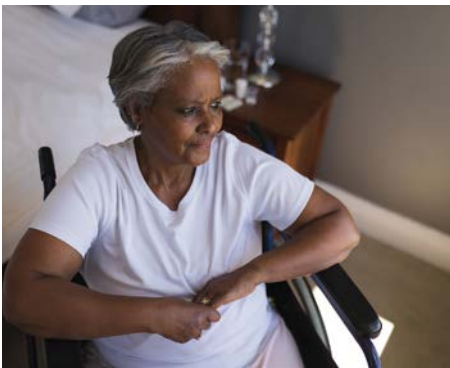


THE ATLANTA VOICE



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AROUND TOWN

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Black History is NOW



John Queen's Capitol View Manor neighborhood has changed many times over the years, but he is invested in remaining in his home. "I love Atlanta, and I feel like I have been able to create a village here." Photo by Letheus Chaney/The Atlanta Voice

Metro



ONLINE

Davonne Reaves owns multiple hotels, and wants to show you how

Black History is NOW: John Queen

Every day, Atlantans are making their own versions of Black history in ways both big and small. They are all a part of our Black History Month series on regular people doing extraordinary things throughout metro Atlanta communities, “Black History is NOW.”

BY LENTHEUS CHANEY

Capitol View Manor, Atlanta's ever-changing neighborhood, hums with the sounds of financial progress. According to Louisiana native and real estate enthusiast John Queen, he hears dreams being constructed in the community he now calls home.

Queen has watched his neighborhood's real estate prices soar, but his commitment runs deeper than potential profits. Despite lucrative offers tempting others to sell, Queen decided his home was more than a financial investment – it was an investment in the fabric of the community.

He wants his neighbors and others who witness his efforts to restore his 1920s home to feel inspired. They too can invest in a neighborhood without sacrificing the soul of their community.

"When I purchased in this area in 2019, the highest-sold house in the area was \$375,000," Queen said.

"Now the house across the street from me just sold for \$617,000, and it's all from investors coming in and looking to make huge profit margins."

According to Zillow, Atlanta ranked ninth on its list of the hottest housing markets in 2023. The report also states that property prices in Atlanta may have reached their peak.

Queen's business education from Morehouse College became the cornerstone of his community-focused investments. His real estate ventures range from affordable housing to Airbnb rentals, all held together by family and friendship.

"I love Atlanta, and I feel like I have been able to create a village here. It really has inspired me and helped me build and grow," Queen said.

As the treasurer for Neighborhood Planning Unit X and former vice president of



Atlantans like John Queen (above at his home on Metropolitan Blvd.) and others are making Black history in ways both big and small. They are all a part of our Black History Month series on regular people doing things throughout metro Atlanta communities. Photo provided by John Queen/The Atlanta Voice

the Capitol View Manor Neighborhood Association, Queen emphasizes the distinct difference between gentrification and revitalization. For him, it's not only about new investments and an influx of money, but also about how to preserve the history and identity of the community while improving everyone's quality of life.

His viewpoint focuses on assisting longtime residents rather than forcing them out to accommodate new investors.

"I feel like what we miss in Atlanta is re-

talization. And that means keeping people in their homes. A lot of people in my neighborhood, the elderly residents, have lived here for 20-30 years," Queen said. "Why aren't we helping them fix up their homes instead of forcing them to sell and bring in an investor who changes the community?"

Queen's mark on his neighborhood runs deeper than the renovations on his historic home. Mention his name to his neighbors and you're likely to hear a tale of a man whose influence extends from his renova-

tion efforts and the intricacies of neighborhood planning to providing water to voters waiting in long lines at the library next door.

"Well, he isn't just about the house," said Zachary Adriaenssens, chair of NPU-X and neighbor. "He really has tried to connect with as many neighbors as possible. He has a direct, hands-on impact on the lives of our legacy neighbors."

What was once farmland and a predom-

See **NOW** on page 3

NOW

Continued from page 2

inantly white Capitol View neighborhood was segregated from the predominantly Black Pittsburgh neighborhood in the early 1900s. Historic symbols of ownership on the north and south ends of Metropolitan Parkway now represent equality. Men of color, including Queen, now own two prestigious homes at each end of Capitol View Manor.

“For the history of the neighborhood to come full circle, and for this true symbol of ownership in the community to be two Black men, I love that,” said Adriaenssens.

In both tangible and intangible ways, Queen has left and continues to leave his mark on Capitol View and Capitol View Manor. His sweat equity, embedded in the walls of his historic home and the hearts of the community members, adds a layer to Atlanta’s Black history. Queen embodies contemporary Black history – a man fully aware of his community’s past, actively participating in its present, and passionately invested in its future.

“I don’t believe that you can make private investments in a neighborhood without actively participating,” Queen said. “Whenever I go into any neighborhood, I’m a participant. I want to know what’s happening. I want to know how I can help, and I want to know how I can truly impact the community.”



The home prices in Capitol View have risen by thousands of dollars since Queen moved into his home in 2019. Photo by Lenthues Chaney/The Atlanta Voice

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Voices

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“Go to work in the morn of a new creation...until you have...reached the height of self-progress, and from that pinnacle bestow upon the world a civilization of your own.”

— Marcus Garvey



The Urgent Need for Diverse Therapists

BY DR. MARLENE F. WATSON

It is natural and normal for a person seeking mental health help to want their therapist to understand them. It is difficult now for people to find a therapist, but people of color who want a therapist who understands their experience are having an especially hard time of it. That’s a problem.

In an ideal world, the race of a person’s therapist shouldn’t matter. But anyone who is paying attention knows this is not an ideal world. Race plays a role in most human interactions, and there are few interactions more human than therapy. Race is a factor for all of us in how we see and measure ourselves, and it’s a factor in how we see each other. Denying that closes off the therapeutic relationship before it can even get started.

Most therapists are white – 73% of them. Only 8% are Latinx, even though Latinx people make up 18.9% of the population. Only 4% are Black, even though Black people are 12.6% of the population. Clients who speak only Spanish, Cantonese or Mandarin — the three most popular non-English languages in this country — have even fewer options.

For clients of color, comfort and fluency in issues related to race are foundational to whether therapy is going to succeed. Clients of color want a therapist who can really understand them, without having to explain what their experiences mean. Having to do so feels like a questioning of their culture, having to educate whites about race-tinged issues they encounter in their lives.

It is more galling when clients realize that when they do that, they are paying to educate their therapist. Clients want the therapist to have the cultural knowledge and smarts to bring this up on their own. When therapists fail to ask about race, it’s problematic.

I once interviewed white therapists about how they deal with race. In many cases, they don’t. They duck the issue, shortchanging the client. One told me, “I don’t want to feel bad about myself as a white therapist, so I don’t bring up race.” Another said, “I am not going to bring it up, because I’m not going to let them question who I am.” How does that serve the client?

This dynamic is just as true with therapists of color and white clients. As a Black therapist, if I have a white racist client, I have to figure out a way to work with that client and understand who they are. Even though white people are the “norm” in this country, that can create race-related issues for them as well. For example, what might be behind why they feel they don’t measure up to expectations? A Black therapist needs to dig into a white client’s



For clients of color, comfort and fluency in issues related to race are foundational to whether therapy is going to succeed.iStock/stockrocket

identity. You have to understand the client in their full identity, and race is a part of everyone’s identity.

If therapy does not address race and explore its role, it fails to see the client, and to really know the client.

No one has the goal of making white children uncomfortable with race, but children of color deal with it every day.

The paucity of therapists of color is a call to train more of them and to welcome them into the field. There is a need that they can fill.

Even so, I am not advocating that people should see only therapists of their own race. Instead, I am advocating that all therapists should be able to acknowledge, talk about and investigate issues that stem from race. We have to be unafraid and undeterred to ask questions. We should be trained to do our own work.

This is why we focus on the “self of the therapist” at the Ackerman Institute for the Family, the organization where I am director of training. We help future family therapists uncover their unconscious biases. We ask that they think of how they feel about their own racial identity, whatever it may be.

This is not easy work. We had a white student who left Ackerman, saying she just was not going to look at race. This was a psychologist with a doctorate degree. I can only imag-

ine how her clients of color must suffer now.

Clients have their own responsibilities in helping themselves. They must advocate for themselves. They should try to select a therapist they’re comfortable with, but they must understand it is not always possible. They should ask about treatment philosophies at private practices. The success of the therapeutic relationship depends on the client, too.

Over the years, it has become more critical to talk about issues related to race, particularly in family therapy. We have tried as a society to act like race doesn’t matter. It was only after George Floyd’s death that we began to talk about systemic racism.

This is why we need to train more therapists of color, and train all therapists more fully. Therapists need to do their own work, and learn how they come across to clients. If they can be honest and courageous with themselves, they will better serve their clients.

Dr. Marlene F. Watson is director of training at the Ackerman Institute for the Family. She is the former chair of the Couple and Family Therapy Department and Associate Professor Emerita in the Department of Counseling and Family Therapy at Drexel University in Philadelphia. She is a licensed couple and family therapist in private practice and the author of the book, Facing the Black Shadow.

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SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

And your point would be?



BY JAMES A. WASHINGTON
The Atlanta Voice

Have you ever wondered how the lawyer feels, who knows his or her client is guilty? But that lawyer is able to get the person off based on a legal technicality.

Legally, the person is innocent, but morally they are as guilty as, dare I say, sin. I've come to believe that this must have been one of the most important issues being debated by the traditional Jew of Christ's times and the radicals who chose to follow Him.

It seems to have been the focal point of what got Christ killed and indeed the focal point of many a debate today.

You see, what Jesus was trying to get the Pharisees and the Sadducees to understand was that the will of God was more important than the play it by the book interpretation of the Law of Moses. They were apparently more interested in being right than being moral.

"...Thus you nullify the Word of God for the sake of your tradition. You hypocrites! Isaiah was right when he prophesied about you:

"These people honor me with their lips, but their hearts are far from me. They worship me in vain; their teachings are but rules taught by men." (Matthew 15:6-9)

Over and over again throughout the New Testament, Christ lets us know He is the fulfillment of the Law. He is the embodiment of God's Word. He is the point; not the rule. The point of the law, any law, is to protect the innocent, punish the guilty and thereby preserve the social and political order of man. Technicality or not, the law was never intended to let a murderer go free.

The point of God's Word is that Jesus indeed is His Son, raised from the dead, who died for our original sin and through whom we obtain everlasting life.

Out of love and compassion for

our fellow man, out of service in His name, out of honoring Him will we also, fulfill our purpose here on earth? Law or no law, the Word of God was never intended to punish the pure of heart when acting on behalf of the Almighty.

So Jesus was constantly at odds with religious scholars of His day about the literal interpretation of scripture (the Law of Moses) versus daily activity in the service of the Lord.

Hence, His parables were constantly illustrating to those who would listen, that yes you might be right, but according to the Will of God, what's your point?

Do you know people who just have to be right all the time? Regardless of the situation or the circumstances, their need to be right and have you

acknowledge their 'rightness' supercedes all logic, common sense and purpose.

Can't you just hear Jesus imploring the traditionalists with, "Okay already! Technically, you're right. I shouldn't be healing the sick, giving sight to the blind, feeding the hungry or teaching the gospel on the Sabbath.

"But what are you arguing about? I'm merely doing my Daddy's will. It seems you're more interested in being right than in bringing the righteous closer to God. So what are you gonna do; crucify me? PLEASE!"

"Love the Lord your God with all your heart and all your mind."

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is just like it. "Love your neighbor as yourself." (Matthew 22:37-40)

It sounds simple enough. But watch your back if you choose to live by this principle. Yes, play by the rules. But don't ever forget the point.

May God bless and keep you always.

"YOUR VOICE"

Should the President have immunity from criminal prosecution for any laws they commit while in office, as Donald Trump asserts?



TYRONE GRIFFIN
Hiram

"The president should not be immune from any illegal activity because if they are undertaking it, they represent the country. There should be no immunity for illegal activity. That's why they call it illegal. So, no president should be immune. If the president is concerned with the illegality of a decision, the decision should not be made. Illegal decisions are still illegal, regardless of who makes it."



TAYLOR TALES
Atlanta

"I think that the President should be [eligible for] prosecution and not immune because if he's immune to prosecution, what is he capable of [when it comes to] what passes as a law? What if he decides to execute a law [against] a certain group of people? That could lead to genocide or anarchy. He's now immune [from the responsibility of] the damage he's caused, which could cause the country to break."



SEXTON CHAPMAN
Conyers

"I feel like that's an ill-advised concept. You know, in elementary school, we learned about checks and balances. It's one of the first things we learned we do [as a people.] If a party of any of those systems feels like they're above being a part of the community, abiding by the rules in that community, and making decisions that benefit those people... you know... Yes, [the consequence of prosecution] is valid hesitation that you don't make a decision that goes against [the law.]"



INDIA CHAPMAN
Conyers

"Essentially, I think anybody should be held accountable for their actions. It doesn't matter if you're a world leader or just some 'Joe Blow' on the street. I think, especially if you're a world leader. Yeah, I know that... there are technicalities, and the argument can be made that [he may have to make a critical decision and can't be concerned about the legalities of it.] And I think that's completely BS, to be honest, because, at any point, you need to be held accountable for your actions, especially if you are a world leader. So my short answer is yes, he should be held accountable no matter what or who you are."

Compiled by Vincent Christie

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The ‘Everything Sport’ for everyone at Airborne Gymnastics USA

BY DONNELL SUGGS

Tucked away in the corner of a shopping center in College Park, a stone’s throw from the busiest airport in the country, a dozen little girls jumped off a small trampoline. The athletes inside Airborne Gymnastics Club, a gymnastics studio that Kamilah Norman owned and has operated at this location since 2018, are three, four, and five years old. The trampoline looked like a sandwich board turned on its side and the girls were having fun jumping on and off of it.

Kamilah Norman, a native of Lansing, Michigan opened the gym, first as a mobile program in the spring of 2016 before finding a brick-and-mortar location big enough to house a gymnastics studio. She wanted to teach the sport, but also make it known that gymnastics can be for any and everyone that wants to learn. She saw a need and filled it.

“I saw a need for more activities for the youth in this community,” Norman told The Atlanta Voice one Wednesday afternoon in January. “I love the sport of gymnastics and I am passionate about helping enrich lives through this amazing sport.”

The need: Just 10% of scholarship gymnasts are identified as Black women, according to data provided by the NCAA. There are gymnasts making hundreds of thousands of dollars a year through the Name, Image, and Likeness (NIL) money flooding college athletics.

“Parents tell me all the time that their kids are jumping off of everything at home,” said Norman. “Gymnastics is the everything sport. It helps build character, confidence, vigor, and resilience.”

Norman, a former gymnast as a youth, added that gymnastics also builds agility, flexibility, physical strength, balance, coordination, and what she called a “sixth sense.”

Norman shouted to her students, “Knees together, arms up, toes pointed.” The girls, the youngest being three years old, followed instructions and worked their way through the stations set up around the gym floor. “Tuck, work, we don’t use that word around here,” said Norman when a five-year-old gymnast said, “can’t.”

Asked what she loves most about her work as a gymnastics coach, Norman, who goes by “Coach K,” said, “Seeing their smiles. Just seeing how much they enjoy this and how they change from when they



Airborne Gymnastics Club USA Director of Operations Kamilah Norman sits with some of her students after practice, Wednesday, Jan. 31, 2024. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice



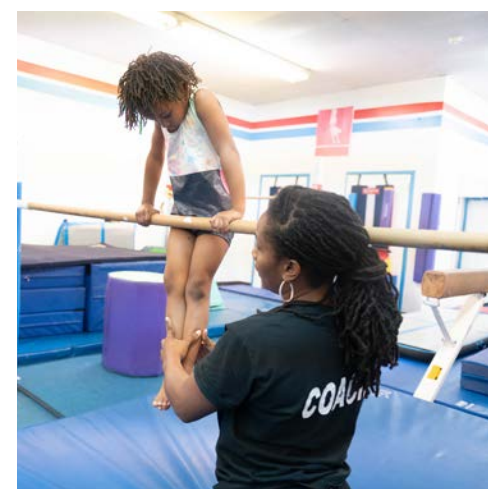
Norman helps one of her young students stretch during a midweek practice session. Airborne Gymnastics Club USA opened its College Park location in 2018. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

start to how far they go.”

A sign that reads, “I take small steps every day to become who I need to be” rests against one of the mirrored walls in the gym.

The travel and competition teams at Air-

borne Gymnastics Club USA compete all over the country. One of the teams competing at a high level, United States Of America Gymnastics Level 2, won first place at the Flippie Hippi Invitational in Columbus (Ga.) last year.



Norman (with a young gymnast inside Airborne Gymnastics Club USA) said gymnastics helps teach boys and girls discipline and drive. Norman was a gymnast while growing up in Lansing, Michigan. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

Norman says gymnastics are a good way for children to find confidence while having fun. “That’s the first thing that happens, eventually,” she said with a laugh as one of the small girls who was training that night decided to walk over to her mother who was watching from the side to discuss her hair.

