

Bradenton Herald, The (FL)

June 16, 2002

Section: front

Edition: BRADENTON

Page: 8A

## WOMAN MAKING A DIFFERENCE BACK HOME

*Roberta C. Nelson, Herald Staff Writer*

No one could have been more surprised to find herself back in Manatee County in 1997 than **Cynthia Newell**.

"I left Manatee County, never to return, in 1969," said **Newell**, now 50. Racial tension marked the late 1960s when **Newell** went to high school here.

"I led a school walkout in 1968 to protest the fact that African-Americans could play intramural sports, but African-American women could not become cheerleaders and majorettes," she said. "White students walked out with us, too."

After graduation from Southeast High School, **Newell** left for Atlanta, where she had been accepted at Morris Brown College. She studied sociology and planned to go to law school, but changed her mind after graduation.

"In 1973, there was a wonderful market for minority women in business, because now we were coming into the workplace," **Newell** said. "So, I used my liberal arts education to go into corporate America."

Later, while studying for her MBA at the University of New Haven, she worked as a substitute teacher.

"My school district had such a problem with kids in special education, and there was an overrepresentation of African-Americans and Latinos," she said. "I decided to go to graduate school and actually change the ways schools work."

She went to the John F. Kennedy School of Government at Harvard University and graduated from an economic development education program. **Newell** said she firmly believes that economic empowerment comes from a good education. That led her to return to Manatee County and found Neighborhood Leadership Initiative, a nonprofit corporation that assists distressed neighborhoods and helps blacks get on the road to success.

"In Manatee County, we still have a long way to go," **Newell** said. "I often wonder how far we have truly come in our quest for civil justice and equity. I would say we have a long way to go. I'm hoping through some initiative that will be coming about in upcoming years that people won't leave because they don't see opportunity here, but in fact, that they have something to attract young people to come back home after college. There were none for me, and few of them now." **Newell** said she and others in Manatee County have the skills to create opportunities for young blacks.

"That is why I stay here. That is why I have come back. It is home," she said. "My mother was born here, and my family dates back. This is my home, not my vacation spot."

PHOTO/GRANT JEFFERIES/The Herald

**Cynthia Newell** poses with her favorite photo of Martin Luther King Jr. After vowing never to return to Manatee County, she's back, creating opportunities for young blacks.