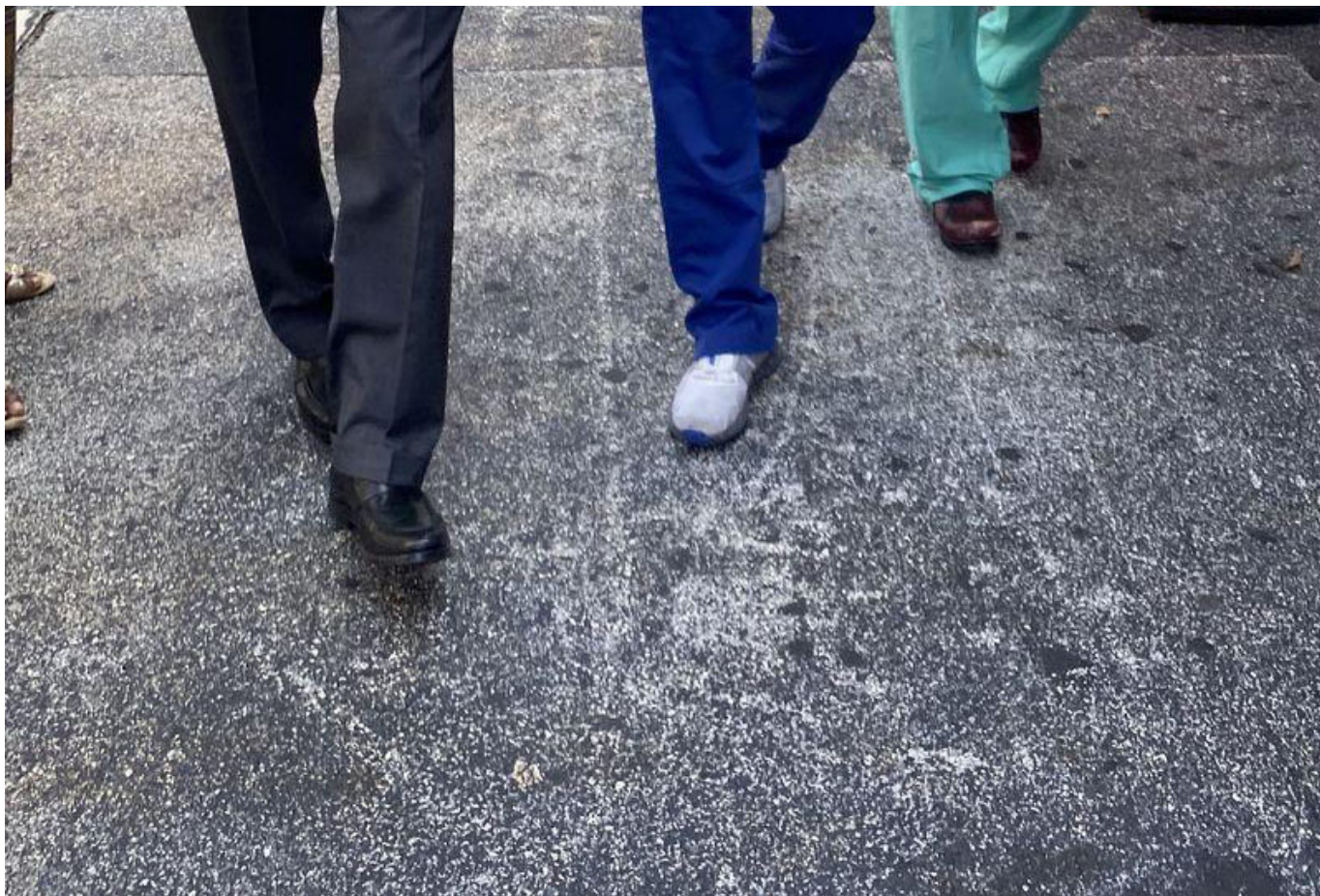


South Florida's pandemic heroes saluted with new cars



By **BRETT SHWEKY**
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Berkens Jean-Baptiste, center, walks out to see his new Hyundai Sonata after being named Healthcare Hero winner. (NSAH/Courtesy)

