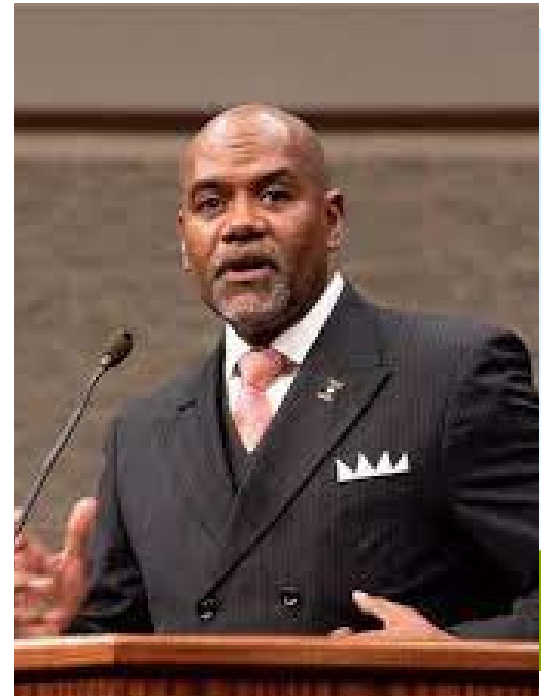


The Lift Every Voice series spotlights the individual voices in our alliance who guide us to wrestle with entrenched inequities and structural racism as we all learn, listen and develop strategies for change.

“ It's OK to be disappointed,
but it's not OK to be discouraged.

Disappointed just means you
did not reach a goal, or you
did not accomplish a task.

To be discouraged means
you don't have any hope. ”



Rev. Dr. Frank Thomas is a career military man who, after retirement, took up the mantle of pastor and community leader. He finds time for golf, but it's hard to see how given his active service on the hospital board, with the Chamber of Commerce, driving fundraising efforts for the United Way, serving on the GEA board or leading two successful school bond campaigns in divisive election years.

His army career introduced him to people from all walks of life and showed him worlds vastly different from his middle-class upbringing in Detroit. In his conversation with GEA Ambassador Julia Osborne, Thomas reflects on the sanctioned discrimination that he experienced in the military as well as the camaraderie he built with his diverse fellow soldiers. His insights about his parents and grandparents and the power of community are well worth the 5-minute read!

What motivates you to be involved in community work and education at this point in your life?

My mantra is, "I will not allow what I cannot do to hinder what I can do." There's a lot that I cannot do so I don't waste my time even thinking about it, but what I can do is put my best foot forward and push toward that end with education. I know and realize that's the foundation of who people are, not who they will become, but who they are. The better educated our children, the better educated adults. It matters that we produce well-educated children. If we have inadequate facilities, we will have inadequately educated children. Those inadequately educated children will become inadequately educated adults, and ultimately, we will end up having to pay for that unemployed or underemployed adult either through a social support system or the criminal justice system. I would argue that it's better to make an investment on the front end with education than have to pay for it on the back end.

What are your hopes for the future of our community?

My hope and my prayer is that we would stop pointing fingers and playing this blame game. Where we are is all our fault. We all must take responsibility. We can't just throw up our hands and say, "That doesn't affect me." If you live in this community, everything that happens in this community is your business. The question was asked, "Am I my brother's keeper?" I would offer yes.

How do you see structural inequities impacting our community?

I'll tell you one of the ways that I'm trying to attack it and make a difference. One of my passions is adequate, affordable housing. It takes the entire community to make a difference in our community. It's planting a seed, and we all have an individual role to play in the nurturing of the seed so it can become what it's meant to be. In this case, we're talking about our children to become all they can become. We all have something to give so why not give your best? Let the rest be the rest. Then you can rest.

What are your hopes like for the kids who are in school right now?

What the kids get is not their fault. It's our fault. If any part of the body suffers the entire body suffers.