

HEALTH MATTERS

Volume 3

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THE STORY BEHIND THE WRAPPED HOUSES

By Karin Hopkins, HEALTH MATTERS, Editor-In-Chief



If you've driven along Wright Street in Tuskegee recently, you may have noticed two historic homes sheathed in protective wrap. To some, it may look like a mystery—or even a sign of abandonment. But according to Bernice Frazier, Chairwoman of the Macon County Health Care Authority, those wrapped homes are actually signs of progress.

“The houses were wrapped to prevent further deterioration,” she explained. “From the assessment of historic preservationists, this needed to be done as we search for funds to fully restore the properties.” She emphasized that while restoration is the first

step, the vision stretches far beyond preservation. “The plan is to create a medical complex in that area, unfortunately it won't happen soon.” Still, the goal is clear—and urgent.

Central to this vision is the Thomas Reed Medical Center, a structure many locals may drive past without knowing its full story. “I don't know how many people know the history of the Thomas Reed Medical Center,” she reflected, “but it was originally built to be expanded into a small hospital. And that remains our ultimate goal.”

Con't on next page

Friends Are the New Superfood

In a world where people text more than they talk and some equate quality time with TV binge-watching; actual face-to-face conversation is becoming an endangered species. But research shows that chatting, laughing and connecting with real humans is as important to your health as eating your vegetables—and sometimes even more so.

Take your brain, for example. Socializing is like a gym membership for your mind. Engaging in lively conversations and swapping stories gives your brain a workout, sharpening memory and problem-solving skills. Studies even suggest it can lower the risk of dementia.

And let's not forget the mental health perks. Laughing with friends releases endorphins, those feel-good chemicals that make you forget your troubles, at least for a while. It's like therapy, at no cost.



Wrapped houses - *con't from front page*

The timeline is ambitious. "We would like to have it all done within 32 months," she said. "It won't be totally complete by then, but we will be well on our way."E

Despite the long road ahead, the Macon County Health Care Authority is committed to transparency and community engagement. Quarterly, the organization publishes this newspaper, Health Matters, to keep residents informed about health-related issues. "The board of directors is always about service to the community," she said. "We want people to keep watching and know that we are moving forward with intention."

Progress is already visible in some areas. Frazier proudly discussed the new mammography equipment that offers advanced 3-D imaging—an essential upgrade in the fight against breast cancer. She also noted that MCHCA funds the ambulance service in Macon County and provides space at the Thomas Reed building for ambulance vehicles and personnel.

So, the next time you pass those wrapped homes on Wright Street, know this—they aren't signs of decay. They're signs of determination.



LEADERSHIP MATTERS



The **Macon County Commission** plays a vital role in shaping health care leadership for the community, appointing the majority of members who serve on the **Macon County Health Care Authority (MCHCA)** Board of Directors. Those currently serving include **Chairwoman Bernice L. Frazier, Vice Chairman Noah Hopkins, Secretary Annie L. Brown, Treasurer Rhonda McCloud, and board members David Clinkscales, Deborah Ellis, Grover Fountain and Ben Rackley.**

The MCHCA Board expresses its gratitude to the Commission for selecting such dedicated and capable individuals to address the county's health care needs.

Leading the Commission itself are **Chairman Louis Maxwell and commissioners Miles D. Robinson (District 1), Edward Huffman (District 2), Elise Tolbert (District 3) and Jan Fountain (District 4).** Together, they provide the guidance and oversight that keep Macon County moving forward.
LEADERSHIP MATTERS

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Karin Hopkins
Editor-In-Chief
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SUICIDE A MENTAL HEALTH CONDITION

by David Clinkscales, MCHCA Board Member



Suicide is a major public health concern. In 2021, suicide was the 11th leading cause of death overall in the United States, claiming the lives of over 48,100 people. In recent years the number of black males and/or veterans attempting suicide has increased over 25%

nationwide. Suicide is complicated and tragic, but it is often preventable. Knowing the warning signs for suicide and how to get help can save lives. If you feel there's a need for help, please call the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at any time of day

Suicide is when people harm themselves with the intent of ending their life, and they die as a result.

Avoid using terms such as "committing suicide," "successful suicide," or "failed suicide" when referring to suicide and suicide attempts, as these terms often carry negative meanings and responses.

