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**Dress to Impress
& Ready for Success**

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Best Selling Author Farrah Rochon Debuts New Book 'Almost There' at Baldwin & Co.



Edgard, LA, Author Farrah Rochon prepares for a book signing in Baldwin & Co.

Jasmine Christopher
Data News Weekly Contributor

Black mothers and their young daughters stood patiently in line as the soundtrack to “The Princess

and the Frog” played throughout Baldwin & Co. They were waiting for a chance to meet Farrah Rochon, the author of the newest novel in Disney’s Twisted Tale Series that stars Princess Tiana.

Rochon, who is an Edgard, LA native, is a two-time

finalist for Romance Writers of America’s RITA Award. Having written over 25 Adult Romance novels, “Almost There” is her debut in the world of young adult books.

The book signing was held on Sept. 11, 2022, at Baldwin & Co., a bookstore and coffee shop on Elysian

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DATA NEWS WEEKLY

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Cover Story, Continued from page 2.

Fields Avenue.

"I love just being able to support Black-owned businesses, and of course, a Black Indie Bookstore," Rochon said.

"When it came time to do a book launch, I knew I wanted to have it here."

Monica Kelley, the owner of the pop-up bookstore The Roaming Bookstar, shared her story and Princess Tiana's importance with Rochon.

"When they announced that it was being released on our [Kelley's and her husband's] anniversary, we just happened to be in Disney World that year celebrating our five-year anniversary, so we were able to see the movie on the premiere day, which was just fantastic," Kelley said.

Kelley and the other attendees' excitement was apparent when Baldwin & Co. ran out of books shortly after the event began and had to go to other bookstores to pick up extra copies.

Many supporters of the original film who attended the event asked questions during the Book-Talk portion of the event about Rochon's writing process – specifically how she detailed what life would have been like for a Black woman in the 1920s.

Rochon said she did this by showing the difference between Charlotte and Tiana's characters.

"Charlotte's eyes are opened," Rochon said. Unlike Tiana, "She is just this very self-indulgent type, you know, person...her eyes are opened to the world."

Rochon also shared that she used her book as a chance to correct some of the mistakes made in the original movie concerning Voodoo and, more specifically, Haitian Vodou. She worked alongside a Professor at Rutgers University,

known to her as the "authority" on the practice to portray it more accurately and respectfully.

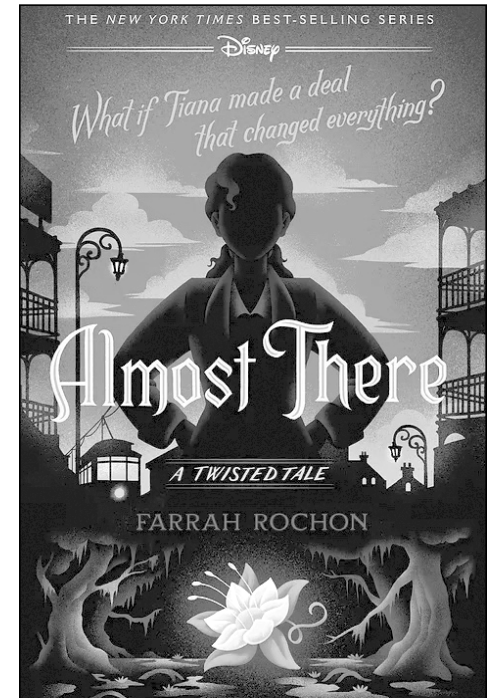
Disney may own this story, but Rochon's extension of Tiana's world is a story written for us, by us, the author said.

One 12-year-old, Landrii Thomas, and her mother, Kerri Landry-Thomas, were among the many mother-daughter pairs who attended the event and who shared how they were impacted by Tiana's original story.

"I grew up with Princess Tiana, and as a young Black female, she was a big inspiration to me," Landrii said.



Young Adult Author Farrah Rochon gives Princess Tiana an alternate ending in her new novel "Almost There."



Almost There, the new book by bestselling author Farah Rochon.



Baldwin and Co. runs out of books due to the large turnout at the book signing but gets additional copies from other bookstores.

State & Local News

JOB 1 Celebrates Workforce Development Month

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JOB1 is hosting a Workforce Development Expo to connect the citizens of New Orleans with local community resource partners, employers, and job skills training

programs in preparation for the fall season.