Local



ONLINE

One party city to another: Vegas completes Super Bowl handoff to New Orleans



Love was in the air on Valentine's Day as Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens officiated the marriages of a dozen couples at Piedmont Park. Photos by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

Love is in the air

BY ISIAH SINGLETON

Love was in the air on Valentine's Day as Atlanta Mayor Andre Dickens officiated the marriages of a dozen couples at Piedmont Park. Hosted by Marry We, dozens of couples got married in a ceremony at Grey-stone at Piedmont Park on Wednesday, Feb. 14.

During the wedding event, songs like "The Lady in My Life" by Micheal Jackson and "I Will Always Love You" by Whitney Houston were covered beautifully by a talented saxophonist. There was a certain feeling of unity, love, and joy in the air during Valentine's Day 2024.

The "Marry We" mass wedding ceremony is hosted by Southern Hospitality Event Group. Couples signed up online and paid \$1,000 to participate in the ceremony. Couples also were invited to renew their wedding vows.

Marry We also invited professional dancers and performers to give a beautiful performance to open the wedding.

"It is an honor to join you all during this beautiful Valentine's Day evening here at Piedmont Park," Dickens said. "We are gathered together to celebrate the union of individuals and for some couples, a renewal of their vows who have made the decision to live their lives and walk into the unknown of the future together."

Dickens also shared a passage from the novel, "The Amber Spyglass" by Phillip Pullman with couples. The passage talks about loving your partner forever no matter what happens in the future and even after death.

Couples took pictures, laughed, and enjoyed each other while taking in such a



monumental day and time. Also, couples received packages which included a marriage license signed by Dickens, portraits, and a wedding gift.

Additionally, after the ceremony there was an indoor reception, catered by Dennis Dean Catering. The reception included dinner, dessert, music, and an open bar.

For more information, visit <https://www.marryweevents.com>.



Election Central

James “JT” Brown wants to be the next Fulton County Sheriff

BY DONNELL SUGGS

Fulton County Sheriff candidate James “JT” Brown has a plan. In fact, the now-retired veteran law enforcement officer has a three-step plan to return the Fulton County Sheriff’s Office (FCSO) to what he believed were its former lofty heights of respectability and efficiency. These days, you can Google the combination of “Fulton County Sheriff’s Office” and “Atlanta 2023” and a plethora of stories and posts on probes into the Fulton County Jail, detention officer arrests, and bad reviews on working at the jail.

On a Friday morning inside the offices of The Atlanta Voice Brown took his badge out of the breast pocket of his navy blue suit. He retired in December 2022 so these days his FCSO badge reads “retired”, but he still keeps it close. After 37 years with the department, the level of pride he once had in the badge has changed.

“My badge is tarnished,” said Brown, tapping the badge with his right index finger. “What’s going on in the jail, the atrocities, we are talking about a controlled environment. How are people dying in a controlled environment when you have an almost quarter-billion-dollar budget?”

The plan is simple, says Brown. It consists of the “Three D’s”, he explained. “Deaths, dollars, and diversion.” Regarding the multiple deaths that have taken place within the Fulton County Jail the past few years during current FCSO Sheriff Patrick Labat’s first term as sheriff, Brown said, “We are going to correct that problem.”

Last year Brown and other retired department members who were still on reserve helped with a shakedown at the jail. Having been gone for a year, he was surprised at how things looked inside the jail where he once worked. “We found 138 shanks on detainees that day,” he recalled. “I know the county can do better because I saw better.”

On the fiscal issues that have taken place, Brown said, “The fiscal management is shot over there, so we are going to correct that and make sure the budget is running efficiently and effectively.”

The final “D” in the plan calls for programs that will focus on the youngest offenders. Brown spent time in the FCSO warrant division and witnessed first-hand how an arrest can derail a young man’s life. “This is what I heard from the kids when we went to their house because their parents couldn’t handle them, ‘Officer I dropped out of school because I couldn’t read,’” said Brown, who believes the road to petty crimes and ultimate-



Brown, a Detroit native, graduated from Morehouse College in 1985 and joined the Fulton County Sheriff’s Office in 1986. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

ly a trip to Rice Street oftentimes starts with not being in school.

“I told myself that if I ever got in charge I would create a reading program for the youth, and would work with community partners so we can bring the jail rate down.”

Brown has seen it all and then some during his career, which is entirely with the FCSO. As a member of the Fulton County Sheriff’s Office (FCSO) he not only worked on the warrant division but also the extradition unit, and was elected to the Fulton County Grievance Board. During his career, he also received training from the National Association on Mental Illness (NAMI).

“I am a law enforcement CEO,” said Brown, a Detroit native who graduated from Morehouse College in 1985 before joining the FCSO in 1986, starting his nearly four-decade-long career. That career and the educational experiences that took place during that time are what Brown’s supporters are saying which makes him the candidate to

choose.

“We have to start putting people in office who carry character. That’s the challenge,” said Brown’s wife of 19 years Monisha Brown. “My challenge to voters is to ask around the county about the reputations of all four candidates.”

One of those voters will be the couple’s 18-year-old son London. He will be voting for the first time by the time the May 12 primary election takes place. A high school senior who is following in his father’s footsteps and will be headed to Morehouse College in the fall, London said his father’s character played a big part in earning his future vote. In an interview with The Atlanta Voice last week, the student-athlete said Brown had to earn his vote like any other candidate would have had to. “I see myself as an average voter and not JT Brown’s son,” he said. “The way he has to convince everyone else to vote for him, he has to do the same for me.”

London remembered an exchange be-

tween the two when he asked his father what he was planning to do if elected and what he was planning to change.

“He wants to change the image of the Fulton County Sheriff’s Office,” London recalled. “From what he told me I told him he had my vote. I don’t see myself voting for JT Brown, my father, I see myself as an average voter voting for the best candidate who I believe is going to do what he needs to do to fix the Fulton County Sheriff’s Office.”

If reputation and experience will define who the next Fulton County Sheriff is, Brown believes he will win. All those years working at various levels of the department have led him to this moment, he said.

“I can win the election because I am the most approachable; the citizens know me. I did a lot of community service. My education, my training, I have every law enforcement certification there is because I wanted to make sure I was qualified to do the job instead of just learning it when I got there.”



Charles Rambo (above) worked for the Fulton County Sheriff's Office for over 30 years and believes he is the right man to lead the department. "You need somebody that has absolute public policy and sheriff expertise to get back in this saddle to ride this crisis that we are in," Rambo said. "Whenever leadership is present, there is always change." Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

Charles Rambo wants to be the next Fulton County Sheriff

BY DONNELL SUGGS

A candidate for Fulton County Sheriff didn't always want to be involved in law enforcement. Charles Rambo grew up in Gary, Indiana, and if you know Gary, you know that during the 60's, 70's, and 80's, the city was dangerous. Police included.

"I was not intending to join law enforcement," said Rambo, who visited The Atlanta Voice offices earlier this week. Rambo enlisted in the United States Air Force following high school graduation in 1986. After eight years in the service, he began following his dream of becoming a mortician. "I wanted to attend mortuary school. I had no plans and no desire to move to Atlanta."

Rambo may have begun his career pursuit at the Powell Coleman Funeral Home in Gary, where he worked from the age of 12 until he left town for the military, but Atlanta was where he would live for the entirety of his adult life and professional career. Rambo worked at the Murray Brothers Funeral Home, one of the city's oldest and most connected Black-owned businesses in Atlanta. There he would rub elbows with

city elites, including many who would steer him toward a career in law enforcement.

"That was my introduction to Atlanta; that was my introduction to families, politicians, and so on," said Rambo. "I wanted to feel like I was putting my eyes on a future career."

Three weeks into working at Murray Brothers, Atlanta Police Department (APD) Sgt. Willie Cameron, one of the founders of the Afro Patrolmen League, was shot and killed in the West End. His family chose Murray Brothers to handle the preparation of the body and burial. Rambo recalls that decision changing his life. On Feb. 6, 1987, Cameron was just 39 years old when he was shot in the face during an altercation in a West End Mall department store where he worked a second job as security.

"That was my first direct contact with law enforcement. People started encouraging me to think about going into law enforcement," he said. "It was almost like a supernatural moment."

"I went from stuffing to cuffing," he joked. Rambo admitted that his time working in funeral homes prepared him for what was to come. "It taught me how to deal with people

at their worst," he said. "It taught me how to lift their spirits, and at the end of the day, the funeral is not about the dead; it's about the living."

This is not the first campaign for Rambo, a 34-year veteran of the Fulton County Sheriff's Department (FCSO), who retired in 2016 and up until recently taught at the law enforcement academy. He has run for the lofty position of sheriff four times, including most recently a loss to the current Fulton County Sheriff Patrick Labat in the June 2020 primary. Undeterred, Rambo believes the fifth time's the charm.

Asked what he wants to do differently if he is elected, Rambo immediately mentioned the Fulton County Jail. "There's a deprivation of the human spirit in that place," he said. "That was not present in the years that we were there. We had our problems, don't get me wrong, but we did not have the amount of deaths that have taken place during this administration."

The majority of the deaths that have taken place within the Fulton County Jail over the past four years have been by way of homicide. Rambo believes that is an issue that can be fixed by leadership.

He said he would also ramp up the security at the Fulton County Courthouse and tighten the budget.

"You need somebody that has absolute public policy and sheriff expertise to get back in this saddle to ride this crisis that we are in," Rambo said. "Whenever leadership is present, there is always change," said Rambo.

Asked why he was running for a fifth time, Rambo said this was his life's calling. Being involved in law enforcement was what he was called to do. "I'm putting myself back out there because so many people called me and asked me to," he explained. "It's worth a shot."

On May 12, he's going to get another shot at becoming sheriff. He knows the odds are against him. The Fulton County Sheriff's Office race tends to become a low-information race," Rambo said. "People are not as in-depth on the real issues, the real qualifications of the candidates."

Rambo believes he is the right man for the job at the right time. The fifth time. "This is not a crisis; this is a plague," said Rambo. "People are watching this office pretty closely and are looking for answers."

Arts



ONLINE
Accessible Design Studios, Fayetteville's first Black-owned interior design firm

Derek Fordjour: A homecoming drawn in paint

BY NOAH WASHINGTON

I was broke for a long time. My mother comes to my lectures to collect on the money I owe her,” Morehouse graduate and multidisciplinary artist Derek Fordjour, 49, jokingly told a young artist inquiring on how she can escape the stereotype of the broke artist.

Fordjour, 50, Morehouse Class of 2001, recently returned to his alma mater to present for the annual distinguished lecture series, which serves to provide students and faculty with opportunities to learn from leading figures in art history, curatorial studies, and related fields.

The event, hosted by the Atlanta University Center Art History + Curatorial Studies Collective, took place on Jan. 31 at the Shirley Massey Executive Conference Center at Morehouse College.

“I was an artist my whole life. I couldn't really do many other things and I just never stopped,” Fordjour told The Atlanta Voice.

During the lecture, Fordjour shared his journey from financial struggles to artistic success. That journey included quipping about his mother attending his lectures to



Derek Fordjour (left) took questions from the audience and talked about his career as an artist. Photo by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice

collect on past debts.

Fordjour showcased a retrospective of his works throughout the lecture, delving into their histories and offering insights into his personal life as a Morehouse student and professional artist.

Fordjour's artistic journey aligns with his broader commitment to connect with audiences inside and outside traditional art venues. Exhibited through different mediums, showcased in paintings, sculptures, and other installations.

A common theme in Fordjour's work is mobility.

Fordjour defines the word as “We as Black folk wanna look like we are going places”. Further citing that when Black people get successful, it is equally important to flaunt that success. Showcasing a picture of his piece, *Flock*, 2023. Fordjour designed this piece to show as a “bouquet” of wheels in motion being pedaled with legs that are inverted and caught off at the thigh.

“We did not become artists to make money; we became artists to make art,” said Fordjour.

In a reflective moment during his lecture Fordjour, expanded on the theme of “the significance of success” within the context of black identity, sharing a personal anecdote about his own family's expectations, such as proceeding to church which Fordjour humorously recounted his mother's insistence on a polished appearance, narrating how she would admonish him not to “come around here wearing those shoes” and emphasized the importance of looking accomplished.

Highlighted the unique condition within Black culture, where success is not only an

internal achievement but also an external presentation that carries cultural weight, “I have a brother that lives and works in Maryland, and he's like, “Man, I'm driving this BMW and my counterpart drives a minivan’,” Fordjour told. This exploration of the performative aspect of success within black communities represents Fordjour's broader artistic narrative, echoing the complexities and entertaining aspects inherent in black culture, Fordjour cited.

During the lecture, Derek Fordjour shared a contemplative perspective on his artistic process, revealing his ongoing exploration and love for the concept of staging live shows in galleries. Speaking on one of his newest shows, *SCORE*, which was shown at the Petzel Gallery in New York City from November 10 – December 22, 2023. Fordjour expressed his fascination with the idea that, as artists, they engage in the creation of illusion through paintings, constructing a visual world that exists within the realm of perception rather than tangible space.

Fordjour drew parallels between the ephemeral nature of his live shows and

See **FORDJOUR** on page 11

‘At the Wake of a Dead Drag Queen’ comes to town

BY ISIAH SINGLETON

A new play written by an Atlanta native is coming to town this week.

In rural Georgia, drag star Courtney Berringers (given name: Anthony Knighton) would like to welcome you to her wake. She has recently died from complications due to AIDS. But make no mistake, this isn't your grandma's funeral. There will be no black frocks, no perfumed flowers, and no crying. Tonight is a celebration.

At the Wake of a Dead Drag Queen is written by Terry Guest, a former native of Atlanta. Now based in Chicago, Guest is an award-winning Playwright, Actor, Director, and Teaching Artist. With his play set in Georgia, this is a full circle moment to have its premiere at Out Front and is a tremendous success story of a playwright who originated their work in Atlanta.

The play is also directed by Damian Lockhart, who also directed a production in Florida in 2021, and has a strong attachment to the piece.

Guest said it feels special to have a showing

in the city where he was born and it's a full circle moment.

“It's special to have the show at Out Front because the audiences that the show is truly about the Black queer people in Georgia will for the first time have the opportunity to see the show,” he said.

Guest also said the play is “full circle” because he's from Atlanta.

“When I was there I had so many limitations around who I thought I was as a person and as an artist, and I didn't even think that I could write a play for real. I certainly didn't think it would ever be produced by anyone,” he said. “Leaving home and building a career outside of Atlanta has been so fruitful and it's taught me in so many ways, my power. It's really special that my play is happening in Atlanta, a play that I thought I would write.”

Additionally, Guest said he had been thinking about writing this play since his late uncle Anthony passed away in 2005.

“I started writing it in 2016, the year Lemonade came out. I wrote it very quickly actually once I sat down and committed myself to it, but the idea took a long time to ruminate and I would write one page and throw it away,” he

said.

At The Wake of a Dead Drag Queen's inspiration is about family, Guest said.

“It's ultimately about family, including my Uncle Anthony and his life/death. He died from AIDS when I was 15 years old. I, being also queer, just had a really hard time and felt very confused by it,” he said. “I remember one time I asked him if he thought he was going to hell because he was gay and he said yes, and that really struck me as a child who was also gay. So, I think I just felt like I needed to write out that confusion, fear, and sadness.”

The play, Guest said, is a personal story.

“Take my Uncle Anthony, a person who was always destined for stardom, and to make sure that even after he dies, people are still saying his name and talking about his story for years to come,” he said. “I don't think he ever imagined this. It's [the play] about two poor drag queens in Albany, Georgia, and the ongoing AIDS crisis with black people in the South. It sounds very serious, honey, I promise, it's fun and a celebration.”

Guest said he wants the audience to have fun and most importantly, feel they know a group of people more intimately, who they

may have not taken seriously before.

While discussing topics that may be heavy, Guest said the importance of making it into a celebration is “the most southern Black thing of all”.

“That's how my grandma was,” he said. “Her life was tough, but she was hilarious, and my uncle was like that. His life was very tough, but he was hilarious, my mom was hilarious, my dad was hilarious, my whole family was. So, I think it wasn't even intentional, it's simply a personal, authentic way of expressing grief.”

As for advice, Guest passed on a message to other Black queer boys and men in the world.

“Build a community of people around you who will challenge you, make you laugh, tell you the truth, and grow with you as well. I think that has been important to me and I look around now, and I am so proud of the people that I surround myself with because they've really kept me afloat,” he said.

At The Wake of a Dead Drag Queen premieres from Feb. 1-17 in select venues near you.

For more information or to purchase tickets, visit <https://outfronttheatre.com/event/at-the-wake-of-a-dead-drag-queen/>.

Entertainment

Old Atlanta is featured in new drama “Perimeter”

BY RADHIYA ALSTON

Tyler Perry Studios is back with a brand-new drama that is airing on BET Plus this February. Perimeter, written and directed by Armani Ortiz, is based in Atlanta during the 1990s. The show focuses on a time when Atlanta is hosting the Olympics and Freaknik has the city jumping. The fictional series follows a cast of characters that include the Dawn family, the current mayor of Atlanta, the first black female police cap-

tain of Atlanta, and others.

