



New credit union and more among economic initiatives planned by Black sorority Alpha Kappa Alpha in Orlando and beyond

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ORLANDO, FL (Aug 2, 2022) – An Orlando native, Tiffany Moore Russell, has been named the South Atlantic regional director of Alpha Kappa Alpha, one of the largest Black sororities in the nation — and she plans to increase the group’s economic and community impact in Central Florida and elsewhere.

Initiatives include launching a Black women-led digital banking institution, funding HBCU endowments and more.

For starters, AKA wants to release its own digital banking institution, For Members Only Federal Credit Union. It will be the first Black-led, woman-owned and sorority-led digital banking organization in the U.S., according to the sorority’s website. “To be able to have an online mobile digital banking system owned by Black women is huge because it promotes Black wealth. It promotes Black dollars,” she said.

The Orlando area has five AKA chapters: one at the University of Central Florida and four graduate chapters of working professionals. The last time someone from Orlando occupied Russell’s position was 60 years ago, she said.

AKA is a sprawling organization that extends beyond college campuses. The 114-year-old sorority has 325,000 members and over 1,000 chapters in the U.S. and abroad.

Danette Anthony Reed was named AKA’s new international president and CEO in July. As South Atlantic regional director, Russell will be responsible for carrying out Reed’s five community impact initiatives in her territory of South Carolina, Georgia and Florida.

Those initiatives include:

Strengthening sisterhood: Russell said expanding outreach and community between chapters is always critical to AKA.

Empowering families: This prong involves “looking for multigenerational approaches to fortifying families in our community,” Russell said. That includes addressing childhood hunger, promoting positive mental health and giving back to senior communities.

Promoting economic wealth: Russell said she will focus on promoting homeownership and helping Black communities understand credit and financing, among other economic equity initiatives. AKA also is diving into the banking space itself with its For Members Only Federal Credit Union.

Caring for the environment and reducing waste: Action in the community related to this pillar could include chapters launching community gardens or community clean-ups.

Advocating for social justice: The last pillar will focus on voter registration, mobilization and other forms of Black civic participation.

Russell plans to focus on making sure AKA members are physically present in their local communities and holding events, including in Orlando. She also will expand the sorority’s work with data and documenting community impact that way, she said.

Additional initiatives will include supporting other Black-led institutions, like historically Black colleges and universities, known as HBCUs, Russell said. AKA has raised \$8 billion to support HBCU endowments.

HBCUs typically have smaller development offices compared to larger colleges and universities, said Sherry Paramore, vice president of institutional advancement at Bethune-Cookman University, an HBCU in Daytona Beach.

“If you look at UCF and their development offices, they probably have 30 people and we maybe have five. If you have 30 people each with a \$1 million goal, you can raise \$30 million easily. I’m the only one on the team right now who’s raising money. It’s hard to reach that level unless you have donor capacity to bring in the mega-gifts.”

External fundraising sources like AKA are often key to bringing in more donors and sustaining capital improvements while keeping tuition costs low, she said.

Russell, an Orlando native, said she never expected to become a lifelong member of a sorority before she went to college. AKA drew her in as a student at the University of South Florida. She joined the organization in 1994.

“When I got to USF, I saw the AKAs on campus and they were the leaders. For me, this young girl from Orlando, I was like, ‘I want to be a part of that.’”

Russell said she has had the opportunity to act as a mentor herself by facilitating workshops, educating on social justice panels and chairing conferences in Orlando.

“I’ve been marrying two worlds — my sorority has been bringing economic impact to the community I serve. It has helped me grow as a leader: how to motivate people to follow you, how to move people to bring about change.”

Russell is the Orange County Clerk of Courts. She holds a bachelor’s in political science from USF and a law degree from Florida State University College of Law.

AKA is one of nine Greek organizations included in the National Pan-Hellenic Council, a coalition of Black sororities and fraternities founded in 1930.