The expo will take place on Saturday, September 24, 2022, from 10:00 am to 1:00 pm at Booker T. Washington High School Gym, located at 1201 S. Roman Street.

For more information or to register, please visit www.job1nola.org

JOB1 WORKS
GET CONNECTED

WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT EXPO
Saturday, September 24th
10 am - 1 pm
Booker T. Washington High School Gymnasium
1201 S. Roman Street

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Dress to Impress & Ready for Success



Tracee Dundas
Fashion Stylist

Dress for Success, nonprofit organization and Crescent City Chapter of Links, Inc. teamed together to provide a pop-up boutique at Southern University of New Orleans during their Career Resource Fair.

The Career Resource Fair was a networking opportunity for students to submit their resumes and meet with potential employers for fulltime, part-time and intern positions. Vonda Taplin, Associate Director for Career Services Coordinator of the Fall Resource Fair indicated that there were over 40 business participants at the annual event. She recognizes the importance of the students making a great and lasting first impression in front of these potential employers "You don't get a second chance to make a first impress. Once it's done, well it's done," said Taplin.

Research says, when you first meet someone, it takes less than three seconds to form an opinion about that person. Therefore, you must be conscious of your dress, actions, and attitude as they will convey a particular image to that potential employer.

Taplin reached out to Tracy Stewart of Crescent City Chapter of Links, Inc. Stewart a graduate of HBCU, Southern Baton Rouge quickly put a plan into action and with the assistance of Dress for Success New Orleans came up with the idea to host a Career Pop-Up Shop where students could stop by and receive a personal styling consultation as well as be gifted with a professional interview outfit. "The end goal is to create a campus closet to provide job-ready professional attire that will give them [students] that confidence needed when walking into that interview," said Tracy Stewart.

Fashion Editor: Tracee Dundas | @fashionablyyoursnola

Photographer for Professional Headshots: Samuel J. Myers



Team Work Effort with Tracy Stewart, Vonda Taplin, SUNO Students wearing outfits by Dress for Success. Also pictured, Nadine Brown, Dress for Success President & Member of Crescent City Chapter of Links.



SUNO students styled in professional attire provided by Dress for Success.



Students professional headshots taken by Photographer Samuel J Myers

Visit www.ladatanews.com for more photos from these events.

Taking Back Your Divine Power



Diva Dionne Character
Female Empowerment
Columnist

Many of us are walking around broken from past relationships living half-empty lives carrying heavy boulders on our beautiful shoulders wondering why things are not flowing accordingly through our existence here on earth. We are disgruntled and angry with the world remaining in constant aggravation because we are holding on to things and people who have let us down somewhere in our childhood lives.

Today, let us recognize that until we write these wrongs, things will continue to stack up higher and higher in our lives as our growth will continue being blocked by old memories and traumas. Yes, you have been hurt and maybe



shamed but you can use these things as ammunition to make you a stronger woman, mother, and a best friend as you allow yourself to grow in healing.

Use this time as an awakening and start writing healing letters to yourself

or to those who have harmed you as these people are living their lives and maybe have no idea that they've done you any harm. Take back your power today by simply acknowledging that you have been hurt, you have been let



down and use that energy to heal yourself, so that you can free your spirit in knowing that you have survived and start taking back your divine power.

Dionne Character can be reached at www.characterhollywood.com

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Congressman Troy Carter Hosts High School Congressional Essay Contest Winner in Washington, D.C.

Data News Staff Edited Report

WASHINGTON, D.C. — Last week, Congressman Troy A. Carter, Sr. hosted his High School Congressional Essay Contest Winner and her mother in Washington, D.C. A junior at Arden Hill Academy in New Orleans, Sydnee Ragas' essay won first place in the Congressman's Inaugural Essay Contest during Black History Month. In response to the essay's prompt about creating a new dream for the future, Ms. Ragas wrote about America's changing understanding of equality in America.

"I was so thrilled to have Sydnee Ragas, our 2022 Essay Contest Winner, join me on Capitol Hill yesterday," said Congressman Carter. "A young, talented, and bright individual, she represents the spirit of Louisiana's



Sydnee Ragas (daughter), Mrs. Chandra LeBeaux-Ragas (mother) pictured with U.S. Congressman Troy A. Carter.

