



THE HOLLER

SEPTEMBER 2023

**DOWN HOME
NORTH CAROLINA**

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For members like Keisha (left) and Chelsea (right), taking back Granville Street Park is just the beginning.



Member Jason with Taron Downey, who came up at the park, went on to play professionally, and now coaches basketball

MORE THAN A PARK, IT'S A COMMUNITY

Granville Street Park holds a special place in the hearts of community members like Keisha and Chelsea. It used to be a vibrant hub called "the Mecca", where kids and teenagers from all over Oxford (population: 8,628) would gather to play basketball, ride bikes, and hang out with friends. Additionally, the park has a rich history as the center of a thriving Black community during the era of segregation.

Keisha was born and raised in New York, but would come for holidays and summer. They went to Bible School together and speak the special language known only by childhood friends who can finish each other's sentences.

"We always had a sense of pride," says Keisha. "There was a real sense of community and making sure that the community was kept uplifted. People got together, they had meetings and it was a really nice place to be."

"This area, we had beauticians, we had teachers, we had educators, principals," says Chelsea Smith. "We had lawyers and judges that lived in this neighborhood. This was like the one stop shop area. My great-grandmother, Maggie Lewis, owned one of the first Black nursing homes in this area, and which is now in an apartment complex."

When neighbors needed a ride to work, Keisha's grandfather started a taxi service business with a 16-passenger van. Everyone just called it "the Big Green Van," and it was how folks without cars got to work.

"It's a rich history here," says Keisha Tyler. The two women grew up in the neighborhood together during the '70s and '80s. Chelsea's great-grandmother owned property in the neighborhood.

The two friends reminisced about the gardens people kept, how the roads used to be made of dirt, and there was even pig farming in the neighborhood.



Members Myla and William at the park

Continued on next page!



[STORY CONTINUED]

Kids would go house to house to collect scraps to feed the pigs. Everyone helped out and watched out for each other.

The city strips the park

During the '90s, the city of Oxford began to neglect Granville Street Park.

Oxford, like many cities and towns across North Carolina and the country, began to cut back on city services. Politicians reduced taxes on the wealthy and left local budgets unfunded, including parks.

With more drugs on the streets and unemployment rising, crime began to rise across the city. And rumors began to spread: Granville Street Park was dangerous. White politicians looked at this park full of young Black men and decided it was a public safety issue. Instead of seeing the park as a way to keep young people off the streets, "tough on crime" programs advocated cutting public recreation programs and instead investing in building prisons and locking people up. But was the park actually dangerous?

"It's just urban legend," says Chelsea. "We did have adult guys starting to come down and play basketball. And I'm not going to say there was never a fight or a pushing match or something like that, but dangerous? No. And the politicians and media just really played it up. I think it was just in an effort to kill the park."

So the City took out the basketball courts. They removed the tennis nets. The blacktop began to crack and crumble – and it was never repaired. Unlike the neighborhood's neatly kept houses, the park was abandoned by the City.

"They stripped it and they abandoned it in hopes that we would abandon it," says Keisha. "And that worked for quite some time. Mission accomplished. They did what they set out to do. We were kind of disenfranchised. They did what they wanted to do."

But the city didn't know who they were dealing with...

***This story continues online!
Read more about the chapter's wins by
scanning the QR code or
going to dhnc.info/blacktop***



Granville County Chapter celebrates their wins and the park's return!



It's Back to School, no thanks to Mark Robinson.

Back to School is an undeniably sweet time. Sure, parents make jokes about finally getting the kids back out of the house but the truth is we love the hustle and bustle of kids getting out their new backpacks and, nervous and excited at the same time, boarding the bus. At school, our kids will learn and grow, they will interact and cooperate, they will be introduced to new ideas and new worlds. It's the magic of learning.

But not everyone feels that way. Lt. Governor Mark Robinson is waging a war against public education in North Carolina and now he wants to be our next governor.

Teachers, parents, administrators, school support staff? They all say: No way.

UPDATES FROM OUR LOCAL CHAPTERS ACROSS NORTH CAROLINA!

PITT COUNTY

Down Home's newest chapter now has their first member! The small but mighty team is setting out to learn more about the community and what needs working folks have. Next up, chapter will be making connections at the East Carolina University involvement fair. *Contact Carlos:* carlos@downhomenc.org

PERSON COUNTY

Down Home Person County is growing—meeting folks where they are and building lasting relationships. Newly rebooted, the chapter has already led a Book Banning Protest at the Person County Library and done two back-to-school community events. Members are energized about the first ever Chapter Block Party on Sept. 26. Live in Person County? Come on out! *Contact Sam:* samantha@downhomenc.org

CABARRUS COUNTY

After working diligently to narrow down candidates and conduct interviews, Cabarrus members endorsed a slate of four municipal candidates for election in November, including member Jayne Williams. Members plan on keeping their achievements from the Evict Less, House More campaign alive by forming a housing task force to keep spreading the word about crisis financial assistance through canvassing and collaborate with resource organizations. *Contact Jasmine:* jasmine@downhomenc.org

What has Mark Robinson done for public education? Nothing. Zip. Nada. He has only attacked our schools, our teachers, and even our children since he came into the limelight.