The Dawns are a prestigious Black family that consists of Atlanta City Councilman Robert Dawn (Donovan Christie), Connie Dawn (Tatyana Ali), and their daughter Paige Dawn (Ava Monet). Councilman Dawn’s only concern is becoming the next mayor, and he is willing to do whatever he needs to do to take down whoever is in his way. That includes him enlisting Evelyn (Jordan Coleman) to keep an eye on Mayor Harvey (Atlanta’s current mayor). During this journey,

councilman Dawn does hit a few bumps in the road and faces some challenges that he never expected.

Paige, who is a sophomore at Spelman College, is struggling with trying to maintain this perfect image. She wants to enjoy her life, be a good daughter, and be a loyal girlfriend to Malcom (Malcom Xavier). Malcolm is a drug dealer/street runner, and someone that Connie would prefer Paige not hang around. Connie does what she can to support her husband and make sure that Paige stays

on the right track.

Captain Lauren Thompson (Sharon Conley) has just been appointed the first black female police captain of Atlanta. With crime at an all-time high, her priority is to crack down on all the criminals running the streets of Atlanta. Some of those hit close to the Dawn family. Perimeter gives drama, tells the story of young love, and is filled with suspense.

The first four episodes will be available on BET PLUS on Thursday, February 29, 2024.

FORDJOUR

Continued from page 10

the timeless appreciation for a live performance and the history created between the art and its viewer.

“I’m saying that coming to one of my

shows while they’re alive, I believe it should be a significant experience,” Fordjour said, proclaiming his belief that attending one of his live shows should be a profound and noteworthy experience.

With a wealth of ideas at his disposal, Fordjour expressed his passion for work-

ing within a community, emphasizing that this collaborative engagement serves as a powerful antidote to boredom in his artistic practice.

“I like different points of entry into my work for people,” he said. “I don’t want to meet you on the same floor, at the same

time every day, in the same way, with the same gaze on. It’s nice to have a practice that’s dynamic that’s reflective of all the sources that I’m taking in as well. I just try to be very honest with what I’m interested in and curious about,” Fordjour said.

THE PROOF IS IN THE PHOTOS

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Education



ONLINE

Due to magnificent demand, Usher adds a third show in Atlanta

Atlanta teens selected for Disney Dreamers Academy Class of 2024

BY ISIAH SINGLETON

It's that time again!

Eight Atlanta-area teens are among the new Disney Dreamers Academy class of 100 students from around the country that was revealed earlier this month by Walt Disney World Resort in Florida, where the annual mentoring program was created to broaden career awareness and inspire teens from Black and underrepresented communities to dream beyond their wildest imaginations.

The eight students from the Atlanta area selected to participate in the 2024 Disney Dreamers Academy are:

- Cameryn Polk – Atlanta
- Ellis Schroeder – Atlanta
- Hannah Dennis – Riverdale
- Bianca Orfila-Molinet – Marietta
- Riley Kennard – Acworth
- Bengina Amponsah – Lithia Springs
- Amir Mason – Mableton
- Lilian Farrar – Mount Airy

At the four-day program at Walt Disney World, the 100 Disney Dreamers will engage



The Disney Dreamers Academy Class of 2023. Photo courtesy of Disney

with business leaders, Disney executives, celebrities, and educators, who will immerse them in workshops and seminars designed to supercharge their career dreams. The students will also explore a wide range of career disciplines while also learning essential skills, such as effective communication techniques, leadership, and networking strategies.

Additionally, they will spend plenty of

time experiencing the magic of Walt Disney World.

"We eagerly anticipate the arrival of another exceptional group of high schoolers from all corners of the country for our 17th year!" remarked Tracey Powell, Senior Vice President of Consumer Insight, Measurement & Analytics and Executive Champion of Disney Dreamers Academy. "These future leaders are poised to embark on a transformative

journey, gaining an experience of a lifetime that will propel them towards achieving their dreams."

Each year, the Disney Dreamers are selected from thousands of applicants who answer essay questions about their personal stories and dreams for the future. The students and a parent or guardian enjoy an all-expenses paid trip to Walt Disney World. The program is an important part of Disney's commitment to support diverse communities by encouraging the next generation to think and dream big.

Since 2008, Disney Dreamers Academy has inspired more than 1,600 students from across the country by fueling their dreams and showing them a world of possibilities as they prepare for their futures. In the years following, graduates have become storytellers, artists, engineers, innovators, journalists and more, and have transitioned into mentors to the Disney Dreamers who follow them.

For more information, visit DisneyDreamersAcademy.com.

Morris Brown professor leaves a legacy of helping others

BY ALLISON JOYNER

When Morris Brown College announced that Dr. Nasrohah Farokhi, one of its longest-tenured employees, was retiring after 43 years, he was overwhelmed by the phone calls, emails, and social media posts he received from previous and current students.

"We appreciate your service and dedication to Dear Ole Morris Brown Dr. Farokhi!"

"An outstanding professor who challenged us to be better!"

"My favorite professor of all time" are just a few comments that flooded the HBCU's Instagram page.

"I got a call from all over the nation, everywhere. I got one from back home in Iran, and they called me and said [the news] was all over," Farokhi said.

Since 1981, Farokhi has taught various subjects about politics, social science, and business to MBC students semester after semester.

To say his time has been tumultuous is an understatement. In over 40 years, he has seen 10 college presidents and six AME Bish-



"I hope my legacy is described as one of compassion, caring, sharing, honesty, decency, trust and everything else that human beings should have," Farokhi (above) said. Photo by Allison Joyner/The Atlanta Voice

ops come and go, persevering through the school's darkest days, when it lost its accreditation for almost half of that time.

Farokhi has seen the good, bad, and ugly of Morris Brown's historical past and has kept the same attitude of helping his students find their potential at the same time.

Now that the school has regained its accreditation and is back on its feet, he says it is an excellent time to pursue other endeavors and continue to give to others.

"I have to give back to the community because this is my life legacy to give to others and give credit to all the people who have been instrumental beside me," Farokhi said.

When Farokhi immigrated to the U.S. from Iran, he continued his education at several institutions like Ball State and Mississippi State University before receiving his Ph.D. in political science from Atlanta University in 1979.

His wife, Beth, also had a career in education as he helped her run for Cobb County and state superintendent offices before she died in 2018 and taught their three kids, including Atlanta City Councilmember Amir, that the only thing that is important in life is what you do for others.

When speaking to The Atlanta Voice, Farokhi mentioned that the only thing that a person will be remembered for is how they made them feel.

"The only thing is what you did for others. That's my goal," Farokhi said.

"Thank you, Dr. Farokhi, for all the lives you have touched."

"An outstanding professor who challenged us to do better," and comments like these

continue to pour in for Farokhi from those who wanted to give him his well-deserved flowers one last time.

When it comes to connecting with his students, he knows that he must invest in them for them to succeed.

"If you want to understand your students, you have to be 60 percent teaching and 40 percent counselor," Farokhi said.

At the end of the semester, Farokhi says he wants to continue helping others by mentoring students and parents in Cobb County high schools who want to go to college and assisting them with filling out applications and applying for financial aid.

But his imprint on Morris Brown College is far from over. Farokhi established the Drs. Nasrohah and Beth Farokhi Endowed Scholarship Fund to support Morris Brown students and the Board of Trustees announced naming the Nasrohah R. Farokhi Center for the Teaching, Learning, and Innovation in his honor.

"I hope my legacy is described as one of compassion, caring, sharing, honesty, decency, trust, and everything else that human beings should have," Farokhi said.

Economy



ONLINE
Year of The Youth:
One Year Later

Black employment is up across U.S. says White House

BY DONNELL SUGGS

Black unemployment across the country is as low as it has been in years, according to the latest White House economic report.

Last year, Black unemployment levels reached record lows and are now just 5.3% compared to 9% three-plus years ago. No one person, administration or event can solely be given credit for this record level of Black employment, but these numbers are reason for optimism.

"It was really a strong year for Black workers," Deputy Director of National Economic Council Daniel Hornung told The Atlanta Voice during a recent phone interview on Thursday afternoon.

The share of Black people with jobs is now above pre-pandemic levels signally a return to the economy.



Black unemployment rates are now well below 6% in comparison to being nearing 10% in 2019, according to a recent report from the White House. iStock/ablokhin

Black households and Black-owned businesses have also seen an uptick during this wave of improvement. "It's not just wages," said Hornung, who agreed that the data

needs to be shared throughout the Black community for better clarity on how the economy is doing. "It's been a strong recovery for Black households in particular."

The amount of Black-owned businesses has doubled since 2019, according to that same economic report from the White House. The number of Black-owned businesses run by families have also doubled since 2019. The building of generational wealth has historically often come from a family business that is passed down from one generation to the next. Having more Black-owned family businesses is important for generations to come.

Even Black family homeownership rates have increased during the past three-plus years. The Black homeownership rate is currently just over 46%, according to the report.

"That's why we need to work so hard to put policies in place to build strong economies and strong wage growth," said Hornung, who added that those policies have to also be shared equally among all communities.

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Health



ONLINE
Grant program for Black women comes under tough questioning in key anti-DEI lawsuit

The Danger of Social Isolation and Loneliness in Older Adults

BY CLAYTON GUTZMORE

“Imagine a new treatment that could increase your survival by as much as 50%. It can also reduce your risk for cardiovascular disease by 29% and stroke by 32%. It can reduce your likelihood of developing depression and dementia. What I’m referring to is social connection. Although it’s not a new treatment, everyone should invest in their social connections,” said Dr. Julianne Holt-Lunstad, professor of psychology and neuroscience at Brigham Young University.

This is one of the valuable pieces of information Dr. Holt-Lunstad shared during a virtual roundtable discussing social isolation and loneliness in older adults. These items are two issues that are affecting older adults at an alarming rate. According to The U.S. Surgeon General, Both matters are associated with a greater risk of cardiovascular disease, dementia, stroke, depression, anxiety, and premature death. The General further explains that the mortality impact of being socially disconnected is similar to that caused by smoking up to 15 cigarettes a day. Dr. Holt-Lunstad and two other professors expound on this subject to reveal what is causing this and what solutions should be applied.

“If you’re noticing something is off with a loved one, or they’re experiencing a major life or health transition, start a conversation. Ask them how they’ve been feeling lately. I’ve noticed that talking about loneliness or social isolation can sometimes be hard or awkward. Common phrases I use are, “I’ve noticed a lot of people have been feeling lonely recently. Is that something you’ve been experiencing?” Or, “Do you need help connecting with others?” said Dr. Ashwin Kotwal, assistant professor of medicine at the University of California, San Francisco School of Medicine.

The Loneliness and Longevity in Older Adults virtual panel was held in December 2023. Dr. Karen Fingerman, a professor of human development and family sciences at the University of Texas at Austin, joined Dr. Holt-Lunstad and Dr. Kotwal. All three discussed the hazard of social isolation and how little things like handwritten cards make a huge difference.

“Back in the 1990s, I did a study of holiday cards, and this is back when people wrote little handwritten messages to people. We got them to fill out a survey for each of their cards. We looked at how much this mattered, and we’ve found that these cards made a difference in their sense of belonging during the holiday season,” said Dr. Fingerman.



"If you're noticing something is off with a loved one, or they're experiencing a major life or health transition, start a conversation. Ask them how they've been feeling lately. I've noticed that talking about loneliness or social isolation can sometimes be hard or awkward."
iStock/diego_cervo

Dr. Holt-Lunstad spoke more on the topic of social connection. She explained how all aspects of social connection have been linked to health and longevity. She illustrated how social connection is an underappreciated factor in people's lives.

"Social Connection is often seen as nice to have but not essential. Yet, it's critical—it's critical for individual and population health, well-being, community safety, resilience, and prosperity. Unfortunately, far too many people lack social connection in one or more ways, compromising these benefits," said Dr. Holt-Lunstad.

Dr. Holt-Lunstad presented three vital components of social connection from the surgeon general advisory: structure, function, and quality. Structure in social connection involves the number of relationships, the variety of relationships, and the frequency of interactions with others. Function deals with the degree to which others can

be relied upon for various needs. Quality is the last component. This entails the positive and negative aspects of relationships and interactions. All three elements are essential for health and influence health in different ways.

Dr. Kotwal categorized loneliness and social isolation as subjective and objective. He explains how loneliness assesses that social relationships are lacking. In contrast, social isolation measures family, friends, or community connections. Life events that occur in older adults' lives that can trigger the two issues are the death of a spouse, the death of friends or relatives, deteriorating physical health, and change in living arrangements.

Dr. Kotwal recommends combating the issues by providing space to discuss potential causes of social isolation and loneliness. A follow-up to that step is asking for an invitation to address the needs. Dr. Kotwal elaborates that items tied to the two issues can

be personal; only some want you involved. However, if people are interested in helping, you can ask them what they think might help and invite them to brainstorm.

Dr. Kotwal believes this matter is big enough to establish policy. He breaks down how loneliness and isolation are common and may contribute enormously to suffering as individuals age and approach the last years of life. The doctor further explains how the medical system spends a lot on disease treatments, even when these treatments are costly and ineffective. Dr. Kotwal is convinced we need to think about how to prioritize spending more on social care, where we might significantly impact the quality of life.

"This is a call to action for everyone. Everybody can make a difference, and it starts by having a conversation, destigmatizing these topics, and providing space to help people process what might be challenging things they're going through," said Dr. Kotwal.

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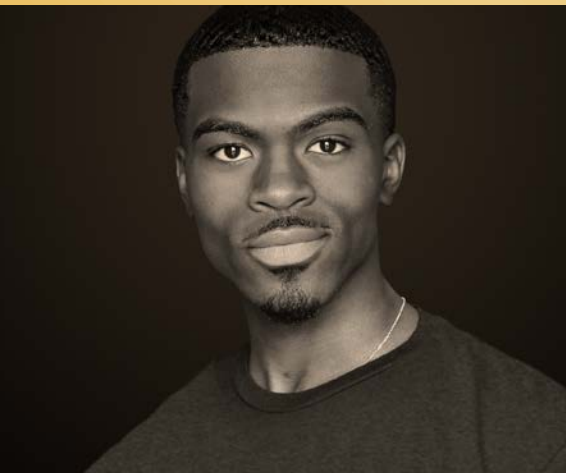
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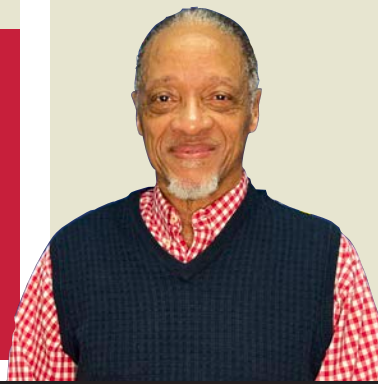


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THE ATLANTA VOICE



IN THIS ISSUE

**Tony Merritt
shares his journey
of living with HIV
for 34 years.** PAGE 8

AROUND TOWN

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The **A** is for amour

Atlanta United defensive midfielder Tristan Muyumba was born in Paris, France and now lives in Midtown, Atlanta. Asked if he is enjoying his new home after having lived here the past 6-7 months, he said, "I'm very happy and excited to be here." Muyumba is one of a handful of players the club will count on if there are going to get back to the league championship. United begins the 2024 at reigning MLS champion Columbus Crew Saturday. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

Metro



ONLINE
Man accused of torching police motorcycles in attack authorities have linked to ‘Cop City’ protests

‘We have the team to win a championship this year’

BY DONNELL SUGGS

MARIETTA, Ga.-

On a cool and slightly overcast Tuesday morning, Atlanta United players made their way through individual drills and team workouts along the grass fields at the Children’s Healthcare of Atlanta Training Ground. Arguably Atlanta’s best supported professional sports franchise, United was once again at the top of the attendance charts at the end of 2023, averaging a league high 47,526 fans per each of its 17 home games, according to sports data website Soccer Stadium Digest. One of the players cutting and juking back and forth on the field that morning was thrust into a graduate school level of learning just how crazy the support and fandom can be for the Five Stripes when he arrived last summer.

French defensive midfielder Tristan Muyumba, 26, is just days away from playing in his first Major League Soccer season opener. Muyumba made his official United debut during a Leagues Cup match against Cruz Azul last July 29 inside Mercedes-Benz Stadium. Coming to Atlanta from Ligue 2 club EA Guingamp, a respectable club in its own right, Muyumba was thrust into a fight for postseason position throughout his ten-game

See **MUYUMBA** on page 3

Atlanta United midfielder Tristan Muyumba is looking forward to his first full season as a member of the club after coming over midway through last season. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice



Muyumba, pictured during training Tuesday, Feb. 20, played in 10 games last season, starting nine. His skill on the ball immediately helped the club defensively. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

MUYUMBA

Continued from page 2

start to life in Atlanta. Having started nine of the final 10 games of the 2023 season for United manager Gonzalo Pineda, Muyumba quickly admits that his move to Major League Soccer (MLS) was partly based on the league’s growing reputation and style of play. “The quality of players in MLS, especially the forwards, is a little better,” said Muyumba, who added that Ligue 2 could be a bit more physical.