Second Congressional District. Sydnee, we are so proud of you and look forward to all of your accomplishments!"

During her day at the Capitol, Congressman Carter presented her with a Celebratory Certificate, gave her a tour, and introduced



Sydnee Ragas, winner of the High School Congressional Essay Contest was in Washington D.C. last week as the special guest of Congressman Troy A. Carter, Sr.

her to members of the Congressional Black Caucus.

Since winning the Congressman's Essay Contest, Ms. Ragas

has also appeared on WBOK Radio and submitted a letter to the editor to The Advocate on reproductive rights.

State & Local News

Dress for Success New Orleans Partners with AARP Foundation to Offer FREE Digital Skills Classes

Data News Staff Edited Report

Dress for Success New Orleans in partnership with AARP Foundation has introduced a series of Digital Skills Ready@50+™ workshops that will focus on the digital essentials to help seniors find and secure a job, change careers, explore entrepreneurship, or just become more tech savvy in a digital world.

Older workers with more digital skills have significantly higher earnings than those with fewer skills. AARP Foundation, through a generous grant from Google.org, launched the Digital Skills Ready@50+™ Initiative to provide digital skills training to people over 50 living with low income, with a focus on women and people of color. However, the program is open to everyone and at no cost.

Although DFSNO serves women entering and returning to the workforce, the Digital Skills Ready @50+ is open to both men and women.

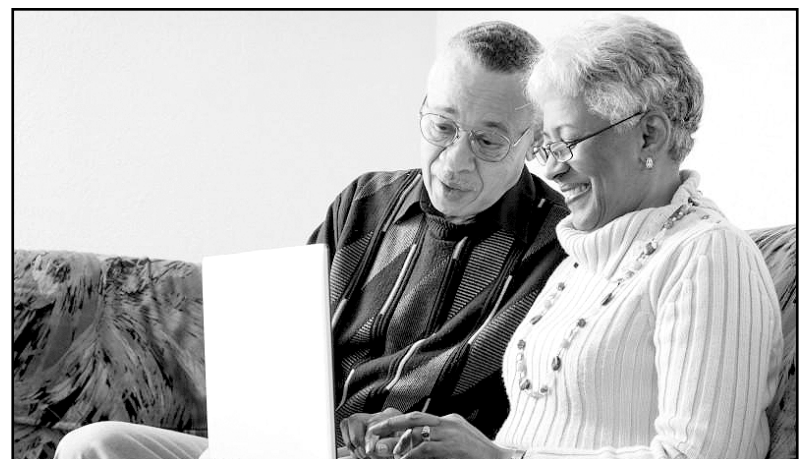


"We are thrilled to add Digital Skills Ready's valuable curriculum to our continuum of free services as technology is not just at work but a part of daily life. Digital skills can empower users to navigate this digital world more confidently," said Lori Byargeon, Executive Director for Dress for Success New Orleans.

The world is changing fast and so is technology! Therefore, it is important to stand out in a competitive labor market and stay ahead of the

curve by sharpening digital skills. The curriculum by Older Adults Technology Services (OATS) offers foundational digital courses, like Computer Basics and Workplace Productivity. Additional topics will range from Finding Information Online to Using Job Search Engines.

Sessions are taking place now through November 15th. Included is the complete schedule and description of upcoming sessions.



Participants can attend in person at DFSNO's Capital One Career Center located at 1700 Josephine Street, Suite 101 or participate virtually via zoom. Registration at dfsneworleans.org is required for all participants. Following the session, the participants will have additional hands-on training with the in-class instructor, followed by a complimentary personal suiting with a DFSNO stylist for those women interested.

Dress for Success New Orleans

is a local nonprofit organization, volunteer driven organization that works with over 50 New Orleans agencies to identify women who, with a hand up, not a handout, can gain employment and economic independence. Through tailored programs and a continuum of services, DFSNO serves hundreds of women annually as they transition from being unemployed and searching, to recently. Visit www.dfsneworleans.org for more information.

Fundraiser Tops \$300K for Teen Sentenced for Killing her Rapist

Stacy M. Brown NNPA
Newswire Senior National
Correspondent

Pieper Lewis had never known freedom and had never enjoyed the support and guidance necessary for children to succeed.

