

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

NAACP Champions Recognition for Augustus "Gus" Tart

February 2026 – The Okaloosa County Branch of the NAACP passed a resolution on February 9, 2025, formally recognizing and honoring Augustus "Gus" Tart, an influential figure in Northwest Florida's history. Born enslaved in South Carolina in 1840, Gus gained his freedom and moved to the area now known as Okaloosa County around 1864. He worked as a cook for John T. Brooks, one of the founders of Fort Walton Beach. In 1903, President Roosevelt granted Gus 135.5 acres of land under the Homestead Act of 1862. Gus' land covered much of what is now, the Town of Shalimar. A month before his death, Gus signed his will leaving his land to T.C. and Emma Brooks.

Gus Tart was renowned for his expertise as a fishing and hunting guide, his hospitality, and his relationships with prominent figures across Florida, including governors, congressmen, senators, and judges. His legacy includes significant contributions to the development of Garnier's Bayou and the surrounding areas, shaping the history of Okaloosa County.

The resolution, which was adopted by the branch on February 9, 2026, highlights the diligent research conducted by an NAACP special committee led by Ms. Diane Dillard, Mr. Statia McNeese, and Mrs. Kay McNeese; along with support received from the Shalimar Library and Mrs. Kay Brooks. Their efforts ensured historical accuracy and community engagement in recommending a State Historical Marker for Gus Tart's gravesite, located adjacent to the Shalimar Library Cemetery. The Branch has called upon the Town of Shalimar to:

- Formally recognize Gus Tart's historical significance
- Support the erection of a Historical Marker at or near his gravesite
- Collaborate with local organizations to pursue State designation
- Update the property description to reflect its historical importance
- Encourage educational initiatives and public recognition of Gus Tart's legacy

Additionally, a commemorative brick honoring Gus will be placed on the NAACP Legacy Walk of Fame at Chester Pruitt Park in Fort Walton Beach, further celebrating his contributions to the area. "Honoring Augustus 'Gus' Tart is not only a tribute to a remarkable individual, but also a recognition of the enduring contributions made by African Americans to the history and development of Northwest Florida. We are proud to lead this effort, ensuring that Gus' legacy is preserved and celebrated for generations to come" stated Sabu Williams, branch President.

Chartered on April 12, 1948, the NAACP, Okaloosa County Branch has been a steadfast advocate for civil rights, equality, and community advancement for more than 76 years.

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