Starting this season with Atlanta United, the 2024 campaign feels more like his rookie year in a way. He is getting to train with his teammates, some for the first time. A full start to the season has also afforded Muyumba the opportunity to play preseason matches with the club, the most recent being against fellow MLS side Sporting KC in Miami on Feb. 17. Learning a new city, new team, coaching staff, and new league can be difficult. Doing all that in the middle of the season even more so, he explained.

“[Last year] I did the preseason with my teammates, so we worked together, and I spent more time with them. So I was more comfortable than when you arrive during the season,” Muyumba said. “It’s different, but it’s a good difference.”

During the nine starts and 10 overall matches, Muyumba played 815 minutes, earning the trust of Pineda during crucial matches that United needed to win in order to remain in postseason contention. He scored his first career MLS goal in what would be a 5-2 victory over visiting Inter Miami on Sept. 16. The header came off of a pass from veteran United defender Brooks Lennon. The goal tied the match at one and



Muyumba (above during a 2023 match at Mercedes-Benz Stadium) and Atlanta United made the playoffs last season, but lost in the first round to eventual Major League Soccer champions Columbus Crew. The two teams will meet again Saturday in Ohio for the season opener. Photo by Itorro N. Umontuen/The Atlanta Voice

the United supporters went wild. Having played professionally in Belgium at the age of 20, and in France since he was 23, Muyumba understands the passion tied to soccer fans around the world, but United-level support excites him a bit.

Muyumba’s current three-year contract expires Dec. 31, 2026. He says he loves playing “In the Benz” and is getting familiar with his on and off-pitch surroundings. “Everyone in the coaching staff, in the locker room, every single person is very good, and for me it is a pleasure to be here.”

Muyumba began playing soccer as a young boy chasing af-

ter his older brothers. He would hone his skills on the streets of Paris while growing up and appreciates the hustle and bustle of a city like Atlanta. After all, having been born in the City of Light, and now being a professional athlete, Muyumba could afford to live anywhere in the city, but has chosen to live in Midtown among his new home’s midday traffic and bustling night light.

He said he enjoys the sights, sounds, and food.

“I feel comfortable here now, I’m very happy and excited to be here,” Muyumba said. “When I arrived I didn’t really know the league, so I learned about my teammates and the league, and I’m going to keep learning.”

Atlanta United opens the regular season at Columbus Crew, Saturday, Feb. 24 in a rematch of last year’s first round playoff matchup. The Five Stripes will make its home debut when it hosts the New England Revolution Saturday, March 9. Muyumba said one of the things he enjoyed about playing in MLS was how much every match mattered all season long despite there not being a relegation factor in American sports.

“We have the team to win a championship this year,” Muyumba said. “We have a lot of competitors on this team, and I think more of them being here is bringing experience to the team.”

A second United championship parade through downtown and Midtown could remind him of how they celebrate victories back home on the Avenue des Champs-Élysées. Muyumba thought for a moment and tugged at the shirt sleeves of his gray and white practice gear. “We have the quality and mentality to win in this league,” he said.

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Voices

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“We will all, at some point, encounter hurdles to gaining access and entry, moving up and conquering self-doubt; but on the other side is the capacity to own opportunity and tell our own story.” – Stacey Abrams



Blacks, Latinos hit hardest by all-time high rental costs

BY CHARLENE CROWELL

A new report on rental housing from Harvard’s Joint Center for Housing Studies (JCHS) makes clear why so many people are dissatisfied with the nation’s economy. Released in late January and entitled, *America’s Rental Housing 2024*, the report documents however-rising rental costs are burdening people in every state of the country.

In 2022, a record high of 22.4 million cost-burdened renter households rose by two million families since 2019. Affordable housing should cost no more than 30 percent of total household income.

“Median rents have risen nearly continuously since 2001 in inflation-adjusted terms and are 21 percent higher as of 2022,” states JCHS. “Meanwhile, renters’ incomes have risen just 2 percent during the same period... Among cost-burdened households, 12.1 million had housing costs that consumed more than half of their income, an all-time high for severe burdens.”

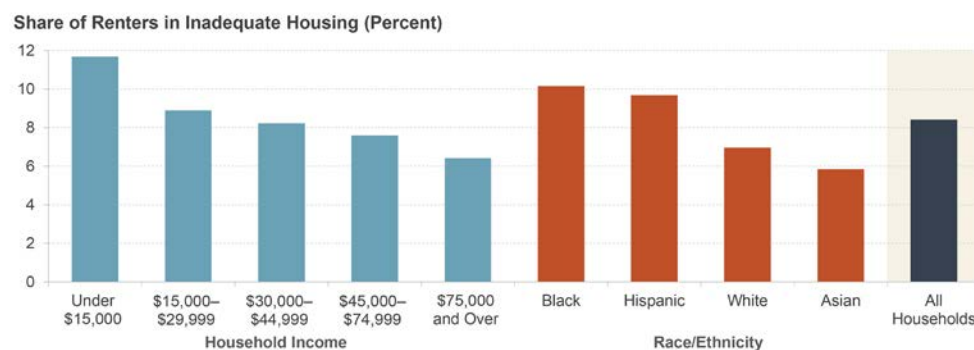
At the same time, eviction filings have returned to pre-pandemic levels in 2023 as relief measures expired. A record-setting 653,100 people were unhoused on a given night in January 2023, an increase of nearly 71,000 people in just one year. Once more, Blacks and Latinos are disproportionately impacted. Black people are 37 percent of all unhoused people but just 13 percent of the US population; while Latinos, representing 28 percent of homeless people, are less than 20 percent of the population.

Ironically, according to the report, cost-burdened renters include people with full-time jobs with a span of incomes that some may find surprising.

While all income groups had increasing cost-burden rates from 2019 to 2022, middle-income renters making \$45,000 to \$74,999 saw their cost-burdened share rise the fastest with a 5.4 percentage point increase to 41 percent. Additionally, 8 million cost-burdened households were headed by a full-time, year-round worker.

Among the 14.6 million renter households comprising the working poor – those earning \$30,000 or less each year – had median cash savings of just \$300 and total net wealth of only \$3,200. They were also the most likely to live in substandard housing with multiple problems such as structural deficiencies, a

Renters with Lower Incomes and Those of Color Disproportionately Live in Inadequate Housing



Notes: Housing inadequacy refers to a variety of structural deficiencies, such as large holes and leaks or the absence of basic features including plumbing, electricity, water, or heat. HUD classifies units as moderately or severely inadequate depending on the type and number of these physical problems. Black, white, and Asian householders are non-Hispanic. Hispanic householders may be of any race. Source: JCHS tabulations of US Department of Housing and Urban Development, 2021 American Housing Survey.

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Joint Center for Housing Studies of Harvard University JCHS

lack of upkeep, or the inconsistent provision of basic features such as hot and cold running water, heat, and electricity. Households with lower incomes and households of color are disproportionately exposed to substandard conditions.

Long-standing federal programs like HUD’s Housing Voucher Program, better known as Section 8, were intended to provide sanitary, standard housing for low and middle-income families. But today’s reality reveals a much different experience.

In 2022, HUD’s Housing Choice Vouchers assisted 2.3 million households, covering the difference between 30 percent of a household’s income and their area’s fair market rent. Their usage, however, depends upon participation by private-market landlords, who are not required to accept the vouchers in most places. Additionally, program rules and timelines discourage some landlords from participating. According to the report, 40 percent of people who receive a voucher are unable to secure a signed lease in the allotted time.

“Nationwide, states and cities also generate about \$3 billion annually through housing trust funds to meet local housing needs,” states the report. “All of these efforts are crucial but fall short of the growing need... In 2022, just 7.2 million units had contract rents under \$600—the maximum amount affordable to the 26 percent of renters with annual incomes under \$24,000. This marks a loss of 2.1 million units since 2012, when adjusting for inflation. The spike in asking rents during

the pandemic accelerated the trend, with more than half a million low-rent units lost just between 2019 and 2022.”

For Diane Yentl, President and CEO of the National Low Income Housing Coalition, the nation’s dearth of affordable housing is at a crisis level.

“Without affordable, available housing options and higher incomes, more than 10 million of America’s lowest-income households, disproportionately people of color, pay at least half their income on rent and utilities,” said Yentl in a recent statement. “With so much money going to keep a roof over their heads, renters with the lowest incomes are forced to live precariously, always one unexpected expense – for a broken-down car or unreimbursed medical bill – away from housing instability, eviction, and, in the worst cases, homelessness. Yet Congress only provides housing assistance to one in four eligible households.”

The JCHS report reached a similar conclusion:

“The instability caused by a lack of affordable housing bleeds over to other public spending, threatening the well-being of millions of people... With housing challenges growing ever more severe, now is the time to make a fuller commitment to ensuring that all people living in the US have a decent, safe, and affordable place to call home.”

Charlene Crowell is a senior fellow with the Center for Responsible Lending. She can be reached at Charlene.crowell@responsiblelending.org.

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SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

Playing the spiritual game on His terms



BY JAMES A. WASHINGTON

The Atlanta Voice

Forgive my sports analogy, but I have often found myself wrestling with the concepts and realities of good and evil. It stands to reason that if you believe in God and His goodness, power and the righteousness of Jesus Christ, then you must also believe in Satan and his earth-bound inherent 'evilness.'

So that I don't become too esoteric, allow me to explain. It is the height of hypocrisy or wanton ignorance that we as human beings follow a course of action consistent with one belief and act at the same time totally contrary to that same belief. We concede to the reality that evil exists.

Our laws, legal system and subsequent penalties are there to protect us against criminal, abhorrent and yes, evil behavior. The recognition then, is, or should be, that there must be a counterbalance of behaviors or at least professed beliefs that confirm the existence of good, the God stuff.

Unfortunately, it seems that evil demands action while goodness gets a whole lot of lip service.

Christ has given all of us the game plan we need to insure ultimate victory

I believe this is true because we humans, with all of our flaws and faults (or should I say sinfulness), have gotten used to functioning in a world controlled in large part by the evil one.

Christians do recognize that the devil does have power in this world, however limited. The Bible confirms this. Thanks to him many of us have become somewhat numb to this brand of living. We see this 24/7 on the news.

Fortunately, when it comes to Christ, we are able to put some perspective on all of this and the evil/sin that exists in our own lives. That's when we finally get it. By putting ourselves in line with the righteousness of Christ, it becomes clear to us where we fit in this struggle between good and evil. We then recognize we are the prize in this game.

To the victor goes us. That's right. In this game between good and evil, we (that

means you) are the prize.

Again, fortunately for us, we have some say in whose clubhouse the celebration takes place. Once you accept the concept of good and evil in the context of God and the devil, the rules of engagement are clear. In this game, the ball (us) has a say in who gets the victory.

Can you imagine any athletic event where the ball actually participates in the game? We are that ball in this high stakes game for our very souls. Imagine that. We can stack the deck. But it can't be by happenstance. It must be deliberate and we must be constant in making sure the ball takes favorable bounces throughout the game.

With this in mind, Christ has given all of us the game plan we need to insure ultimate victory.

"He who believes in me... will never die." John 11:25-26. That's it. It's all about belief.

When Jesus says in John 16:8-9, "When He (the Counselor/Holy Spirit) comes, He will convict the world of guilt in regard to sin and righteousness and judgment: in regard to sin because men do not believe in me..." He is telling us that the biggest threat to our own salvation is disbelief.

You see, belief in Christ brings about the condemnation of Satan. It must. It's a game changer. The knowledge of good concedes nothing to evil. Now we are armed and ready for the struggle.

We are on guard against the evil that is intended to destroy us. We now have a point of reference for all of our current and future behaviors. That doesn't guarantee success all the time. But it does let us understand the stakes.

We know the difference between good and evil and we recognize our weaknesses in relation to evil and our strengths in relation to good. No contest is without its risks and rewards but for now, Game on!

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May He bless and keep you always.

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Claflin gets \$1.8M for CU-DEEP, aids rural health

Start your yoga journey today

BY CLAYTON GUTZMORE

The beginning of the year marks when everyone tries to become healthier. People attempt new practices that sometimes may be too intense to maintain beyond March. One activity that starts easy and can evolve into something challenging is yoga. This exercise involves stretching, breathing, and movements to connect you with your body. After putting yoga into your routine, the results can be tremendous for your overall health. Jasmine Nicole and Kiyona Miah are the founders of the Black Yogis of South Florida. They share their knowledge of how anyone can start this activity and reap the benefits immediately.

“You can see the benefits of yoga the same day if you’re open to it. Experiences and trauma can get trapped in the body. We don’t often realize how many things we carry daily,” said Kiyona Miah, co-founder of Black Yogi’s of South Florida.

“I’ve seen people be able to release the first time on their mat physically. That looks like them crying, feeling looser, or getting an epiphany about their challenge. All because they could sit long enough to hear it,” said Kiyona Miah, co-founder of Black Yogi’s of South Florida,” said Miah.

Yoga is an ancient and complex practice rooted in Indian philosophy. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, it began as a spiritual practice but has become popular for promoting physical and mental well-being. The Black Yogis of South Florida explain that yoga means yoke or unity in Sanskrit. Through yoga, one unifies breath and movement to build interconnectedness.

“Have you ever seen someone with anxiety and you can see the physical presence of it there? Their nervous system isn’t regulated,” said Jasmine Nicole, co-founder of Black Yogi’s of South Florida.

“What that means is their senses are heightened; they are in this constant state of fight or flight mode because the world has put us on the go. What yoga does is center the body. With continued practice, you can tell when you are not regulated and learn how to pull yourself back to a balanced state of mind,” said Nicole.

The Black Yogis of South Florida assembled in 2022. Their



Yoga is an ancient and complex practice rooted in Indian philosophy. According to the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, it began as a spiritual practice but has become popular for promoting physical and mental well-being. Photo Credit iStock.com/youngoldman

mission is to create safe and inclusive spaces for melanated people to practice and explore yoga. They aim to support black yoga teachers and shine a light on them while also supporting black businesses. Nicole and Miah are transplants from New Orleans, LA, and Baltimore, MD. They met when Nicole tried to find a Yoga Class in Hollywood, FL. Miah was the only Black instructor listed at that location. They became friends and decided to find other Black Yoga groups. Their results had yet to return. They launched this organization as a hub for those wanting to do yoga.

Having an Open Mind.

The first tip The Black Yogis of South Florida recommends

is an open mind. Beginning yoga with limiting beliefs will prevent you from being immersed in the exercises. Miah explains that people’s first idea of yoga is the challenging poses experienced people do. She describes how simple tasks like meditation and breathwork qualify for the exercise.

“People often think of postures, but it’s so much bigger than that. People look on Instagram to see the challenging yoga poses and calisthenics. They might get intimidated by it, but they shouldn’t because that isn’t a full representation of yoga,” said Miah.

Finding A Good Yoga Instructor.

A yoga instructor can make or break someone’s experience with the activity. The Black Yogis of South Florida recommends finding an instructor that resonates with you. The duo explains that you should visit their Instagram page or a class or event where they are instructing. Please pay attention to how they lead. The Black Yogis share that yoga is a passion and shines through how the instructor speaks and teaches. The Black Yogis recommends YouTube for Yoga for those who want to practice at home or can’t make it to a studio. Once a month, The Black Yogis host mini-flow Monday. This is a 5-minute session led by a fellow black yoga instructor on the organization’s Instagram.

Spend Your Energy on the Being, Not the Doing.

The Black Yogis express how this activity allows you to pause. The duo can’t state enough how deep breaths can make a difference. For beginners doing Yoga, The Black Yogis want people to focus more on being present and meditating. Silencing the distractions around you or, in their words, focus on the being, not the doing. Nicole and Miah also want those starting their yoga journey to pace themselves and do what they can. Have a level of accountability to know not to push yourself through a yoga exercise you cannot do.

“Have the accountability that it represents love. If your leg can’t go here, or you need to get into a child’s pose when the class is heated. Do that. Hold yourself accountable to take breaths as needed and not try to push yourself through something you’re struggling to do,” said Nicole.

Business

Rideshare service Blacklane expands Atlanta services

BY DONNELL SUGGS

Germany-based international ride-share service Blacklane will expand its services in Atlanta beginning on Feb. 23, according to a release from the company.

The chauffeur company has provided airport and city-to-city service in Atlanta since 2014 and plans to make moving around Georgia and neighboring states more accessible for its clients.

“We see a growth opportunity for our city-to-city service,” said Blacklane CEO Dr. Jens Wohltorf

The new routes from Atlanta to other cities in Georgia will include service to Augusta, Albany, and Columbus. Service to Alabama will include routes to Dothan, Huntsville, and Montgomery. Atlantans and visitors to the country’s busiest airport, Hartsfield Jackson International Air-

port, can get to South Carolina (Greenville), North Carolina (Asheville), and Tennessee (Chattanooga and Knoxville) by way of Blacklane.