- As Lieutenant Governor, Robinson has undermined public schools while ignoring critical needs.
- As Lieutenant Governor, Robinson used state resources to harass educators about so-called “indoctrination” in schools.
- Robinson has led efforts to censor educators from teaching the truth about our nation’s history.
- He has said he doesn’t think that basic subjects like science and history should be taught in North Carolina’s schools.
- He has called climate change, one of the most pressing issues affecting our children’s future, “godless junk science.”
- He has called for the State Board of Education to be eliminated.
- He wants to cut critical funding from our public schools in order to give taxpayer-funded vouchers to millionaires.
- Robinson has championed and presided over bills that threaten and endanger children who identify in ways that he is not comfortable— children he calls filth.
- If Mark Robinson had his way, our kids wouldn’t be returning to happy, well functioning and well funded schools — they’d be returning to empty library shelves, falling and failing test scores, and to classrooms that don’t feel safe or welcoming to all our children.

For us, that’s a no-go for Governor. Sorry, Mark, we love our kids too much to let you have more power here.

ALAMANCE COUNTY

The Alamance chapter has endorsed four candidates for municipals, including Beth Kennett for mayor of Burlington; member Dejuana Bigelow for Burlington City Council (she would be the first African American woman in that role); Quinn Ray for Elon City Council; and newcomer Tangela Mitchell for Gibsonville town council. Members have also been very vocal and organized around the toxic mold crisis shutting down county schools. *Contact Bryant:* bryant@downhomenc.org

JOHNSTON COUNTY

Johnston County has made significant strides by forming three strong committees: the PSS committee, focused on public education and holding the BOE accountable for providing teachers with necessary classroom supplies; the co-governance committee, which has been interviewing local candidates for municipal endorsements; and the organizing committee, which has been working hard to identify community needs and develop issue-based campaigns. The chapter has voted to run an issue-based campaign, which will be determined by members this week. *Contact Liz:* liz@downhomenc.org

EVENTS THIS MONTH

Find our events and sign up here:
mobilize.us/DownHomeNC

ALAMANCE COUNTY

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Thursday, Sept. 28

ASHE COUNTY

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, Sept. 19

CABARRUS COUNTY

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Thursday, Sept. 14

GRANVILLE COUNTY

Municipal Endorsement Meeting
Wednesday, Sept. 6

JOHNSTON COUNTY

Municipal Endorsement Meeting
Wednesday, Sept. 6

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Thursday, Sept. 28

PERSON COUNTY

Block Party
Tuesday, Sept. 26

WATAUGA COUNTY

Monthly Chapter Meeting
Tuesday, Sept. 12

UNITE NC Town Hall
Tuesday, Oct. 10

SCHOOLS

Public School Strong Training
Saturday, Sept. 23

H.E.A.L NC Statewide Call
Thursday, Sept. 28

Got something to say? Say it in The Holler!

The Holler is the monthly newsletter showcasing the work being done by Down Homies across the state!

Send us your updates about your chapter, photos, their opinion pieces about your campaigns and your community!

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THE SEPTEMBER SURGE IS HERE!



It's undeniable that parents and residents who support public education are in the majority— public schools are a huge part of our day-to-day lives. Our communities rely on them, not just for the education of our children but also as vibrant social centers for our towns and neighborhoods. Additionally, they are an economic center and engine, being one of the largest employers in many North Carolina counties.

Unfortunately, a well-oiled outrage machine was deployed into North Carolina late in the pandemic, fueling culture wars and attacks on public education. Often the loudest voice in the room, these groups began to dominate school boards even when they are a small minority. Fed up, parents and supporters are now organizing against this faux-outrage and to set their local schools back on track.

That's why Public School Strong teams in nearly 40 counties are headed to their school boards this September as part of the September Surge.

"I'm participating in the September Surge because it's important that we let our voices be heard and ensure that our school systems know that we are paying attention to the decisions they are making across our state," says Jenice Ramirez, the co-director of Education Justice Alliance and HEAL Together NC steering committee member, who is also a public school parent.

Do you want to get involved in YOUR county's September Surge and Public School Strong? Reach out to Isabell Moore (isabell@downhomenc.org) or Sohnie Black (sohnie@downhomenc.org) and they will get you connected with local organizing in your area!

Get daily DHNC updates at:

 DownHome_NC

 DownHomeNC

 [downhomenc3575](https://www.youtube.com/channel/UC3575)