

Travel/Today

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PHOTOS BY ALEX BOERNER/SCRIPPS TREASURE COAST NEWSPAPERS

Courtney Perrine (left), 18, and Ty Lawrence, 21, discuss ideas for the next Youth Advisory Board newsletter after a board meeting at the Youth Transition Center in Vero Beach. The Youth Transition Center offers support for youths who have aged out of the foster care system. Lawrence lives in an apartment on the grounds of the center while Perrine lives off-site. Counseling and a life-skills program are among the resources offered.

A time of transition

New Children's Home Society center provides a home, and hope, for teens who age out of foster care

By **Christin Erazo**
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Most teens celebrate their 18th birthday testing the waters of adulthood, safely anchored by home.

But after troubled childhoods in foster care, Ty Lawrence, Jaleel Nugent and John Harrison were dumped headfirst into turbulent, murky waters.

Like many of the 800 teens who age out of Florida's foster care system each year, they were alone with no job, no education and no home.

They found refuge at the Children's Home Society Youth Transition Center in Vero Beach.

"Not everybody has a place to go when you age out, so you end up homeless," Lawrence said. "I didn't know what I would do in a homeless shelter. I came from a terrible background, but I always reminded myself there's going to be a change. Coming to YTC was a new beginning for the rest of my life."

The transition center, which runs on donations, opened in January 2010. In 12 months, it has been a safe haven for 50 young adults, including Lawrence, 21, and Nugent, 18.

According to the nonprofit society, 62 percent of foster children — almost 500 children each year — are unemployed when they age out of the system. One of every three of those kids is expected to be homeless within three years.

In 2007, Lawrence and Nugent were removed from a Port St. Lucie home because their adoptive mother was accused of mistreat-



Lawrence, 21, lives in one of the nine apartments at the Youth Transition Center in Vero Beach with his brother, Jaleel Nugent, 18.

ing and neglecting them and nine other adopted youths. Soon after, they entered Hibiscus Children's Center in Port St. Lucie.

Two months after entering the children's shelter, Lawrence turned 18. He was able to stay for an extra six months, then lived with a friend.

The brothers could have searched for a place of their own, but they knew they weren't ready.

They live in two of the nine apartments at the transition center.

"I came here out of fear of going out there and being alone," Lawrence said.

Since coming to the center in May, the brothers have learned job skills and everyday life skills such as doing laundry and budgeting. Lawrence is earning his GED, and Nugent is weeks away from graduating high school. Both plan to attend Indian River State College in the fall.

"You can't change the past. It's not an excuse to fail school, to be unemployed or to just give up on life," Nugent said.

Harrison, an outreach mem-

ber of the center, never had a real home or family before arriving at Children's Home Society.

"My mom was 13 when she had me and I was taken from her when I was born and put into state custody," Harrison, 22, said. "I bounced around from foster home to foster home. I never had an actual father, so I really raised myself."

The day he turned 18, Harrison was taken from a group home in Miami and dropped at the Children's Home Society in Fort Pierce.

Because the transition center didn't exist yet, the organization provided Harrison only a hotel room and meals for a few weeks. Without a job or friends, he soon found himself on the streets.

The opening of the center gave Harrison a house for eight months and a way out of the bad habits and circles he had fallen into.

"I thought I was my own boss," Harrison said. "Then I realized no one was there for me, to watch me, so I had to learn to self-discipline myself. ... The center provided structure."

YOUTH TRANSITION CENTER

The Youth Transition Center is funded entirely from donations. The annual Children's Home Society Designer Showcase is the major fundraising event for the program. The 2011 Calypso Palms Designer Showcase showcases the work of 16 local designers.

DESIGNER SHOWCASE

What: Daily tours of the 2011 Calypso Palms Designer Showcase
Where: 4169 S.E. Old St. Lucie Blvd., Stuart
When: 10 a.m.-4 p.m. Feb. 26-March 18
Cost: \$25 in advance; \$30 at the door; \$14 lunch tours (11 a.m.-2 p.m.; cash only) from the Osceola Street Cafe
Information: Advance tickets, www.lyrictheatre.com; sharon.lear@chsfl.org; 772-344.4020, ext. 231

Nine of every 10 teens who try to live on their own at 18, without help, fail, according to Matt Anderson, director of operations at the transition center.

Harrison, with help from the program, has moved into his own apartment, earned his high school diploma and landed a job detailing cars at Dyer Chevrolet in Vero Beach.

"I love my job and it feels good to be out on my own and making a paycheck," Harrison said. "I was always told that I was never going to be anything. This program reminds me that I'm not a screw-up."

Savion Glover taps into dance history with new show

By **Marilyn Bauer**
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Savion Glover is not a headbanger. He's a heel-banger — and toe and side of foot.