With Atlanta scheduled to host multiple World Cup matches in the summer of 2026, including the semifinals, there will be more visitors to the city from across the country. For example, the competition for rideshares at the airport will be heightened by a large

margin. For example, more than three million fans attended the World Cup in Qatar two years ago.

“Atlanta is a major business and travel hub in North America and important to us with or without major sporting events,” said Wohltorf. “However, the World Cup adds even more growth opportunities to Blacklane serving Atlanta residents and visitors alike.”

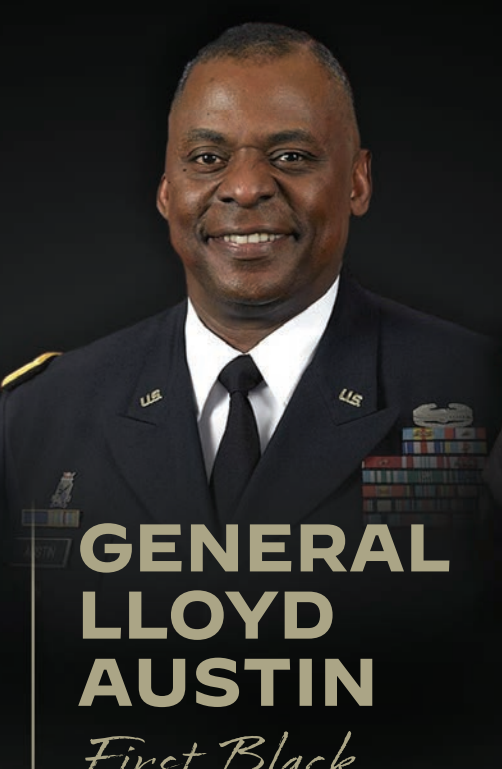
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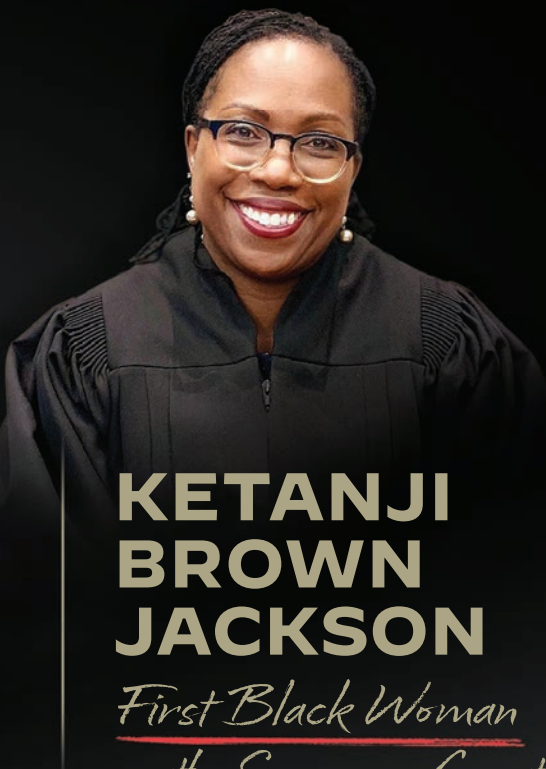
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BY ISAIAH SINGLETON

the west side in a small church and became very good friends,” Merritt recalled. “He contracted AIDS and one of his college classmates and I were his caregiver because he couldn’t work. We moved into this facility for people who were dying of AIDS and I was one of his caregivers. During the week, his classmates cared for him, and I would care for him on the weekends.”

his friend alive. "I walked into the apartment, and I saw him. He looked like someone that was dying and someone I had seen in Jerusalem House," he said. "That was really hard, especially when you have known this person all your life. Until

What it takes to be an advocate

“A part of this goes back to the point where several years ago, I was sitting in a breakout session for one of the agencies dealing with HIV/AIDS and they mentioned the numbers of young black males in the city of Atlanta that are HIV positive and more than likely not getting care. Adhere to the medication and you will live a relatively healthy life and so that was my idea of becoming an advocate,” he said.

“My friend told me if this was something I really believed in, it’ll be easier for me to do,” he said. “So, when I decided to do it, it was easier than I thought it was going to be because back in the day, a lot of it was shame, denial, and getting back to what I accepted, the fact that this was something that I wanted to do in terms of who I was.”

"When I agreed to share my story, I told them I would do it, but I must talk to my son first because he knows I'm gay, but he didn't know I'm HIV positive. So, I gave him a call and told him I wanted to share some information with him, not for his approval but letting him know this is something I'm going to do this year," he said.

Additionally, Merritt said this wasn't the



"When I agreed to be an advocate for this program, it wasn't as challenging as I thought it would be. I thought I was going to be questioned, condemned, and it wasn't there," he said. Certain things like going to conferences and being around like-minded people helped Merritt gain his level of comfort.

The conversation and resources surrounding HIV/AIDS have changed tremendously in the last 34 years. With open conversations and medicine like PrEP (pre-exposure prophylaxis) and PEP (post-exposure prophylaxis), a positive diagnosis is no longer feels like a death sentence.

“When I was diagnosed, nothing was available. The only available medicine was doing more harm than good, so you wanted to stay away from that. Now they have something that saves your life, and if you adhere to the medication, you can have a relatively long healthy life,” he said.

The problem, however, he said is the stigma that comes with having HIV/AIDS. "It's still here alive and well," he said. "You would think it would be less knowing how effective these drugs are, but that stigma is major, and I can understand because I never shared my status with my family."

“There are healthcare processes, procedures, drugs, and resources to help people live a healthy life and I am an example of that,” he said. “I can say I have been living with HIV for 34 years and if you take the medication regularly, you can too.”

The “Be Fearless. Get Tested.” The HIV and STI testing event at AvitaCare Atlanta is offering confidential HIV and STI testing on February 5-11. Walk-in testing and appointments are available at avitacareatlanta.com/befearless or by calling (404) 231-4431.

Testing can also be scheduled by visiting avitahealthatlanta.com/befearless or calling (404) 231-4431. Results are confidential, and expert healthcare providers will offer personalized follow-up care.

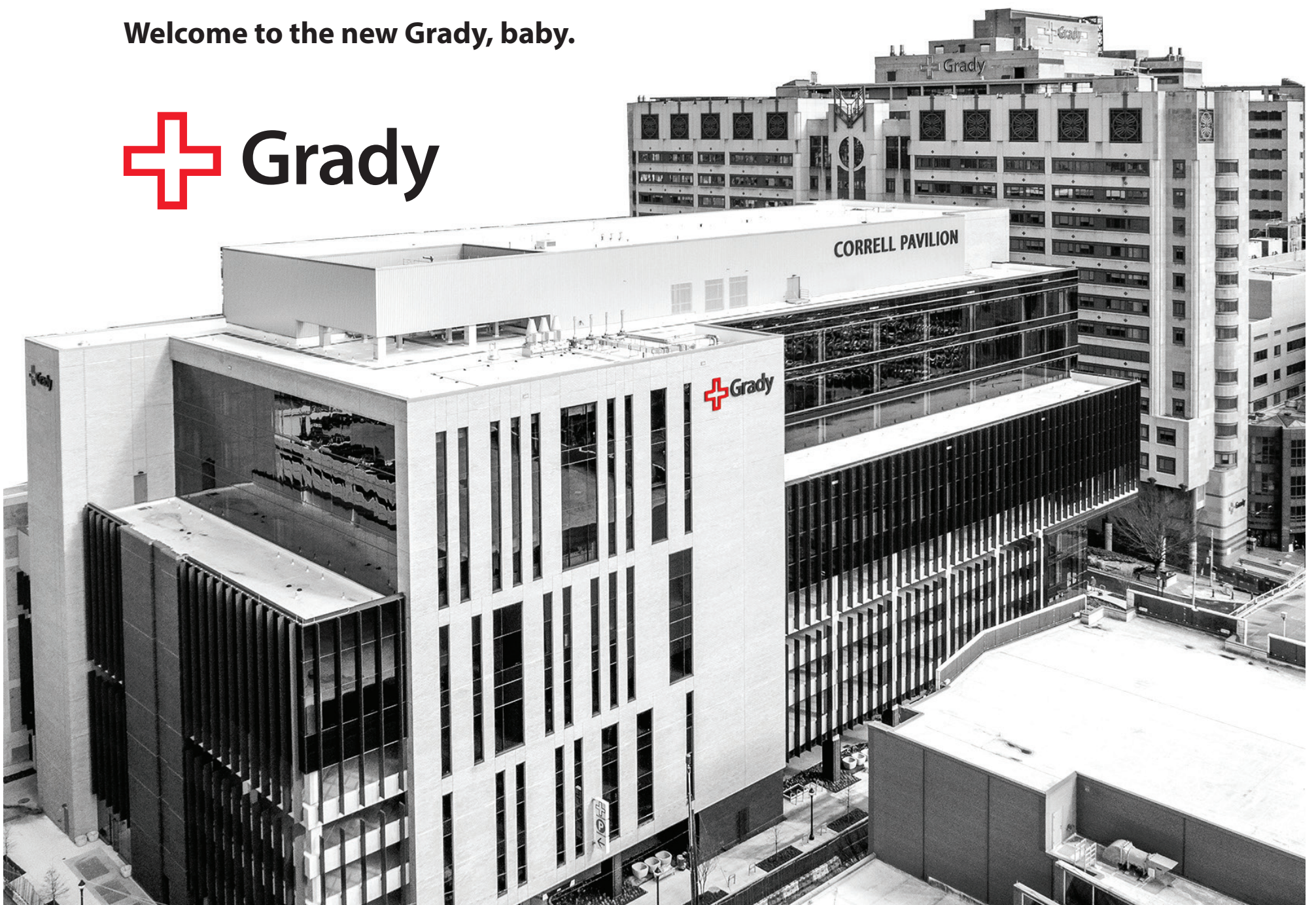
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Fashion



Say Yes to Prom returns to Atlanta for a second year in a row

BY ISIAH SINGLETON

Say Yes to Prom returns to Atlanta for a consecutive year, its 12th overall. Warner Bros. Discovery treated 500 Atlanta students to one-on-one styling sessions with Monte Durham of TLC's Say Yes to the Dress: Atlanta and WBD employees to help them develop their unique prom look and style.

The Atlanta schools involved in the styling sessions include KIPP Atlanta Collegiate, Carver Early College + Cristo Rey Atlanta, Mundy's Mill High School, McNair High School, North Clayton High School, and Carver STEAM Academy.

This year's SAY YES TO THE PROM experience includes a selection of on-trend dresses and thousands of shoes and accessories from Macy's, as well as custom tuxedo fittings and trend-forward menswear rentals provided by Men's Wearhouse. Cosmetics were donated by Glamnetic, Glamlite, and Lottie London, and L'Oréal USA donated thousands of products including fragrances, makeup, and cosmetic tools for hair and makeup consultations from established CNN stylists all thoughtfully curated to get students looking and feeling their best for a night to remember.

Sessions included a student welcome and introduction by Durham and Adria Alpert Romm, Chief People and Culture Officer, WBD as well as a shopping experience including styling from Durham and WBD Atlanta employees, as well as hair and makeup application by CNN artists.

North Clayton High School seniors Kaylan Hawkins, Lucy Adams, Sa'niyah Snell, and Marsha' Dossie spoke to The Atlanta Voice about how they each feel about the event.

"I feel amazing. It feels like my senior year has gone right already and we aren't even over the semester yet," Hawkins said.

"I feel good. I feel confident and I feel like this is an amazing opportunity for young people in our generation today," Adams said.

"I feel amazing right now. This means so much to me and all the girls here because we get to map out our entire process for our proms," Snell said.

"I'm feeling good. Picking my dresses means to me that senior year is coming to an end, and I did this at an early age," Dossie said.

In addition to giving deserving high school students the opportunity to shop for a complete prom look, students were provided with resources to learn about careers in the media and entertainment industry, including tailored presentations exploring film and TV production roles in partnership



Say Yes to Prom returns to Atlanta for a consecutive year, its 12th overall. Photo by Isaiah Singleton/The Atlanta Voice

with RE:IMAGINE. In addition, SAY YES TO THE PROM works with the Emma Bowen Foundation, Hispanic Scholarship Fund, The Posse Foundation, and T. Howard Foundation offers juniors and seniors from underserved communities information on mentorship, internship, and scholarship resources that go beyond the prom and give them the confidence and tools necessary to achieve their future goals and dreams. For more information, visit <https://www.tlc.com/style---self-care/packages/say-yes-to-the-prom>.

RIGHT: The Atlanta schools involved in the styling sessions include KIPP Atlanta Collegiate, Carver Early College + Cristo Rey Atlanta, Mundy's Mill High School, McNair High School, North Clayton High School, and Carver STEAM Academy. Photo by Isaiah Singleton/The Atlanta Voice



Entertainment

‘I carry the A with me everywhere I go’: Welcome home, Usher

BY ALLISON JOYNER

Clark Atlanta University (CAU) students got a Valentine’s Day surprise as R&B superstar Usher entered the Bishop Cornelius Henderson Student Center Wednesday afternoon.

“I knew there was a surprise, but I didn’t know that Usher was the surprise,” said Asia, a Biology major and native of Houston, Texas.

Fresh off his Super Bowl halftime performance, Usher visited CAU, where he received accolades and proclamations from state and local politicians and celebrated Usher’s New Look Foundation’s 25th anniversary during a “Coming Home” rally.

Amazon Music and the Historically Black University and College (HBCU) hosted the event with the same name as his new album “Coming Home.” The album is his ninth for the Atlanta native. It has been six years since Usher’s last album.

The album cover, which shows a closeup of the back of the singer/songwriter’s head as he lays a peach on his right shoulder, was released days before his spectacular Super Bowl LVIII halftime performance.

This year is also the 25th anniversary of Usher’s New Look Foundation, which gives high school students mentorship opportunities and leadership education to help them graduate from school or college.

To celebrate the occasion, Amazon Photos donated \$25,000 to the foundation to help continue their endeavor.



Photo by Allison Joyner/The Atlanta Voice

“This collaboration between Amazon, Usher’s New Look, and CAU signifies a collective effort to tackle the challenges that prevent teens from reaching their educational goals and to create a brighter future for the next generation,” said Clark Atlanta University President Dr. George French.

The foundation’s first new look camp was hosted at CAU in 1999. Today, it has served over 50,000 youth to help them get accepted

and enrolled in college, most of them being one of the first in their families to do so.

“In my mind, I always thought about curating and building and never thought about being the king to take somebody else out,” Usher said. “I only thought about how can I continue to build things that will be infrastructure in people’s minds so that they can believe in themselves just as much to do the same thing – if not more – than what I’ve

done as a Black man in America.”

Asia told *The Atlanta Voice* that having the two-time Grammy winner on school grounds was exciting, especially after his Super Bowl halftime performance.

“It’s surreal that somebody who we grew up listening to – who we just watched on TV – and now he was sitting on our campus stage. It’s amazing and a blessing in itself,” Asia said.

During the rally, Usher received several recognitions, including an “Usher Bowl” award similar to the NFL Vince Lombardi trophy from Usher’s New Look and proclamations from Ga. Senator Sonya Halpern, State House District 55 Representative Inga Willis, Fulton County Commissioner Natalie Hall, and Ga. Legislative Black Caucus Representative Carl Gilliard.

“I am a product [of Atlanta]. I came here at a very young age, and everything that I and my mother said happened the way we said it would,” Usher said. “I carry the A with me everywhere I go. That’s why you see that peach on my shoulder.”

He then gave some parting words to the CAU students, encouraging them to graduate and become alums and motivating those coming up behind them.

Additionally, he awarded tickets to his “Past Present Future” concert to a few students before departing.

“Coming Home” is now streaming on all major music apps, and tickets for his upcoming shows are on sale now.

“Mixed girl”: A short film on biracial identity struggles and trauma

BY CLAYTON GUTZMORE

Skin complexion can significantly affect one’s confidence and sense of belonging. Members of biracial families face these issues the most. This matter is illustrated throughout the short film *Mixed Girl*. Directed by Des Gray and co-produced by entrepreneur and Love and Hip Hop star Yandy Smith, *Mixed Girl* explores a young woman’s struggle with identity and trauma.

“We wanted to create a movie where we talk about something that society doesn’t usually speak about, what a mixed girl goes through. This film really touches on the emotional effect that it has on you. Women who are biracial feel like they don’t belong in society and are confused about who they are,” said Des Gray.

Mixed Girl was released in Fall 2023. It is available now for streaming on Crackle, Tubi, and Revolt. *Mixed Girl* stars Jermaine Carter, Mikaela Seamans, and Livia Jarcem. The film

is about Leslie, a white alcoholic, drug-addicted, and vicious teenage mother who falls for James, a black college student she meets at a fraternity party. Unbeknownst to James, she becomes pregnant and gives birth to a biracial baby girl. Burdened and left to raise two children, Leslie spirals into a world of chaos and alcohol abuse. Years later, James learns he fathered a troubled adolescent daughter and seeks to take custody. They battle to overcome her traumatic childhood as they bridge the gap between their two different worlds.