Suicide is the act of intentionally causing one's own death. Mental disorders (including depression, bipolar disorder, autism spectrum disorders, schizophrenia, personality disorders, anxiety disorders), physical disorders (such as chronic fatigue syndrome) and substance use disorders



(including alcohol use disorder and the use of and withdrawal from benzodiazepines) are risk... wikipedia.org

Warning signs that someone may be at immediate risk for attempting suicide include:

- Talking about wanting to die or wanting to kill themselves
- Talking about feeling empty or hopeless or having no reason to live
- Talking about feeling trapped or feeling that there are no solutions
- Feeling unbearable emotional or physical pain
- Talking about being a burden to others
- Withdrawing from family and friends

- Giving away important possessions
- Saying goodbye to friends and family
- Putting affairs in order, such as making a will
- Taking great risks that could lead to death, such as driving extremely fast

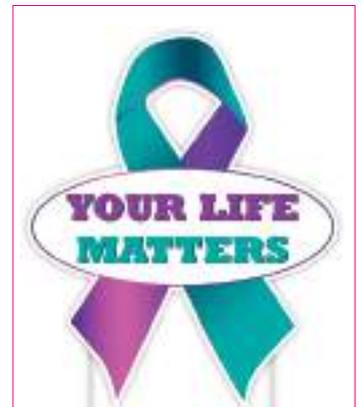
Other serious warning signs that someone may be at risk for attempting suicide include:

- Displaying extreme mood swings, suddenly changing from very sad to very calm or happy
- Making a plan or looking for ways to kill themselves, such

as searching for lethal methods online, stockpiling pills, or buying a gun

- Talking about feeling great guilt or shame
- Using alcohol or drugs more often
- Acting anxious or agitated
- Changing eating or sleeping habits
- Showing rage or talking about seeking revenge

Suicide is not a normal response to stress. Suicidal thoughts or actions are a sign of extreme distress and should not be ignored. If these warning signs apply to you or someone you know, get help as soon as possible, particularly if the behavior is new or has increased recently.



Good news, Help is just a phone call away: Call or Text or Chat the 988 Suicide & Crisis Lifeline at any time of day. Veterans can call 988 #1 and speak to with a fellow veteran. The Lifeline provides free and confidential support for people in distress, prevention and crisis resources for you or your loved ones.

Specialty: Psychiatry, Clinical psychology, Clinical social work

Risk factors: Depression, bipolar disorder, autism spectrum disorders, schizophrenia, personality disorders, anxiety disorders, alcohol use disorder, substance use disorder

Prevention: Limiting access to methods of suicide, treating mental disorders and substance misuse, careful media reporting about suicide, improving social and economic conditions.

Assessing Health Care in the Sister Cities

By Karin Hopkins | Editor-in-Chief, HEALTH MATTERS



The Sister City bond between Tuskegee and South Berwick, Maine took a major leap forward in June 2025. That's when South Berwick hosted its first-ever Tuskegee Day, celebrated with a fair featuring Tuskegee history and growth, kayaking on the Salmon Falls river, lobster dinner, ferry boat ride, community supper and an event honoring the 200th anniversary of the visit by General Lafayette who came to Maine in June 1825. That same year, Lafayette also traveled through Macon County.



As Editor-in-Chief of HEALTH MATTERS, I felt compelled to steer my attention in a different direction and look at health care in these two towns—separated by race, region and resources.

Let's start with some basic facts:

- **Distance:** 1,250 miles and 10 states apart
- **Racial Makeup:** Tuskegee – 94% Black | South Berwick – 94% White (Source: U.S. Census)
- **Geography:** Tuskegee sits in Alabama's warm, rural Black Belt | South Berwick lies in the colder Northeast near the Atlantic Coast
- **Connection:** South Berwick and Tuskegee formed a sister city relationship in 2017

HEALTH CARE

On the surface, the two towns are strikingly similar in one key area—neither has a hospital. Residents in both communities travel to nearby cities for emergency and specialty care. South Berwick residents typically drive 10 to 25 minutes to reach hospitals in Dover, Portsmouth,

Somersworth or Rochester. Tuskegee residents face longer drives—20 to 45 minutes—to reach hospitals in Tallahassee, Opelika, or Montgomery. Both towns have clinics that close by 5:00pm on weekdays and are not open evenings and weekends.

INSURANCE

In both towns, access to health care is heavily tied to insurance—but how that plays out looks very different.

In South Berwick, 97% of residents have private insurance. "It's great," said Amy Miller. "But my insurance costs a fortune, even with the employer contribution." Despite the cost, the safety net is strong: South Berwick residents are more likely to have consistent care, options for providers and the means to act quickly when health issues arise.

In Tuskegee, a majority of the population has health insurance. 38.5% is employer sponsored and many people rely on government programs; 26.8%, Medicaid and 8.8%, Medicare. 10.3% of Tuskegee residents have no health insurance. (Source: americashealthrankings.org)

"It's expensive—but worth every penny," said Magdalene Patton, who is among the Tuskegee residents with private health insurance. But for those who depend on public programs like Medicaid, there are often restrictions on where and when medical care can be received.