The 17-year-old child trafficking victim who murdered her rapist and tormentor pleaded guilty to voluntary manslaughter and willful injury for stabbing to death Zachary Brooks, 37, who authorities admitted raped her multiple times in 2020 when she was 15.

Brooks, whom prosecutors acknowledged purchased Pieper from a sex-trafficking ring, repeatedly drugged and beat the young teen.

Polk County District Judge David Porter sentenced Pieper to five years of supervised probation and ordered her to pay \$150,000 restitution to the man's family.

The judge said Iowa law required the \$150,000 restitution to the dead man's family and \$4,000 to the state.

"The court is cognizant that you and your supporters will be frustrated with the imposition of the \$150,000 in restitution to Mr. Brooks' estate," Porter, a Black man, told Pieper. "This court is presented with no other option, other than which is dictated by the law of this state."

He also told Pieper that she's to refrain from getting into any trouble. Otherwise, he'd impose a 20-year prison sentence.

However, if she meets the conditions of her sentence, the court could expunge Pieper's record.

In court, Pieper spoke about overcoming her challenging situation.

"My spirit has been burned but still glows through the flames," she read from a prepared statement. "Hear me roar, see me glow, and watch me grow. I am a survivor."

While support for Pieper had been elusive – she was raised in foster care and shipped from home to home – her high school math teacher has stepped in to offer what



In court, Pieper Lewis spoke about overcoming her challenging situation. "My spirit has been burned but still glows through the flames," she read from a prepared statement. "Hear me roar, see me glow, and watch me grow. I am a survivor."

no one had ever done.

Leland Schipper started a Go Fund Me for Pieper to help offset the cost of the \$150,000 judgment and to help her restart her life.

"Today, my former student, Pieper Lewis, bravely took the microphone during her sentencing hearing and told the courtroom that her voice mattered," Schipper wrote on the fundraising site. "I was incredibly proud of her. She was powerful, and she brought me to tears."

Schipper said Pieper, who had already spent nearly three years in juvenile detention awaiting trial, did not deserve to spend time in an adult prison.

"Instead, the judge gave her five years of probation. He decided that 834 days she spent in juvenile detention awaiting her sentencing was enough 'punishment' for a then fifteen-year-old girl who had been kicked out of her home and found herself sleeping in the stairwell of one of the most dangerous apartment complexes in Des Moines," the math teacher asserted.

"As a girl that was ultimately preyed upon by men twice her age who traded her body for drugs.

These men physically assaulted, raped, and sex trafficked Pieper on multiple occasions. Finally, on June 1st, 2020, Pieper snapped and killed one of the men who exploited and raped her, stabbing him to death."

The fundraiser has netted more than \$325,000 to date, and Schipper called her sentence a "compassionate outcome."

"Pieper only found herself in this situation because she was initially charged as an adult with 1st-degree murder.

However, DMPD and the Polk County prosecutor's office saw Pieper immediately as a grown, violent, adult, murderer, and they charged her as such," Schipper stated.

"Only because a team of amazing people came to Pieper's side was her story truly heard and understood. However, with the risk of life in prison looming, Pieper pled guilty to charges of manslaughter and willful injury.

"This was to avoid a risky trial where her team feared an Iowa jury may implicitly struggle to see a young Black girl as the victim of sex trafficking that she was."

Like many who've reacted to the restitution part of her sentence,

Schipper asserted that Pieper "does not owe that man's family justice."

"Pieper does not deserve to be financially burdened for the rest of her life because the state of Iowa wrote a law that fails to give judges any discretion as to how it is applied," he said.

"This law doesn't make sense in many cases, but in this case, it's morally unjustifiable. A child who was raped, under no circumstances, should owe the rapist's family money."

Schipper also noted that the judge ordered Pieper to perform several hundred hours of community service each year, do routine drug testing, and attend therapy.

"Pieper's path to true freedom will not be easy, and she is still a teenager that has experienced a lot of traumas," Schipper stated.

He noted that she desires to attend college, create art, and advocate for other sex trafficking victims.

"Our system is broken. It will take decades of advocacy and electing people committed to rethinking and reimagining our criminal justice system, especially our juvenile one, to fix the system," Schipper said.