“The media portrays black men in a certain light, especially in these movies. We like to vilify black men; in this story, the black father is a hero,” said Yandy Smith.

“He is the Savior of this young girl’s life. He didn’t have to be, but he stepped up to the plate once he realized the initial plan of her terminating the pregnancy didn’t happen. When he

found out he had a daughter, he could have hidden it and made his life easier. He didn’t, and now he has to redefine his existence for a child that was dealt a very difficult hand of cards,” said Smith.

The film won the award for best social impact at the 2022 City of Angels Women’s Film Festival. Smith got involved with the project because she believed in Gray’s abilities as a director.

Before *Mixed Girl*, Gray worked on music videos for Chris Brown, Rick Ross, and Future. She even shot the 2022 rap cipher for BET’s HipHop Awards. *Mixed Girl* is Gray’s first film. The material was strong enough to get the attention of Money Bagg Yo. Gray collaborated with the Memphis rapper to release *Mix Girl* on his streaming platform, Bread Gang TV, in December 2023. It is the first film released on the platform.

“Andre King-Holland is my business part-

ner and Money Bag Yo’s partner for Bread Gang TV. The relationship started with him. I spoke to MoneyBagg Yo, and he loved the film. He said it was really good, and I should do the whole thing,” said Gray.

What next for Gray and Smith is seeking investors for *Mixed Girl* to evolve into a full-feature film.

The duo will continue to promote the film to reach more people struggling with identity issues.

“I want the audience to leave with a message about facing your trauma. A lot of times, if you don’t face your trauma at an early age, it’s going to affect how you view things in your life. Ashlyn battled mental depression, identity issues, and not loving herself enough. How you treat your kids from inside your household is how they will look at themselves when they are in the world,” said Gray.

Arts



ONLINE

Joyce Farmer, James "JT" Brown, Kirt Beasley, and Charles Rambo all want to be the next Fulton County Sheriff

"Our Celebration of Stevie Wonder" shines at Thompson Buckhead

BY NOAH WASHINGTON

In Atlanta, a musical legend is given his flowers with the opening of Art Melanated's "Our Celebration of Stevie Wonder" exhibit at the Thompson Buckhead.

Coming off the celebration of the 50th anniversary of hip-hop, we now transition into the 65th anniversary of Motown and all its artists. The exhibit opened on Friday, Feb. 2, and initially hosted an exhibit at the Andaz West Hollywood Art Gallery in Los Angeles which ended on New Year's Eve 2023. Art Melanated and Sol Aponte, whose favorite Stevie Wonder song is "As," chose the second day of Black History Month to open the exhibit. In an effort to break down barriers and demystify the world of art collecting, Aponte and his wife, Jennia have brought their nomadic gallery to unconventional spaces where people naturally gather, such as hotels. Expressing the motivation behind this approach, Aponte said, "For a long time, our people, our community have felt boxed out of the art space. It feels stuffy, unwelcome, right?" Recognizing the need for change, the gallery sets up exhibits in accessible locations like hotels to make art tangible and redefine the art-collecting experience.

The current exhibit, held at the Thompson Buckhead, showcases a curated collection of paintings, sculptures, photography, mixed media, and memorabilia dedicated to the iconic Stevie Wonder. The transformation of the space into a Stevie Wonder shrine features vinyl covers and others as prominent decorations.

Murjoni Merriweather, whose favorite Stevie Wonder song is "Sir Duke," is from Prince George's County, Maryland, began working with clay 14 years ago and produced a sculpture resembling Stevie Wonder called "Still Hot." She describes her work as not exact replicas but inspirations. "The piece over there, 'Still Hot,' is the inspiration of Stevie Wonder," says Merriweather. The piece features an exaggerated neck on Stevie Wonder and handmade beads made famous by Wonder's locked hair-style. The entire sculpture took two months to complete and was featured in the L.A leg of the exhibit. "I painted all the beads. I worked on the glasses. It was a lot of different work. It was a lot of work," said Merriweather.

Art Melanated co-founder, Jennia Aponte's paper mosaic piece, "The Alchemist" showcasing Wonder, had immersed herself in his music as part of her creative process. "While I was creating my Stevie Wonder piece, I'm immersed in his music, in interviews, in live concerts. I love being able to create; whatever I am working on, I immerse myself in the subject matter," says Aponte. Aponte's piece, "The Alchemist," with a 2023 white background, is



In Atlanta, a musical legend is given his flowers with the opening of Art Melanated's "Our Celebration of Stevie Wonder" exhibit at the Thompson Buckhead. Photo by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice



Murjoni Merriweather (above) with her Stevie Wonder inspired sculpture, "Still Hot". Photo by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice

inspired by Wonder's favorite book, "The Alchemist," written in braille. "His face is made from Egyptian papyrus aged in muddy water from the Nile," Aponte added.

In his detailed explanation of the painting titled "Conscientious Criminal," featured self-taught artist Kipkemoi (favorite song, "Higher Ground"), 38, born in Cuxhaven, Germany who moved to Oakland, Ca 10 years ago and now resides in L.A; sheds light on Stevie Wonder's

political activism. Kipkemoi, deviates from the expected focus on Stevie Wonder's musical genius, choosing instead to highlight his role as a political activist. The inspiration for the piece stems from the revelation that the well-known "Happy Birthday" song is an homage to Dr. Martin Luther King, used by Wonder and Coretta Scott King to advocate for MLK Day as a national holiday.

Further delving into Stevie Wonder's ex-

tensive activism, including his efforts against apartheid, his arrest in 1985, and ongoing support for the Black Lives Matter movement. The title "Conscientious Criminal" captures Wonder's activism, and the painting juxtaposes an image of Wonder performing in 1974 with a crowd of protesters at the 1964 March on Washington. The background features recycled Stevie Wonder quotes, emphasizing the artist's words from speeches, interviews, and lyrics.

Wonder, drawn in black & white, is a signature style of Kipkemoi that is present in the piece. "I believe it highlights humanity because it takes up the distractions of colors and really focuses on the subject," says Kipkemoi.

Atlanta-based artist Kevin A. Williams (favorite song: "Living In The City") also contributed to the exhibit, creating two pieces for the original L.A showcase and a new entry for the Atlanta debut. Williams expresses his desire for the Atlanta audience to see an original piece of his art. "The first piece in L.A (titled 'Living for the City') showcased him settling into his success, showing his evolution as an artist, going from an entertainer to a more social and political voice for the culture. So this piece is called 'Young Money,' which introduces the newness of success." "Young Money" showcases an oil on canvas painting taking visual reference from a 1966 picture taken in Seven and London for GQ magazine, with a changed visual background environment referencing Beverly Hills and Los Angeles.

"I wasn't a big fan of Stevie Wonder because songs like 'Ribbon in the Sky' became stale to me," says featured artist Patrick Henry Johnson, 42, from Valdosta, GA. When Sol Aponte first contacted Johnson to work on a piece for the exhibit, Aponte suggested listening to some of Wonder's earlier music to the hesitant artist. "I had to listen to the older stuff so I can get the feeling back, the music that I grew up with. Once I started listening to the older music, it took over, and I was listening to 'Boogie Reggae Woman.' 'Boogie Reggae Woman' is the best Stevie Wonder song to me," said Johnson. His canvas piece features a young Wonder singing in the midst of a song made with oil on canvas.

Murjoni Merriweather further praises the inclusive nature of Art Melanated, expressing the contrast to the sometimes exclusive atmosphere of traditional galleries and museums. In the context of the Stevie Wonder Show, Merriweather appreciates the familiarity and relatability of the subject. "Everybody knows Stevie. That's our cousin."

"Our Celebration of Stevie Wonder" is on display at the Thompson Hotel until April 27, 2024.



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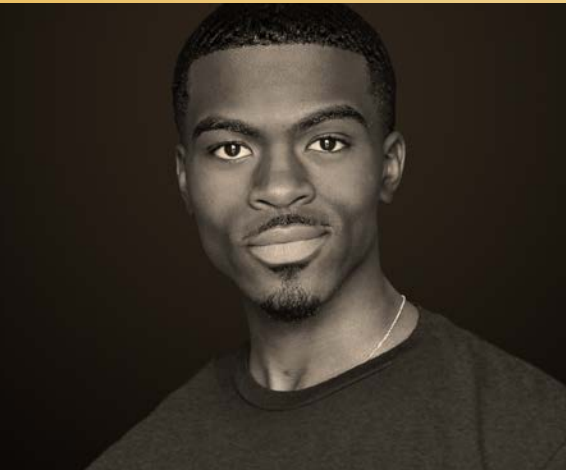
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(B.F.A., dramatic writing, 2022)
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Travel



ONLINE
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Winter Chalet on the Green is located on the greenspace located between Phipps Plaza and Nobu Hotel Atlanta in Buckhead. Photos by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

Escape the city with winter chalet on the green

BY DONNELL SUGGS

The kids are in school, and spring break is still a couple of months away, but there's a way for parents to travel without having to pack their bags.

Winter Chalet on the Green by Citizens Market, located in the heart of Buckhead, is a way to mix exclusivity and outdoor dining. The chalet bubble zips open and inside are six chairs, comfy blankets, small tables, and, on one Friday night, a board game to play.

The express purpose of the chalets is to get away without having to go far. Starting on Feb. 1 and running through Feb. 25, the chalets are available to book for a \$50 rental fee on Thursdays, Fridays, Saturdays, and Sundays. There is a \$100 per person (with a minimum of two people per reservation) cost, but a 90-minute reservation includes food,



drinks, and most uniquely a private dinner despite being stationed outside of Citizens Market and next door to the Nobu Hotel Atlanta, one of the city's newest luxury hotels.

The menu inside the chalet includes a choice of a bottle of wine (Veuve Clicquot, Orin Swift Abstract, or Davis Bynum Char-

donnay) or a carafe of a cocktail. There are also non-alcoholic options available upon request. On Friday night the meal began with a cheese and charcuterie board, including jams, nuts, and peppers. The servings are portioned according to the number of guests in a party.

Following the opening course a Just Krispy Rice Box, a combination of spicy tuna, yellow tail, salmon, and truffle avocado sushis, was served. Along with the sushi, shrimp tempura and four (two per person) umami beef sliders were served.

The menu of the vast food options inside Citizens Market is also available to order, including Sam's Crispy Chicken, Firebelly Wings, and El Pollo Verde, for a separate fee.

Citizens Market general manager Wintana Mehari says the combination of outdoor dining in the city and the privacy of the chalets

is what has been keeping the reservations booked through the first nine days of business.

"It's very exclusive, and you're not interrupted by servers, and crowds," Mehari said. "But we're right here in the middle of Atlanta."

The chalets are non-smoking and spacious enough for two or six people to relax and enjoy a board game (the chalet we inhabited had a Sorry board game). Plan on keeping the bubble closed for maximum heat.

To be able to isolate oneself in the heart of the city, particularly at night, and enjoy a meal and a small slice of peace is worth the effort. Winter Chalet on the Green is a perfect way to explore Atlanta, enjoy good food and drinks, without the hassles of long lines and large crowds.

You can book reservations at <https://winterchaletonthegreen.splashthat.com/>

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NOTICE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta, GA (AH) will hold a Public Hearing on Thursday, March 7, 6 - 8p in Roosevelt Hall at 660 Student Movement Blvd. to present and receive comments on its Fiscal Year 2025 MTW Annual Plan (Plan). The Plan outlines AH's vision and describes planned activities that AH will undertake during the fiscal year. A draft of the Plan is available for review at all AH-owned communities and online at <https://www.atlantahousing.org/about-us/plans-reports/> through Friday, March 8, 2024.

You can comment on the Plan in person at the Public Hearing, by email at strategy@atlantahousing.org, or by US mail: Atlanta Housing, OSPRA MTW Office, 230 John Wesley Dobbs Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30303. Comments received before March 13 will be included in the Plan. All interested parties, esp. families assisted by AH, are invited to attend the Public Hearing.

If you require special assistance or accommodation(s) to review the Plan or attend the Public Hearing because of (1) a disability or (2) limited English proficiency, please call Haniff Graham at 404.817.7493 or send an email to accessibility@atlantahousing.org by February 28, 2024 to request reasonable accommodations for your needs.

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of your heart
health**

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AROUND TOWN

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“A Different World” is Back on Campus

(left to right) Darryl M. Bell, Kadeem Hardison, Cree Summer, Jasmine Guy, Glynn Turman, Dawnn Lewis, and Charnele Brown were at the Old Fourth Ward restaurant for a tip-off dinner for a national HBCU tour in honor of the impact that iconic NBC television series, “A Different World” had on generations of Black youth. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

Metro



ONLINE
Sterling K. Brown’s admiration for Halle Bailey’s ‘Little Mermaid’ performance brought her to tears



“A Different World” stars Cree Summer (far left), Kadeem Hardison (center), and Darryl M. Bell joined other cast members at a dinner Wednesday night in Old Fourth Ward. The cast is going on an HBCU tour, beginning in Atlanta Thursday night. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

A Different World HBCU College Tour 2024 starts in Atlanta

BY DONNELL SUGGS

One by one several of the main characters of what many consider the best representation of Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCU) in television history made their way into the Marcus Bar & Grille on Wednesday night.

Jasmine Guy, Kadeem Hardison, Cree Summer, Dawnn Lewis, Darryl M. Bell, Charnele Brown and Glynn Turman were at the Old Fourth Ward restaurant for a tip-off dinner for a national HBCU tour in honor of the impact that iconic NBC television series, “A Different World” had on generations of Black youth.

For many people, Black or not, “A Different World” and the fictional Hillman College was their first look at an HBCU campus, and most importantly, the culture, sound, and feel of an HBCU.

The first stop on the “A Different World HBCU College Tour”, which is presented by Cisco and sponsored by Wells Fargo, is in Atlanta and begins Thursday night in the Atlanta University Center. The cast will meet with students, faculty and guests from Clark Atlanta University, Morehouse College, and Spelman College. The 10-stop tour will then move on to the nation's capital at Howard University, and to Alabama at both Alabama State University and Tuskegee University

in April. The remainder of the tour stops and dates will be announced at a later date, according to the tour’s Instagram page and website.

The first episode of the show, which was created by Bill Cosby and producers Susan Fales and Debbie Allen, aired on September 24, 1987. Asked what the show’s legacy, impact on HBCUs, and this tour mean to him and the rest of the cast, Bell, who played Ron Johnson on the show, said it meant a lot.

“It means everything to us. We’ve spent the better part of 35 years as the preeminent representation for HBCUs in film and television,” Bell said. “The number of engineers, lawyers, doctors, HBCU presidents

that have come up to us and said, ‘I am who I am today because I went to an HBCU and watched “A Different World”. It’s what matters.”

The cast and the show remain synonymous with HBCUs decades after airing its final episode on July 9, 1993. Bell acknowledged that impact and seemingly timeless connection with people that weren’t even born when the show came on the air or went off the air.

“For us to have the opportunity to carry that message to the next generation, it’s a blessing,” said Bell. “We want to get to as many schools as we can. That’s why we all do it.”



An East Point urgent care center, Southside Medical Center, celebrated its grand opening and ribbon-cutting Friday morning. Photo by Isaiah Singleton/The Atlanta Voice

Southside Medical Center opens urgent care facility in East Point

BY ISAIAH SINGLETON

Southside Medical Center opened its East Point urgent care center, celebrated its grand opening and ribbon-cutting Friday morning.

Southside Medical Center is more than just an urgent care facility. They offer residents in East Point and surrounding communities continued access to quality, convenient urgent care in addition to an array of services such as primary care, women's health, pediatric, dental, and mental health services, discounted pharmaceuticals, and many others.

Also, Southside Medical has a new X-ray machine, exam rooms, and a procedure room to take in urgent care visitors after receiving \$5 million from Wellstar. The money and renovations came after Wellstar decided to close its urgent care operations at Atlanta Medical Center South, a year after it closed the hospital at the exact location.

Dr. David Williams, president and CEO of Southside Medical Center, said the clinic should allow urgent care patients to see primary care doctors for preventative care if their need is not an emergency.

In honor of Black History Month, Williams said that just as Dr. Martin Luther King had



Dr. David Williams, president, and CEO of Southside Medical Center (above) said the clinic should allow urgent care patients to see primary care doctors for preventative care if their need is not an emergency. Photo by Isaiah Singleton/The Atlanta Voice

a dream, so did the founders of Southside Medical Center almost 60 years ago.

"They had a dream to provide excellent health care in the South Side Community, and those of us who are still here are carrying out this dream," Williams said. "We all recognize the impact the closing of South

Fulton hospitals will have on this community, and I'd like to say before that happened, the leadership of Wellstar came to us and shared with us that they did not want to leave this community."

When Wellstar asked Williams if he was willing to open an urgent care center, recognizing its impact on the community, Williams couldn't agree more.

