, represent a vital part of the city's history, serving as a boarding house for Black entertainers and the site of several thriving businesses. The venue now serves as a hub for artistic expression and cultural preservation, reflecting Florence Ali's dedication to supporting her community.

By managing these historic homes as cultural venues, the City of Pompano Beach Cultural Affairs Department highlights the importance of preserving African-American heritage while fostering community connections through art, education, and storytelling. These venues ensure that the legacies of Blanche Ely and Florence Ali remain integral to the cultural fabric of the city.

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About Blanche Ely House Museum

The Blanche Ely House Museum, reopened in March 2019 under the leadership of the Pompano Beach Cultural Affairs Department, is a historic site dedicated to preserving the legacy of Blanche and Joseph Ely, renowned educators and community leaders. The restored home now serves as a thriving venue showcasing the significant social and cultural milestones of Pompano Beach's Northwest Community. It is also an active cultural hub, offering diverse artmaking and storytelling workshops that connect the community with its rich history.

History of the Ali Cultural Arts Center

The Ali Cultural Arts Center, built in the 1930s, is one of the few remaining examples of early 20th-century architecture in Pompano Beach. Originally the home and business site of Florence Major Ali and her husband, Frank, the building was historically significant as the first Black-owned property in the city and a cornerstone of the thriving commercial district along Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Boulevard (historically Rock Road).

The Alis operated a barbershop and barber training facility while also running a boarding house for Black entertainers who were prohibited from staying east of the railroad tracks due to segregation. Legendary artists such as Cab Calloway and Louis Armstrong are rumored to have stayed there during visits.

In 2012, the Pompano Beach Community Redevelopment Agency purchased the building, transforming it into a world-class cultural venue with an expanded footprint, including a 2,400-square-foot addition and an outdoor concert courtyard. Today, the Ali Cultural Arts Center stewards the history of the Northwest district and serves as a nexus for musicians, visual artists, dancers, and spoken-word poets influenced by Black culture.

**** Black Box Theater COMING SOON!**