

DOW	S&P 500	NYSE	NASDAQ
Closing: 25,430.33	Closing: 2,582.14	Closing: 12,320.77	Closing: 6,790.7
Change: +72.09	Change: +3.29	Change: +12.88	Change: +792



The Mediation Center is a local non-profit that supports the community in managing conflicts, whether it's adults involved in a court case who need a mediator, or youths who have emotional internal conflict or youth peer-to-peer problems. (Erelyn Falton/Contributed photo)

Mediation volunteers work to solve community challenges

BY EVA FEDDERLY
For Savannah Morning News

Jill Cheeks volunteered four years ago to help adults and youths find solutions to their problems by being a mediator at Savannah's non-profit The Mediation Center of the Coastal Empire.

Today, Cheeks is the executive director at The Mediation Center and finds her work both rewarding and helpful.

Cheeks is one of 70 active mediators with the local non-profit that supports the community in managing conflicts, whether it's adults involved in a court case who need a mediator, or youths who have emotional internal conflict or youth peer-to-peer problems.

Each month, she'll hold a monthly information session, "Mediation Matters," where people will learn about the process of becoming a volunteer mediator for the non-profit.

"People who are interested in volunteering are ones who believe that people in conflict can voice their own solutions; they believe that creating a space for powerful conversation to discuss a disagreement is important in people's lives. They enjoy solving problems," explained Cheeks.



The non-profit will hold a monthly information session, "Mediation Matters," where people will learn about the process of becoming a volunteer mediator.

"In general, they have a spirit for giving back to the community."

Cheeks, who was offered her position as executive director of the program in September 2016, said her work is gratifying in helping people find solutions to their problems, which is why she loves it.

"When people want to keep talking to work through and bet-

ter understand their issues, it can be compelling to show up somewhere every day where there's conflict and help people walk through that," she said. "Once someone experiences the value of mediation and having a natural third-party ask the really smart questions, we can identify the root of the problem quickly and effectively to reach a solution."

The information sessions will teach attendees about the services and programs center offers. Its staff and volunteers will discuss how the program executes and delivers to the community through volunteers.

"We want to paint a picture for those interested in volunteering

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about how they can support us. One of the ways they can do that is by becoming a volunteer mediator," said Cheeks.

Volunteers must have a high school diploma. Then, the volunteer must become an official registered mediator of the state, by taking a three-and-a-half-day class at the rate of \$250, which the person needs to pay. The person can use his or her certificate for other professional opportunities, such as consulting, administration, education, and legal.

The next class, which happens Jan. 4-7, will be at The Mediation Center on

5105 Paulsen St. in Savannah. The class is offered four times per year.

"After they take the class, we support them with observing mediations and then with co-mediating with another mediator to build their skills," said Cheeks. "We take care of their annual renewal fee with the state."

Volunteer Jeri Monroe has been a civil mediator for two years, and is an attorney and college teacher. The volunteer program appealed to Monroe because Monroe likes to help people solve problems.

"It's wonderful to help someone resolve a dispute in just a matter of hours, because usually the dispute has been weighing on

their minds for a long time," Monroe said. "If the dispute gets resolved, the parties feel good and that makes me feel good. I have also come to discover that it is a wonderful way to forget, at least temporarily, your own problems, because you're helping other people with theirs."

Nancy Carr, who's been a civil and domestic mediator for two years and has a career in broadcasting for 30 years, said, "Seeing the relief people feel when they solve their conflicts and can now move off with their lives" is why she volunteers as a mediator.

The non-profit encourages people to volunteer because it allows The Mediation Center to give more of

funds raised from mediation to youth programs.

The Mediation Center also has a family law resource center where volunteers help support people who can't or don't want to hire an attorney. Volunteers support them with paperwork and provide education on issues.

"We talk to youths about their emotions, how to manage internal conflict, and how to respond peer-to-peer when they're faced with conflict," said Cheeks. "This is how we want to better support the community, through our youth programs. Our mediators are even more proud to be part of the organization and share our stories."