

From [pnj.com](http://pnj.com) written by Louis Cooper

Retired Navy Capt. Frank J. Smith considers himself a problem solver.

And his latest task is marketing and promoting destinations of interest to people of African descent — a project of the Florida Black Chamber of Commerce.

Smith will serve as chairman of the board of directors for the new National Cultural Heritage Tourism Center, an effort launched this month and built around the website [www.nchtc.com](http://www.nchtc.com).

The project currently is based on Florida destinations, but organizers hope to solicit input from communities across the nation about destinations of cultural significance to black tourists.

"Here in the state of Florida, the No. 1 industry is tourism," Smith said. "We wanted to bring more of the African-American culture into tourism. There's a big interest in that now. The goal of the National Cultural Heritage Tourism Center is to promote community-based, culture-based tourism."

During his Naval career, Smith, now 58, served on the USS John F. Kennedy, the USS Coral Sea and at the Pentagon. He also was commanding officer of the Naval Air Maintenance Training Group at Pensacola Naval Air Station.

He has a master's degree in national resource strategy from the Industrial College of the Armed Forces.

"When you deal with national resource strategy, you deal a lot with economics — a lot of dealing with the haves and the have-nots," he said. "You learn things about citizenship and

things you can do to give back."

When Smith retired to Pensacola in 2003, he was attracted to the work being done by Gene Franklin, a banker who was active in the local minority community as well as with the National Black Chamber of Commerce. Smith joined Franklin's Christian Multicultural Economic Development Alliance and later became vice chairman of the Florida Black Chamber of Commerce.

Franklin, president and chief executive officer of the Florida Black Chamber of Commerce, tapped Smith to serve as chairman of the Heritage Tourism Center.

"Capt. Smith is a professional businessman and natural leader," Franklin said. "He is a team player who is comfortable assisting others in solving complex problems. People genuinely like and trust him. He has a winning, natural smile that invites trust. His leadership skills and abilities to work with people of all cultures impressed my chamber leadership and led to his selection."

The website's current listing for Pensacola links to the DeVilliers Cultural Heritage e-Museum.

There, visitors learn about the cultural significance of various destinations, including Johnson Beach on Perdido Key, so named for Rosamond Johnson, the first Pensacolian killed in the Korean War.

"The Sunset Riding Club ... leased the land in 1950 from the county for the sole use of bathing, beach and recreational facilities for 'colored citizens,' " according to the website. "Although the lease was cancelled in 1956, the name Rosamond Johnson Beach remained."

The website also features information about the history of black travel, including a section called "The Negro Motorist Green Book."

" 'The Negro Motorist Green Book' was a publication released in 1936 that served as a guide for

African-American travelers," according to the website. "Because of the racist conditions brought on by segregation, blacks needed a reference manual to guide them to integrated or black-friendly establishments."

The board of directors for the Heritage Tourism Center is made up of representatives from across Florida, as well as Louisiana, Washington, D.C., and New York.

Smith said the group will first meet in a teleconference but could meet in Pensacola in the future.