Anointed the "greatest tap dancer that ever lived" by dancer and actor Gregory Hines, Glover has gone where no tap dancer has gone before — bringing funk, attitude and quick-fire skill to the old shuffle, step.

"It comes from me. It is my energy," said the dreadlocked dancer who jangles and steps at the speed of light. "I can express many emotions and many feelings through



Tap dancer Savion Glover will perform at 7 p.m. Feb. 23 and 24 at The Lyric Theatre in Stuart.

dance. It is another way of speaking, of allowing others to understand music and appreciate sound."

Glover is bringing his "SoLo in TiME" show to The Lyric Theatre on Feb. 23 and 24.

The show, performed on a nearly bare stage with three tap platforms and chairs for the musicians, illustrates Glover's interest in dance history and the synergy he sees among

dance forms. In "SoLo," he brings the passion of flamenco to the stage.

"This production allows people to hear the dancers and music paired against or matched with flamenco," Glover said. "We are going to have a flamenco trio when I will be joined by Marshall Davis Jr."

Perhaps Glover's best-known performance and choreography cred came in 2006 when he played the tap dancing penguin, Mumbles, in the animated feature "Happy Feet." He also starred in Spike Lee's film "Bamboozled."

But Glover, 38, got started with rhythm and percussion as a child,

pounding out complex compositions on pots and pans in his mother's Newark, N.J., living room. At 7, he began taking dance classes at the Broadway Dance Center in Manhattan, where he eventually came to the attention of tap legend and Broadway choreographer Henry Le Tang.

Five years later he debuted on Broadway in "The Tap Dance Kid" (1985). His film debut came in 1989 when he co-starred with Hines and Sammy Davis Jr. in "Tap." The following year he began a five-year stint on "Sesame Street," and in 1996 he had his big break, starring in and choreographing the

What: Savion Glover
When: 7 p.m. Feb. 23-24
Where: The Lyric Theatre, 59 S.W. Flagler Ave., Stuart
Tickets: \$60
Box office: 772-286-7827
Online: www.lyrictheatre.com

Tony Award-winning "Bring in 'da Noise/Bring in 'da Funk."

A musical adaptation of the African-American experience from slavery to today, the show won multiple awards and won Glover Dance Magazine's Choreographer of the Year Award. Not bad for a 23-year-old hooper with size 12½ EE tap shoes.



HILLARY COPSEY

FEATURES EDITOR

Get in touch with nature at Oak Hammock

You readers are a helpful bunch.

Since asking in January for places to visit, I've collected a whole list of suggestions. Thanks to you, I've stuck to my New Year's resolution to visit a new corner of the Treasure Coast each month.

Two months in, two places down.

I hiked Hawk's Bluff in Jensen Beach in January, and this month my family and I hung out in Oak Hammock Park in Port St. Lucie.

The park was suggested by Port Salerno resident Richard Mortensen. He also is the naturalist on the Port St. Lucie Parks and Recreation staff who tends Oak Hammock Park.

"It's a true biogem, 50 acres of tropical forest with two miles of trails winding through huge pines and 200-year-old live oaks," Mortensen wrote in a January e-mail.

I can't verify the ages of those oaks, but I can vouch that Oak Hammock is a gem.

We saw the towering pines and canopy of the park long before we found the entrance, which is tucked away on Villanova Road. Oak Hammock is about 20 minutes west of U.S. 1, off California Boulevard, deep in sprawling Port St. Lucie.

"It has plants and animals that don't exist anywhere else in the city," Mortensen said.

We took Leafy Road to get to the park. It's an appropriate name. I like our neighborhood off Green River Parkway, but was envious of the trees shading the houses backing up to Oak Hammock.

Last Sunday was a gorgeous February in Florida day: crisp air and blue skies. We weren't the only ones enjoying it.

Several fishermen put in boats on the C-24 Canal, which runs alongside Oak Hammock. A barefoot water-skier — Mortensen said they're common on the canal — fascinated my preschooler. A handful of dogs, out for walks along the canal path with their owners, elicited excited squeals from my toddler. Before we left, we joined a couple of families making use of the playground.

But first, we strolled through the hammock on a wide path created by Mortensen just after the park opened in 2000. Sun filtered through the trees, and our feet slipped on slick pine needles.

The only wildlife we spotted were the migrating robins, red bellies flashing, but Mortensen said the park often attracts hawks, ospreys and swallow-tailed kites. Occasionally, he's spotted gray foxes, bobcats and deer.

We left making plans to drive back across the city to Oak Hammock soon, one weekend morning. My husband can run the trails while I sip coffee and watch the kids play.

Maybe we'll see you there. And if not, where will you be?

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