"They said the urgent care center won't solve all the problems, but it's certainly a spark. We shared with the leadership of Wellstar our dream to create the nation's first Community Health Center of Excellence, which means it must be more than just a primary care," he said. "So, we wanted to do things like primary, secondary, tertiary, and hospital care."

Williams also said, "When one door closes, another opens".

He said it's unfortunate South Fulton had to close, but their closing enabled another door to open.

"Our vision was to reopen South Fulton hospital, reopen the emergency room, and provide community care at a level different from what they currently receive," he said. "I'm pleased to say the South Fulton leader-

ship board agreed, accepted the vision, and has given us the opportunity."

Currently, according to Williams, Southside Medical does not have emergency care, meaning patients would have to travel to Grady, Piedmont, or Emory.

Additionally, Williams said he hopes within 18 months, they will be able to operate the old hospital, however the plan still needs to find funding. His goal is to have primary, urgent, and emergency care in one location to better meet everyone's needs.

East Point Mayor Deana Holiday Ingraham said she believes they are dismantling the system of healthcare in the country.

"We need an accessible, affordable, high quality, and comprehensive health care system in our community that includes acute care. Everyone needs a primary care medical home, and that's what this facility provides; it's right next door to a place where people used to come for what they felt was the care they needed at the time," Ingraham said. "So, I'm very optimistic about us being able to connect everyone in the community to a primary care home so that we can continue to help them through their health journey."

For more information, visit <https://south-sidemedical.net>

Voices

QUOTE OF THE WEEK

“I decided blacks should not have to experience the difficulties I had faced, so I decided to open a flying school and teach other black women to fly”

— Bessie Coleman, American Aviator



It’s Not About Biden’s Age. It’s About Race and Gender

BY CHRIS B. BENNETT

It’s election season, and we’re hearing more talk and chatter about the age of Joe Biden and how it could impact his ability to lead the country.

Yes, Joe Biden is 81. However, we need to ask ourselves why there is a narrative around his age, which started before he was elected during the last presidential election cycle. Many of us have people in our own families — who are just as old, if not older, than Joe Biden — who are in great shape, and in some cases may outlive many of us, and from a cognitive standpoint, are as sharp as tack. When it comes to representation and leadership, currently, three U.S. senators are older than Joe Biden: Senate Republican leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., who will turn 82 on Feb. 20; Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., who will turn 83 in September; and the oldest member of the Senate, Chuck Grassley, R-Iowa, who will turn 91 in September.

In addition, there are currently eight members of Congress who are older than Biden: Danny K. Davis, 82; Jim Clyburn, 83; Nancy Pelosi, 83; Steny Hoyer, 84; Maxine Waters, 85; Hal Rogers, 85; Bill Pascrell, 86; and Grace Napolitano, 86. Eleven people in total are older than Joe Biden. Yet, we don’t see the mainstream media and political talking heads questioning their age, their ability to make decisions, lead the country, or their knowledge of domestic and international politics.

While most of them are not constantly in the public eye, I can assure you that many walk just as slowly, if not slower, and more gingerly than Joe Biden. What would they say about Mitch McConnell if they had to watch him side-waddle from Air Force One to the White House? Republicans would probably have you believe that his walking posture, in some way, is a precautionary form of physical therapy to help maintain



Fear of a Kamala Harris presidency is what’s really behind the nonstop chatter about how old President Biden is. Photo by Itoro N. Umontuen/The Atlanta Voice

his posture, flexibility, and agility. So what is behind the buzz about Joe Biden’s age? Kamala Harris.

The righteous people in this country do not want to see a woman, especially a Black woman, as the face of freedom and democracy for the United States. As second in command, Kamala Harris would take over the duties of the presidency if something happened to Joe Biden while in office.

When we look at Nikki Haley, people wonder why she is still in the race to be the Republican nominee, even though she has no chance of winning. She is still in the race because she’s not running against Donald Trump. She’s in the race to strike fear in the hearts of Americans who cannot stomach the thought of a Black woman running the country that their forefathers so valiantly protected from being a place that they could not solely control.

Why is Nikki Haley talking about Kamala Harris on the campaign trail? Because she and the Republican establishment are trying to make race an issue, while Donald Trump tries to sway as

many Black folks and other ethnic groups to support him as the “best candidate to support their interest.”

What is also interesting to me is that people will try to cast Barack Obama as the worst president that we’ve had — while also trying to make a case for Donald Trump being the best. Again, this is an attempt to say that a Black man was not up to the task, and the Make America Great Again candidate is the best thing for America since Jim Crow.

While I won’t debate who was better and who was worse, I will ask you to take a deep look at the economy and the quality of life based on the last six presidencies:

- George H.W. Bush: bad economy, country at war
- Bill Clinton: great economy, country no longer at war
- George W. Bush: bad economy, country at war
- Barack Obama: saved the economy from disaster and ended his term with a great and growing economy, took out Osama bin Laden
- Donald Trump: inherited a great economy and ruined it, and

created an environment of racial tension in America not seen since the Jim Crow era

Joe Biden: saved the economy from disaster, and successfully navigated the country through COVID-19

While I’m not a person who gets caught up in party labels, I am a person who looks at history, and what history will tell us is that we have to get away from scare tactics and inaccuracies when it comes to voting. History will tell us that race and politics have always been a bad combination for America, especially Black America.

This race is not about age. It’s about gender and race. After all, Donald Trump, who will be 78 in June, is the same age as Joe Biden during the last presidential election, and no one is talking about his age the way they were and are about Joe Biden. But I suspect it would quickly become an issue if he chose Tim Scott of South Carolina as his running mate.

Look at the big-ticket domestic political items targeted by Donald Trump and the Republicans — Affirmative Action, DEI, and a woman’s right to choose. The reality is that these are the tips of the iceberg as they relate to their political agenda, and they are eager to regain the momentum for their agenda that they enjoyed while Trump was in office.

Knowing that the goal of winning the presidential election is based on raising the hairs of bias, racism, and sexism on the back of the necks of those who wish to “take back” our country is a sign we all need to pay close attention to.

Vote based on who you believe best represents your interest, not on who you believe will serve out the full term or not. Tomorrow is not guaranteed, not even for the president of the United States — no matter who they are.

Chris B. Bennett is CEO and Publisher of The Seattle Medium Newspaper Group and a founding member of Word In Black.

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SPIRITUALLY SPEAKING

What you show folk should matter



BY JAMES A. WASHINGTON
The Atlanta Voice

Not being an ordained minister, I find it pretty uncomfortable to attempt to tell anyone how he or she should or shouldn't live their life. I don't want to believe I'm that judgmental or, at least I'm trying very hard not to be.

However, it is becoming more and more obvious to me as I continue my walk, that certain behaviors are acceptable and, as a Christian, even expected.

The more I read and study, the easier it is to understand that what we do every day should reflect in some small way on what we believe in. It's the "what we believe in" that should be what others see in us as we navigate the trials and pitfalls of a secular world.

The way you carry yourself should actually mean something. Those throw-away words and phrases, which ordinarily have little practical meaning, become living principles rooted in our psyche once we truly embrace what it means to live a Christian life.

The way you carry yourself should actually mean something

I'm not speaking of those things we generally associate with spiritual existence. I'm talking about those things we understand as simple concepts but are actually incredibly powerful tools to live by: kindness, love, mercy, forgiveness, humility, for example.

If you notice I didn't mention faith or belief in God or sacrifice and other very clear spiritual principles. True, those things should be the foundation for why and how you live.

But sometimes I think people fail to acknowledge the spiritual fundamentals because to live a truly Christian life is an apparent impossible task.

Maybe, but it really is kind of easy to be courteous, nice, humble and charitable without knowing the first thing about faith. So, when people say it's so hard to lead a Christian life, what are they really saying? When people refer to Christians as being 'holier than thou,' what are they really saying?

Can you see how complex we can make a really simple pattern of thought and an even simpler way of living? That simple pattern of thought should become and needs to become a set of guidelines by which you and I behave.

For Christians, the foundation for such behavior is specific and unyielding. It does not change. It is one of those constants in life that gives our lives purpose and meaning. Simply stated, we are deliberately trying to be Christ-like.

We are trying to demonstrate our beliefs and our faith through our behavior. The imperfections that we all have do not in and of themselves negate our efforts to let this world see Jesus in us. Remember, Christ was killed

because He acted upon his belief.

The whole world knew then and knows today what He stood for. I'd like to think that even if the world doesn't know what I stand for, it certainly knows who I stand with.

Therefore, don't be surprised if my first reaction now is to give instead of take, to forgive rather than hold a grudge, to love rather than hate.

Excuse me if I want to see the best in others rather than the worst. Allow me to not judge you, to not be jealous of you, to not be envious and to always be thankful for the blessings that I have whether you can relate to me or not. I love the Lord.

I'm trying to love you. Through my rebirth, integrity, honesty and values take on a new meaning. Believe it or not, I am a new creature.

I am what you see. Don't try to read in between the lines. Hopefully, you'll get a glimpse of the Holy Spirit in something I say or do. I can only sincerely wish the same for you.

May God bless and keep you always.

"YOUR VOICE"

In the wake of Nikki Haley's loss in her home state to Donald Trump, would she have a chance to win the nomination if he was convicted of insurrection?



ROBERT ANDREWS
East Atlanta

"No, I do not at all. And my opinion is, which is mine; some people still don't feel like a woman should be in charge of a country that is as powerful as the United States of America. So, I wouldn't be surprised if someone did not vote for her like myself.

And it would be a slanted side, even though she may be capable of handling the position. [I didn't vote for Hillary Clinton when she ran.] I voted for myself. A write-in ballot."



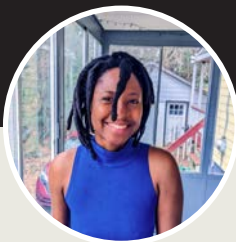
DEANDRA
Decatur

"I believe that, even if he is convicted, sadly, I don't think that she would have a chance because I do believe America is racially biased. And I believe that more people support Trump than we are privy to knowing it. So that is my response."



EMMANUEL ALBERTS
Woodstock

"I don't believe that Haley will have a chance even if Donald Trump is convicted of an insurrection, just because I don't think she has a good backing from the Republican Party at all. So, even if Trump is convicted, he may still stay on the ballot in other states. And I think he would essentially win the nomination from the Republicans."



EBONY GREENE
Decatur

"No, I don't think that she would have a chance. I feel like America loves Donald Trump. Even facing 91 felony charges and four indictments, he's still winning. Despite his slogans, I feel America benefits from his ability to bring hype to the masses. I think it's a skill. It's a gift that Donald Trump has. So even facing all these charges, and even if he committed an insurrection, I still don't think anyone has a chance against Donald Trump."




ONLINE
 Girls of Excellence and Power of Girls collaborate for third annual wellness day in Atlanta

Black History is NOW: William Blount

BY NOAH WASHINGTON

William Blount, 26, is seated at a bar, completely enveloped in his work. He's unbothered by the sounds coming from the people at the bar.

Reading press releases and Googling new developments, Blount is a man on a mission. More commonly known to many as Bright_bill3000 on Instagram, Blount has a passion for cities and the stories of how those cities came to be. Born and raised in Atlanta, his childhood was shaped by the urban environment that surrounded him.

Blount's early years were spent in East Point, off Cleveland Avenue, where his mother, Lolita Blount, 60, worked as an elementary school teacher at Oak Knoll Elementary School, which is now called The Rise Schools. Blount said his mother instilled a love for learning and exploration within him. His father, Clarence Blount, 66, is an HVAC technician and used to own his own business, Blount Heating and Air.

Blount's father is responsible for introducing him to the cityscape of Atlanta. He would take Blount into the city often while on different jobs, igniting a fascination with architecture and urban development.

"My childhood was spent immersed in maps, buildings, and drawings," Blount said.

Black History
 NOW

"I was always drawn to the city, even from a young age. My dad gave me a map one day, and that sparked a lifelong hobby of exploring and understanding cities."

Despite initially pursuing studies in animation at Savannah College of Art & Design following his graduation from Langston Hughes High School in 2015, Blount's passion for urban planning and development remained steadfast. "It was always in the back of my head," he explained. "I kept up with every project happening while I was in school. It was just something I liked to do."

After graduating from SCAD in 2019 with a degree in animation & digital media, Blount's journey took a significant turn during the pandemic in 2020 when he decided to channel his passion for urban landscape into action. Utilizing drones initially intended for his father's HVAC work, Blount began documenting urban landscapes, focusing on construction and development projects often



William Blount (above) has a passion for cities and the stories of how those cities came to be. He uses his drones to share the history of different cities in Georgia. Blount says he plans on taking his work overseas in the near future. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice



One of the DJI Mavic drones (above) that Blount uses at work in Atlanta, early Feb. 2024. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

overlooked by traditional media.

"I realized there was a gap in coverage," Blount said. "The news often misses the intricate details of urban development, especially in smaller cities. I wanted to fill that void and provide people with a deeper understanding of the changing urban landscape."

Blount's drone footage has captured the attention of viewers, highlighting cities across

Georgia, from the bustling streets of Atlanta to the historic charm of Savannah. He has since added two more DJI Mavic drones to his arsenal. His goal is to inform and inspire curiosity about the stories behind each city's evolution.

"Savannah, in particular, has always intrigued me," Blount shares. "It's a city steeped in history, with hidden tales waiting to be dis-

covered. No matter how small, every city has something unique to offer."

Blount shed light on the often-overlooked aspects of urban development, particularly in cities like Savannah. Blount recently detailed an instance where a development project initiated by the Savannah College of Art and Design resulted in the destruction of an older community. He emphasizes the lack of transparency in such processes, noting how many residents were uninformed until construction began. Blount said there is a need for greater public awareness and involvement in urban planning decisions. "There's a lot of things that the mainstream news don't speak about unless you're going and doing the physical research yourself; you're never going to know," Blount said.

Looking ahead, Blount dreams of expanding his exploration beyond U.S. borders with Spain topping his list of European destinations. "I want to uncover the lesser-known stories, the hidden gems of cities around the world," Blount said. "It's about sharing the richness of each place's history and culture."

As Blount continues his journey of discovery, he remains committed to shedding light on the untold narratives of cities, one drone flight at a time.

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Community



The HBUC: Historically Black University of Creatives

BY NOAH WASHINGTON

Located down the street from Tyler Perry Studios at 680 Murphy Ave is a creative space paying homage to the legacy of Black academic institutions that preceded it. The HBUC, or Historically Black University of Creatives, derives its name from a deliberate homage to historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs).

Travis Cochran, co-founder, and majority owner, opened the studio with his business partner, Caleb Seales, also co-founders of Muse Digital Magazine and hosts of the Change Agents podcast, both operating as sub-brands out of The HBUC.

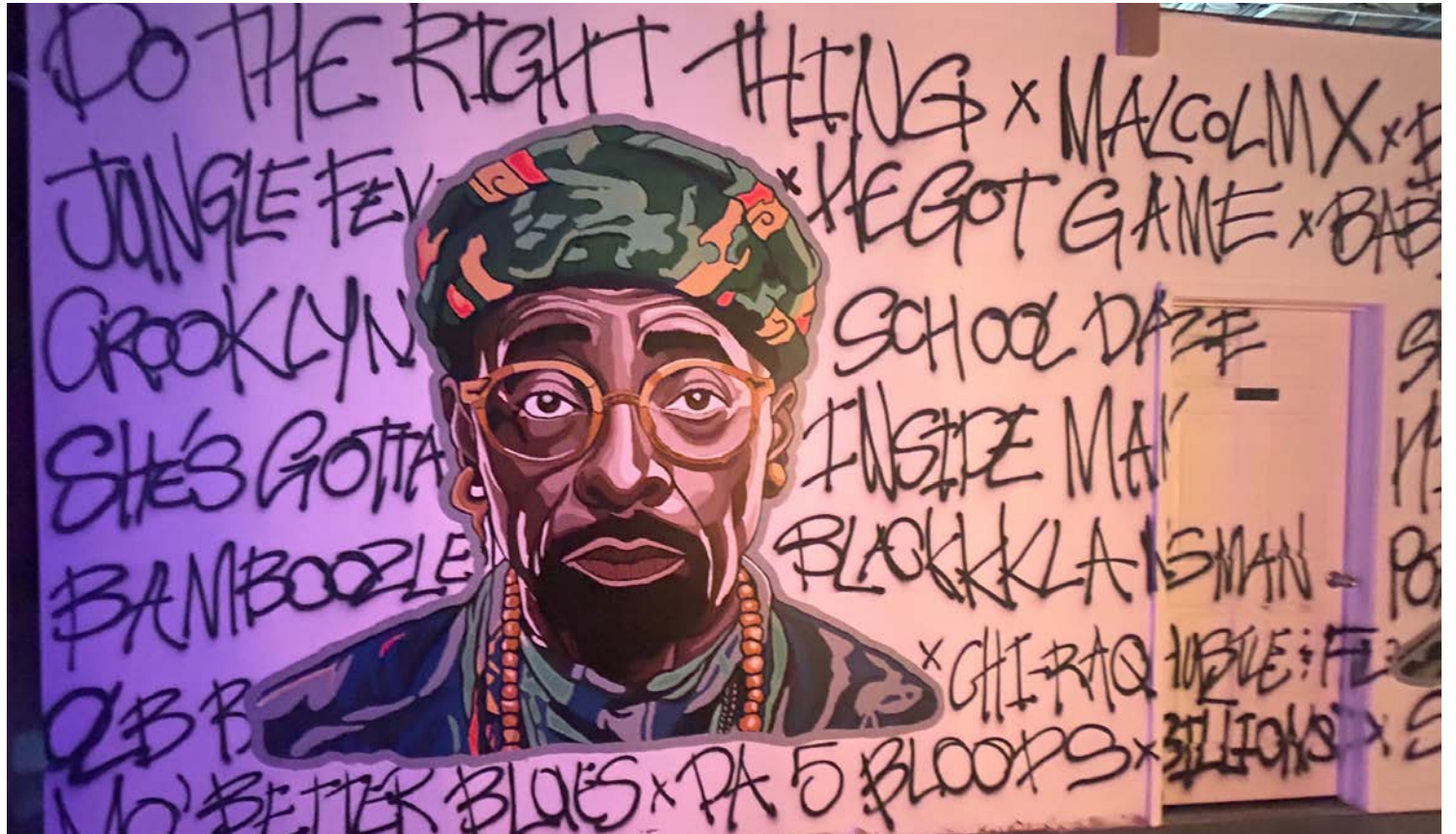
Cochran conceived of the HBUC during the challenging times of the pandemic. Managing musical artists independently, he felt the need to innovate and create opportunities against the constraints posed by the pandemic. The decision to establish HBUC stemmed from a desire to empower artists and foster a sense of community in the face of global adversity. "The pandemic played a big part. I was thinking of creative ways to keep things going without putting yourself in a position of being around 20 people," Cochran said.