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Data News Weekly, "The People's Paper," is looking for freelance writers to join our team print and digital team. We need writers who can cover New Orleans news stories, ranging from local high school sports, community events, City Hall and entertainment. Experience in print is necessary, experience in digital and social media are encouraged.

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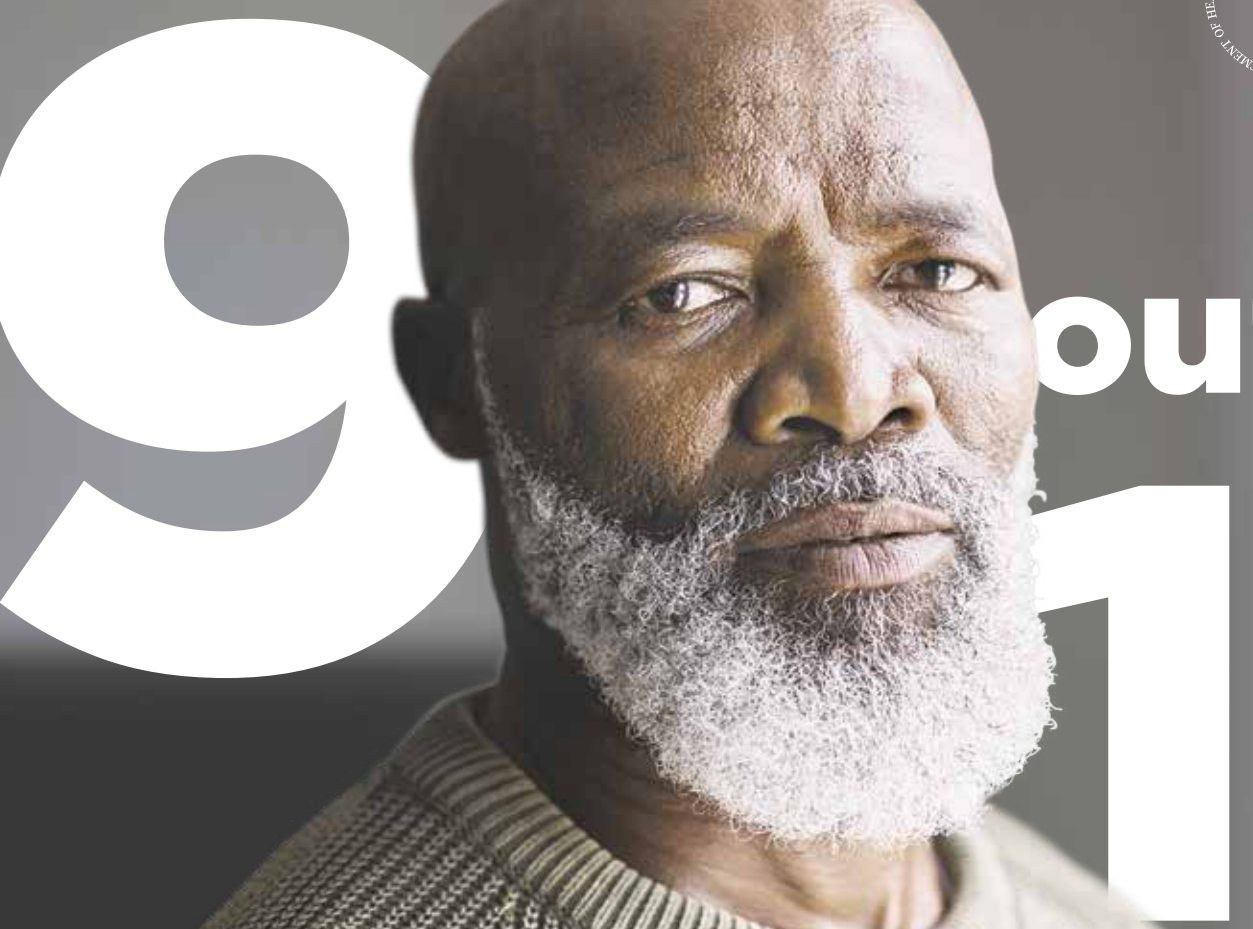
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9 out of 10

9 OUT OF 10 COVID DEATHS IN THE U.S. WERE PEOPLE 50 AND OLDER.

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