The [National Salute to America's Heroes](#) has been on the lookout for four local heroes who have helped make an impact in battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

Following the cancelation of this year's Hyundai Air and Sea Show that takes place on Miami Beach over Memorial Day Weekend, the annual event went on a mission to recognize health care workers, first responders and other individuals who have made a difference during the crisis. National Salute to America's Heroes partnered with Hyundai to present a community-based nomination initiative called Salute 365, which awarded four heroes with new Hyundai Sonatas as signs of appreciation for their service.

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Three **Folds of Honor** higher education scholarships also were presented. The nonprofit organization provides educational scholarships to families of military members who have been disabled or died while on active duty.

“There is no better time than Memorial Day weekend to pay tribute to our military, first responders and those that have paid the ultimate sacrifice on behalf of our freedom,” Mickey Markoff, executive producer of National Salute to America’s Heroes, said in a statement. “We are honored to award the winners of the four Hyundai Sonatas and honor those who are heroically serving on the front lines responding to the COVID-19 pandemic as well as presenting scholarships to the families of veterans and fallen soldiers.”

Out of 1,859 nominations, nurse Berkens Jean-Baptise, Lauren Ashley Green, Aubrey Talton and Dr. Makendall Saint Eloi were selected as the winners of the Salute 365 initiatives.

Jean-Baptise, 36, is an intensive care nurse in the cardiovascular unit at the Florida Medical Center in Fort Lauderdale and has worked to ensure his patients and their families have been given the best care possible. Working 13 to 14 hours a day, he volunteered his services to the hospital’s COVID-19 ward and has made sure his co-workers have the correct protective personal equipment to do their jobs safely.

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Berkens Jean-Baptise is surrounded by supporters as he looks in his new Hyundai Sonata. (NSAH/Courtesy)





Jean-Baptise has also made time to bring food to a homeless resident so he always has a meal to eat. With his new car, the aspiring future physician will now be able to rack his bicycle in the house and no longer use it to commute to work.

“The reason I volunteered was because I tried to put myself in the situation of those people,” Jean-Baptise said. “If it was me or my parents that are elderly, I would want someone to come and care for me or those people.

“We also have nurses that have medical issues that can’t afford to be potentially exposed to the virus,” he said. “I’m fairly young and healthy along with I know how to protect myself. So volunteering felt like the best thing to do.”

Talton, 21, volunteered to work in New York City to offer support to the local first responders as part of the FEMA COVID-19 task force. The West Palm Beach first responder worked 12-hour shifts every day as helped his fellow first responders as well as those affected by the coronavirus.



First responder hero winner Aubrey Talton hugs his new Hyundai Sonata. (NSAH/Courtesy)

“This is a new experience for everybody, so why not me?” Talton said. “I felt like I was chosen for this. I wanted to assist in any kind of way possible as well as try and make a difference.”

Dr. Makendall Saint Eloi has been an advocate for appropriate COVID-19 testing since the pandemic started. The 30-year-old has been working on the front line against the coronavirus in the ER and Urgent Care at Jackson Memorial Hospital in Miami by evaluating patients daily who have received a positive diagnosis.

He has also organized several free medical checkups for underprivileged communities in South Florida.



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Lauren Ashley Green was selected as the Community Hero winner for her generous deeds during the pandemic.

Green, 34, has shopped for friends and family who have been unable to go to stores and shop for themselves. As word of her kind work was beginning to spread, nurses and doctors who were working long hours and couldn't shop for essential items reached out to her for assistance.

Not soon after, she organized a fundraiser to help distribute meals to hospitals such as West Kendall Baptist and Nicklaus Children's Hospital.

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The Folds of Honor \$5,000 scholarships went to University of Central Florida freshman Aileen Carrasquillo Rios, Florida Institute of Technology sophomore Eric Witherspoon and Florida State University junior Keith Happel.

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