The gap widens when you factor in income. In a place like South Berwick, high household incomes can cushion the blow of rising premiums and out-of-pocket costs. In Tuskegee, where wages are lower and jobs without benefits are common, even the thought of getting insured can feel out of reach.



SAFETY NETS

A solid infrastructure—both medical and social—can make the difference between managing health and falling through the cracks. In South Berwick, insurance and other support systems are strong. Also, preventive health is integrated into daily life. Miller says, "I'm not a healthcare expert," but community matters. Dog walks with neighbors, gym buddies, and peer pressure for checkups—it all adds up."

All photos on this and the adjacent page were taken in South Berwick during the first Tuskegee Day celebration in June 2025.

Assessing Health Care

MEDICAL RESOURCES IN TUSKEGEE

While the Affordable Care Act (ACA) or “Obama Care” has opened doors for some through subsidized marketplace plans, barriers persist. Just navigating enrollment can be challenging.



Still, Tuskegee is not without health resources. The Macon County Health Care Authority owns the Thomas Reed Medical Center, a central hub for medical services. Inside the facility there are primary care professionals and medical specialties, including cardiology, physical therapy, 3D mammography and an in-house lab.

In addition to Thomas Reed, Tuskegee is also home to Tuskegee Quality of Life Health Care and Comprehensive Rural Health Care Network. These facilities play a critical role in meeting everyday health needs, especially for those who lack transportation or insurance.



Also, Tuskegee residents face layered social determinants of health—from high poverty and limited access to fresh food, to spotty broadband, which affects telehealth. Additionally, there is a shortage of local medical providers in Tuskegee and Macon County. As Patton noted, “The community has new industries, including manufacturing plants. The possibility of on-the-job injuries has created a critical need for 24/7 health care.”

For many in Tuskegee, the issue isn’t just about access—it’s about the fragile infrastructure surrounding that access.

SHARED DREAMS

Both towns want the same thing: timely, quality health care. But while South Berwick wrestles with issues in a system that mostly works, Tuskegee continues to fight for the basics. Also, Tuskegee, once a town with three hospitals, has been waiting for a massive overhaul of its medical system, since John A. Andrew Memorial Hospital closed in 1987.

QUINTESENTIAL PARADOX

As the sister city relationship evolves, events like Tuskegee Day serve as joyful reminders of what’s possible when people come together with open hearts. But they also reveal the invisible threads—like health care access—that connect and divide us.



A Woman's Guide: Power Moves at Every Stage

In Your 20s – Build Your Foundation

Say yes to opportunities but know your worth early. Stack your skills, protect your peace, and don't confuse attention for affection. Start saving—even if it's small. Travel, try, fail and learn fast.

In Your 30s – Define Your Voice

Cut the noise. Choose relationships that pour into you, not drain you. Own your career path or pivot with purpose. Prioritize wellness—mental, physical, and spiritual. Boundaries are not selfish; they are necessary.

In Your 40s – Protect Your Energy

Say no without guilt. Invest in health, wealth, and sisterhood. Reclaim the dreams you paused for others. This is your power decade—make it count with clarity and courage.

In Your 50s and Beyond – Live Out Loud

No shrinking, no settling. Mentor, travel, love boldly. Your wisdom is currency—spend it where it's valued. Keep evolving. Keep glowing. This is your time to thrive unapologetically.

Every stage is a season. Own yours.



Sweet Potato Pecan Crisp (No Butter, Low Sugar)

Serves 6 | Soulful, satisfying and diabetic-friendly



Ingredients

For the sweet potato base:

- 3 medium sweet potatoes, peeled and diced
- 1 tbsp olive oil or coconut oil
- 2 tbsp maple syrup or agave (optional: sugar-free syrup)
- 1 tsp cinnamon
- 1/2 tsp nutmeg
- 1 tsp vanilla extract
- Pinch of sea salt

For the pecan topping:

- 3/4 cup rolled oats
- 1/2 cup chopped pecans
- 2 tbsp almond flour (or oat flour)
- 1 1/2 tbsp olive oil or avocado oil
- 1 1/2 tbsp maple syrup (or monk fruit sweetener)
- 1/2 tsp cinnamon
- Pinch of salt

Instructions

1. **Preheat oven** to 375°F.
2. **Cook sweet potatoes:** Toss diced sweet potatoes with oil, cinnamon, nutmeg, salt and maple syrup. Spread on a baking sheet and roast for 20 minutes, until soft and slightly caramelized.
3. **Prepare, topping:** In a bowl, mix oats, pecans, almond flour, oil, sweetener, cinnamon, and salt until crumbly.
4. **Assemble the crisp:** Transfer sweet potatoes to a greased baking dish. Sprinkle the pecan-oat topping evenly over them.
5. **Bake** for 20–25 minutes until topping is golden brown and crispy.
6. **Cool slightly** before serving. Optional: Serve with a dollop of unsweetened Greek yogurt or coconut whip.

