Local residents will be part of ‘History Makers’
National archive documents black experience

By KAT BERGERON
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South Mississippians easily recognize the names of Dr. Gilbert Mason, Bishop Joseph Howze, chemist Katie Booth, war hero Lanier Phillips and other distinguished black Americans who overcame the odds in the segregated South, but their stories are little-known outside the region.

That will change as they join the ranks of national jazz legend Ramsey Lewis, Sen. Carol Moseley Braun, Rev. Al Sharpton, activist Jesse Jackson and hundreds of other notable blacks taking part in a national archive called the History Makers.

Gulfport High was integrated, describes History Makers as “a collection of important pieces of history that otherwise may not be collected.”

Tartt and Rushing are two of six being interviewed by director-interviewer Larry Crow and videographer Scott Stearns. When they finish their Coast interviews today, they will head to New Orleans for two more days of recording oral histories.

Since its founding in 1999, History Makers has interviewed more than 400, but that’s less than one-tenth of the video archive the institute hopes to amass. A recent grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation has allowed the pair to travel across the country and to smaller communities like Akron, Ohio, Grand Forks, S.D., and Biloxi.

“We find interesting people everywhere we go,” Crow said. “This is America’s missing history, the people who quietly and not so quietly moved obstacles to make change.”

History Makers (www.thehistorymakers.com) was founded by Julianne Richardson, a Chicago lawyer. With her diverse background in corporate law, television production and cable television, she dreamed of using cutting-edge video and digital technology to preserve and make accessible the black American story. Universities, scholars, researchers and the public will eventually have access to the History Makers archives.

“We’re looking for the stories of the known,” said Scott, “but also the unknown and the unsung. They all are history makers.”

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