

# She makes history her business now

NTP



Antoinette Jackson, right, talks to Suzanne Prieur at a meeting where Jackson's students presented research about Old Seminole Heights.

BRIAN CASSELLA | Times

## FAST FACTS

### Antoinette Jackson

**Home:** Old Seminole Heights

**Gig:** Anthropology assistant professor at the University of South Florida; her students have researched Old Seminole Heights, Sulphur Springs and Spring Hill. Next up is Wellswood.

**Hurdles:** Was one of the top six All-American 100-meter hurdlers in college. Her time qualified for Olympic trials, but a U.S. Olympic boycott kept her home.

**Motivation:** "I figured if I got through that level of sports intensity and achievement, I could do anything. That's always in the back of my mind."

ny as a "laboratory" of cultural research for students. She is shy about telling her age, but said in her younger years she was a college track star. She even qualified for the 1980 Olympic trials in the 100-meter hurdles, she said, but never competed because the United States boycotted the summer Olympics that year.

Today, Jackson's focus is on local history. Students gather diverse aspects of communities, Jackson's assistant Alisha Winn says.

"I think that's what really gets her (Jackson) is to see that all parts of the community are presented," Winn said. "It's one of her goals, to ensure that everyone's stories are told and then bring those stories together."

Another goal is to really engage her students in the learning process.

"That's the beauty of being an educator," Jackson said. "When students get the passion themselves — not just take what you've already done, but advance it and find more things they'd like to pursue. They get invested in the pursuit. That's what you hope for."

Winn said that's when they're no longer working for a grade. Through working with Jackson, she now plans to research her home neighborhood. And that Jackson takes as a compliment.

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## OLD SEMINOLE HEIGHTS | An inspired professor motivates students to look deeply into the rich life of the past.

BY ELISABETH DYER  
Times Staff Writer

Antoinette Jackson was a corporate type with an MBA and a cushy job with Lucent Technologies when a hobby took over her life.

She was in a canoe on vacation in 1997 off the coast of South Carolina, going to the site where slaves once worked a rice plantation.

"Those island plantations are gorgeous," she said. "Green and lush. Beautiful. But then it's packed with all this contentious history."

At one time, more than 700 slaves toiled on Jehossee Island, now a haven for birds and ducks

that feed on rice that grows wild. It was the second time she had taken a vacation to explore old slave plantations.

"In the middle of that, all of a sudden it was clear as day," she said. "I knew right then. I had thought it was a hobby. But I knew I had to tell their story."

Jackson saw that the slaves were much more than people who went about just "doing what they were told."

Growing rice required skills. Outside work, they had rich lives. They had families, social activities. They went to church. They had a sense of community.

Right away, Jackson applied to the University of Florida's

anthropology program.

"It grabbed me," she said.

The story of how enslaved people lived on the Jehossee Plantation became her dissertation for her doctorate.

"There's a lot to learn about people not giving up," she said. "We all have to do that. We all face obstacles."

Now an assistant professor in the University of South Florida's Department of Anthropology, Jackson passes these lessons and her passion for history to her students.

She does so by moving the classroom into communities.

Her students interviewed longtime residents in Old Seminole

Heights, Sulphur Springs and a small neighborhood south of Busch Boulevard and east of Central Avenue that was once known as Spring Hill. They sifted through old maps and computer records. They read old newspaper stories.

Their research is considered a field work project for the class. In time, Jackson's students will look into other historic Tampa communities.

They discovered how things changed when Interstate 275 divided these neighborhoods. They learned how life differed depending on your skin color.

Last week students presented their findings at the Seminole

Heights Garden Center to more than 30 neighbors.

One person students interviewed remembered how she didn't need to leave Seminole Heights except to buy "fine, ready-made clothing."

In a video interview, another remembered block parties with bonfires and how she woke her six children for school in the mornings by playing the piano.

They remembered how black people couldn't go to the dog track or swim in the Sulphur Springs Pool.

Jackson lives in Seminole Heights and said she chose the neighborhood for its historic feel. She uses the commu-