Why It Works

- **Sweet potatoes:** Full of fiber, vitamin A, and natural sweetness
- **Oats and pecans:** Give texture, heart-healthy fats, and crunch
- **No refined sugar or butter,** but still sweet and warm like a hug from Big Mama

Health Benefits Of Art

Public art can have a healing effect. It mends fractured spirits, honors forgotten voices and renews pride in communities longing for restoration. That's the vision Dr. Ronald McDowell carries for Tuskegee—a transformation exuding history, culture and creativity.

Named Tuskegee's Artist-in-Residence years ago, Dr. McDowell believes the city's walls and streets are waiting for color and texture; waiting to tell stories through art. He envisions murals and statues that not only honor the past but also nurture the spirit, offering residents and visitors alike a reason to pause, reflect and feel uplifted.

His proposition begins with a statue of Rosa Parks—born in Tuskegee, she is revered for her civil rights' contributions. She would be in excellent company on the list of potential honorees. Dr. McDowell wants to celebrate the Tuskegee Airmen, Booker T. Washington, George Washington Carver, Lionel Richie and others who have carried Tuskegee's legacy into the world.

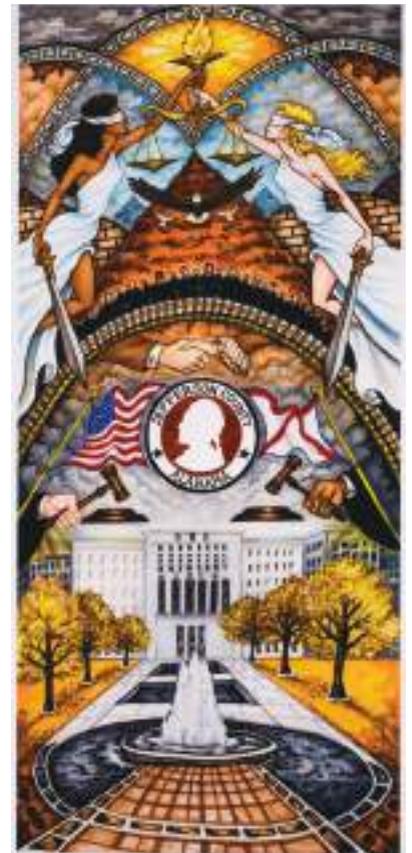
But beyond preserving history, he wants his art to help people feel. Research backs him up: public art has been shown to reduce stress, foster reflection and boost collective comfort levels. Public art invites moments of pause in a fast-paced world.

Dr. McDowell's past work proves this point. His civil rights statue in Birmingham draws millions who marvel at this tribute to a dark chapter of American history. His

monumental mural on gender and racial equity hangs in the Jefferson County Courthouse, a daily reminder of the long journey to justice and inclusion. The statue of Eddie Kendricks and The Temptations in downtown Birmingham has turned a park into a place where music, memory and healing meet.

For Tuskegee, his imagination has no limits—historic murals packed with Instagram moments. This strategy is designed to get individuals to share their images on their social media platforms—free tourism marketing for Tuskegee and Macon County.

To Dr. McDowell, it's more than art. It's a prescription for healing—written with clay, bronze, pencils and paint—simple tools that in his hands, create masterpieces.



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ADVOCACY & RESOURCES

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Bernice L. Frazier, Chairman
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334.552.1722

DENTISTRY

Tuskegee Quality Health Care
1201-B Notasulga Road
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.727.7211

DIALYSIS

Fresenius Kidney Care
802 East MLK Highway
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.727.9447

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Big Bear Discount Drugs
203 West Lee Street
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.727.6880

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202 West MLK Highway
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.727.6586

Tuskegee Quality Health Care

1201-B Notasulga Road
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.727.7211

EYE CARE & EYE WEAR

Bell & Bell Associates
302 North Elm Street
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.727.6247

FAMILY MEDICINE

Rhema Health & Wellness
Dr. Deanah Maxwell, M.D.
3805 West MLK Highway
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.226.1915

Tuskegee Medical & Surgical Center

301 Wright Street
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334.727.5900

Tuskegee Quality Health Care

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Tuskegee AL 36083
334.727.7211

PEDIATRICS

Prime Care Medical Center
Dr. Fazle Matin, M.D.
203 West Lee Street
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.727.7050

Southeast Pediatrics

Dr. Mollie Walker, M.D.
804 Crawford Street
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.724.0550

PHYSICAL THERAPY

Crain Rehab
301 Wright Street
Tuskegee AL 36083
334.725.1261