The HBUC opened its doors on March 15, 2021, but didn't fully open for business until June 1, but in that lapse of time the HBUC hosted projects such as Chris Brown's "Go Crazy (Remix)" music video with Future, Young Thug, Lil Durk, and Latto. Opening with a series of investors, co-owners, and backers. Among them being Trent Brown, known as the offensive tackle for the New England Patriots, and Jamere Jackson, serving as the CFO of AutoZone.

The creative process at HBUC involves a collaborative effort, with input from interior designers, directors, and artists. Tuesdays mark the beginning of a collaborative process to envision and bring to life new sets within the studio. During these meetings, team members present their creative ideas for potential sets. Once ideas are shared, the team collectively decides which concepts hold the most promise and potential. Typically, around five sets are selected for further development and construction, following an evaluation process.

Each set design comes with its own set of financial considerations. Building and designing sets can incur significant costs, with the average set running into the thousands. A standout among the sets is the LED light room, as it has emerged as the most utilized space within the facility since its inception.

The set design team at HBUC has been in-



The Spike Lee wall inside the HBUC creative space. Photo by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice

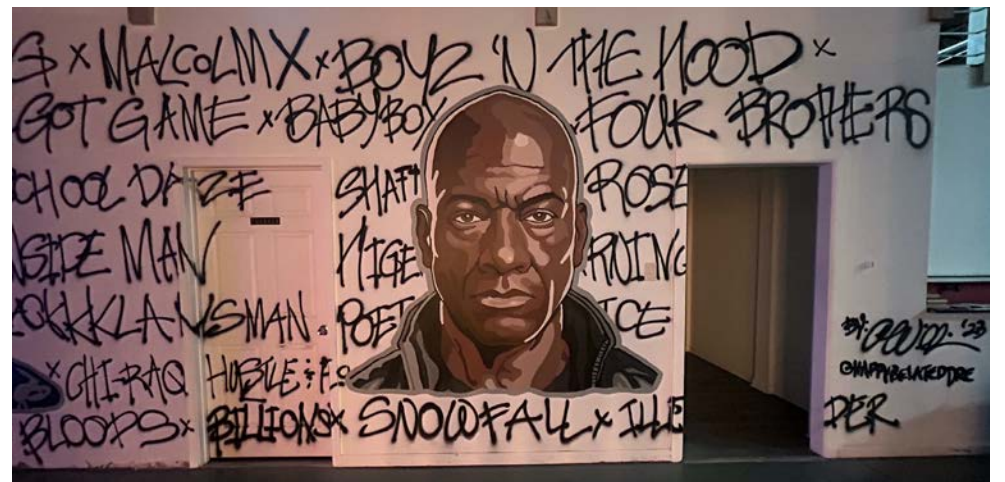
strumental in shaping the studio's aesthetic and functionality, having conceptualized a total of 20 unique set designs thus far. However, not every design receives the same level of acclaim or usage. For instance, the Versace room struggled to find its niche in practical use, despite its visual appeal.

From conceptualizing set designs to executing productions, Seales and Cochran prioritize innovation and quality in every creative endeavor. They even devote a wall of the HBUC to John Singleton and Spike Lee, whom they cite as creatives ahead of their time. "Collaboration is key. Ownership is key. If we do a whole lot of stuff together, then we can do a whole lot more stuff," said Cochran. Currently, The HBUC hosts nine different spaces for artists to choose from.

Seales, a director and producer of Resolve Media Group and co-founder of the production business OPN SZN, highlights a remarkable feat for the Atlanta-based studio, "For us to be here for four years and no actual crime incidents, that's a real testament of the work that we really do."

This is against the backdrop of 1,949 violent crime reports in the West End of Atlanta per a report by www.areavibes.com

This achievement, he emphasizes, extends beyond the absence of typical studio disruptions like break-ins or fights, reflecting



The John Singleton wall is inspired by the work of the groundbreaking director and filmmaker. Photo by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice

the natural synergy and energy of the space. Seales delves into conflict resolution within the bustling environment. Addressing the inevitable clashes of egos and personalities, Seales notes the presence of renowned artists and their entourages, often laden with testosterone. Yet, the resolution strategy isn't confrontational but rather collaborative; as Seales explains, "We always try to find a way to find a real solution that we will be okay with," said Seales.

For Cochran and Seales, the fusion of artistic vision with business strategy serves as the

cornerstone of their success. "It's always kind of been my mentality. I really want to put us in a position to create our own opportunities," said Cochran.

Cochran envisions expanding the studio's offerings to include lounging areas and private training facilities in a country club fashion where creatives are welcome to enjoy everything the studio offers. "At HBUC, our tables are better. It's about building the right tables, so we don't have to beg for inclusion; our table automatically gets put in the room," Cochran told *The Atlanta Voice*.

SUBMITTED BY THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF BLACK LAW ENFORCEMENT OFFICERS

An Agenda for Black America 2024

By Benjamin F. Chavis Jr.

President Joe Biden will make his State of the Union address on March 7. As a veteran civil rights leader committed to improving public safety and unlocking economic prosperity in our communities, there are few policies I hope the president will address.

There also is one I hope he will leave — permanently — on the cutting room floor.

Finally, President Biden should continue to request additional federal funding for Historically Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs). The gap in funding between predominantly white institutions and HBCUs is not the result of smaller endowments. It is the result of systemic underfunding by state lawmakers. According to an Inside Higher Ed report, the country's historically Black land-grant universities have been underfunded by their states by a total of \$13 billion. HBCUs are a springboard toward success. They constitute only 3% of four-year U.S. colleges, but their graduates account for 80% of all Black judges, 50% of Black lawyers, and 50% of Black doctors.

National polls indicate African American do not want their votes to be taken for granted in 2024. President Biden now has a strategic opportunity to engender trust, promote more inclusive public policies, and to commit to helping our communities to improve the quality of life.

That policy is the U.S. Food and Drug Administration's (FDA) proposed prohibition on the sale of menthol cigarettes. Local law enforcement would be in charge of executing this ban and because Black Americans who smoke are more likely to choose menthol cigarettes, the Biden administration's proposed rule will result in more, potentially violent encounters between cops and people of color.

In other words: the FDA's proposal runs directly counter to President Biden's attempts to address crime and reform law enforcement practices to better protect Black Americans and other communities of color. Crime is rising especially in many urban centers. The proposed FDA rule change will lead to underground and illicit transactions that will only contribute to more crime and more negative interactions between law enforcement and communities of color.

We cannot leave our communities unprotected. At the same time I recognize that Black and Brown individuals account for 68.7% of the people in prison and 44% of the people killed by police in the United States. To reduce these numbers, we need to change the culture and premise of policing.

It is estimated that, in several cities, less than 5% of an officer's time is spent actually fighting violent crime. Police are still expected to respond to 911 calls, even if these calls have nothing to do with a crime. That requirement is part of the problem. According to the National Alliance on Mental Illness, people with mental illness are more than 10 times as likely to experience use of force in interactions with law enforcement than those without mental illnesses. Calling 911 when a person is having a manic episode should not be a matter of life and death, but, too often, it is.

Instead of issuing regulations that will require law enforcement to tackle yet another public health matter, President Biden should make it clear how he intends to help communities take the burden for nonviolent public safety matters off law enforcement's shoulders. Enhancing funding for substance abuse, mental health, and housing counselors, for example, will keep more people out of jail and prevent police violence.

To further improve outcomes for people of color, President Biden should issue a bold plan to increase Black homeownership. Last year, the National Association of Realtors reported that while 72.7% of white Americans own their own homes, only 44% of Black Americans do.

Black homeownership has only increased 0.4% in the past decade.

An effective strategy to overcome poverty in Black America is to increase homeownership and prevent racial hyper segregation. President Biden has pursued some regulatory actions to address housing discrimination, but improving access to homeownership will require greater efforts to reduce inflation so Black Americans can save and get out from under the burden of high interest rates.

THE WHITE HOUSE MENTHOL BAN

IS MISGUIDED, NON-SCIENTIFIC, & ROOTED IN THE HISTORICAL, PURPOSEFUL TARGETING OF BLACK & BROWN AMERICANS

THE WHITE HOUSE NEEDS TO FURTHER DELAY THE BAN AND TAKE A HARD LOOK AT THE UNINTENDED CONSEQUENCES OF A FEDERAL MENTHOL BAN.

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ONLINE
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Disney Princess Half Marathon: A celebration of friendship and resilience

BY DONNELL SUGGS

ORLANDO, FL.- There were only two of them here now, but the other two were on their way. A quartet of first-time Disney Princess Half Marathon runners from four separate cities across the country were meeting for the first time at the starting line Sunday morning.

Their friendship started online with a Peloton group and now they were going to motivate each other in person and on the ground.

"We decided to use this race to meet for the first time," said Kyra Norris, who made the trip to Orlando from Las Vegas. "Peloton brought us together, but Disney made us a family."

Standing next to Norris was Tieshia Jones, who made her way to the meeting spot from her home in Arizona. "This is a two-fold celebration," Jones, a breast cancer survivor, added. "We're excited to get together."

The third member of the group, Gary Cox, who also runs with a men's group, Black Men Run, in his native Baltimore, showed up minutes later. "We travel as a pack," he said.

One of the pre-race announcers shouted into his megaphone, "The hard part was getting here and you've already done that," and this group was almost there.

Why people run Disney is always different. There are stories of breast cancer survival, weight-loss journeys, family get-togethers, first time trips to Disney, and people that just love to run. People like Yuri Ramirez, a native of Cuba that now lives in Orlando. She has run "five or six" Disney Princess Half Marathons and described her reason for being here again this year as simply for the love of running. And princesses.

"I love running, I love Disney, and I love runDisney because it's very organized," Ramirez said. She was wearing a white runDisney race jacket with 2022 on it. An experienced runner, Ramirez said she recommends this race to friends who want to find a fun race to do. Especially if they love princesses. "I love princesses too," she said with a big bright smile.

One of the largest women-focused race events in the country, runDisney races allow participants to run through Disney theme parks while they are still empty. So there were many reasons to run the Disney Princess Half Marathon today or any of the other runDisney race weekends, which includes



Atlanta resident Robin Alexander decided to run her first ever half marathon at Disney Sunday, Feb. 25, 2024. "At this point in my life I might as well try," she explained. Photo by: Donnell Suggs/The Atlanta Voice

the Springtime Surprise race weekend on April 13-16. Nearly 170,000 people will have participated in runDisney race weekends this year, according to data provided by Disney. Their reasons are both different and similar.

People from across the country and around the world made their way to the starting line on a dark and cool Sunday morning. Among the thousands in attendance were 165 runners who have earned the distinction of being "perfect," after having participated in each and every of the Disney Princess half marathons.

Kay Hughston and Tess Roberts of Fernandina Beach, Florida were not among the "perfect runners" trying to stay warm an hour before the race began. The friends were a part of a group of female runners that wanted to take on the challenge of a half marathon together.

"This is an opportunity to be in this with our other sisters," said Hughston, who wore an Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority, Inc. pullover over a pink tutu and running tights.

Roberts, who used to live in Atlanta, said she loves Disney and has run a number of half marathons, but this was her first Disney



Tess Roberts (left) and Kay Hughston, friends from Fernandina Beach, Florida. Photo by Donnell Suggs/The Atlanta Voice



Yuri Ramirez (above) has run in "Five or six" Disney Princess Half Marathons. "I love princesses," she said. Photo by Donnell Suggs/The Atlanta Voice

Princess Half Marathon. "We love Disney," she said.

A few feet away from them was Karen Bourne. Wearing a Princess Tiana outfit and working on a quick bite before the race,

Bourne looked every bit the part of a princess.

"I wanted to come here to celebrate our Black princesses," said Bourne, who was in Florida from Silver Spring, Maryland. This wasn't her first runDisney event, but it was her first Disney Princess Half Marathon. "I wanted to see what it was like. I wanted to get the energy and the positivity," she said.

With Princess Tiana from "The Princess and the Frog" being featured all around the race grounds that morning, it would be hard for a Black woman to not be motivated. There were a number of Princess Tiana look-alikes amongst the runners on hand.

One of those Tiana lookalikes was Vee Johnson, whose dreads popped out over her shiny tiara. Johnson made her way to the Disney Princess Half Marathon from San Antonio, Texas and said she was here to advocate for veterans mental health.

"I want to inspire those who are suffering from mental health issues," said Johnson, a veteran. "I also wanted to learn new habits and do new things."

This was her first runDisney half mara-

See **RUN DISNEY** on page 11

Politics



ONLINE
Historic White House Gathering Celebrates Descendants of Civil Rights Icons

Georgia Democrats push to get abortion rights on November ballot

BY ITORO N. UMONTUEN

Georgia Democrats have pounded the drum in support of reproductive care and abortion rights. Wednesday, State Representative Kim Schofield held a press conference to highlight her House Resolution that would codify abortion rights into state law. House Resolution 836 would establish ‘a fundamental right to reproductive freedom and such right shall not be denied, burdened, or infringed upon.’ If it passes both chambers, it would go to the voters in November.

According to Schofield’s bill, it says every individual has a fundamental right to reproductive freedom that entails the right to make and effectuate decisions about all matters relating to pregnancy, including, but not limited to, prenatal care, childbirth, postpartum care, contraception, sterilization, abortion care, miscarriage care, and fertility care.

In states that have put abortion rights on the ballot, the voters have overwhelmingly turned out in favor of each initiative. For example, Ohio voters supported a measure that codified abortion rights up until the fetus is viable in November 2023. The right to abortion is available until 22 weeks. Also in Kansas, voters defeated a constitutional amendment by a 60-40 margin that, if it were successful, would have banned reproductive care and abortions.

“What we are seeking is work that saves



Georgia State Representative Kim Schofield, D-Atlanta, speaks to legislation inside the Georgia State Capitol on Wednesday, February 21, 2024. Photo by Itoro N. Umontuen/The Atlanta Voice

lives,” says State Rep. Park Cannon, a Democrat from midtown Atlanta. “So that is absolutely why over the past few years, we’re expressing that the bills passed have been because of late nights we have spent here asking questions. We will continue to stand on the record which is that just as much as the bill might be sponsored by a member across the aisle, they still need our votes to make it

move. And so if we move forward the rest of this legislative session with the understanding that the work that needs to get done is more important than who gets the credit. We feel like we’ve done the right thing.”

Georgia women are dying from pregnancy-related causes at alarming rates. The Georgia Department of Public Health’s latest Maternal Mortality Report found 30.2 preg-

nancy-related deaths per 100,000 live births between 2018 and 2020. With the overturning of abortion rights relative to the Dobbs decision, the effects go beyond abortion.

There is a spectrum of reproductive care, which is indeed part of ‘healthcare.’ At one end you’ll find individuals fighting for abortion rights, access to birth control, including Intrauterine Devices (IUDs). On the other end, couples are looking to start families and may be struggling to do so. In the middle, there are treatments for fibroids, endometriosis, and Polycystic Ovary Syndrome (PCOS). Every space within the reproductive care spectrum is rife with invasive and deeply personal questions.

With the Alabama Supreme Court decision that outlaws in-vitro fertilization, it is the latest example that many activists in Georgia believe that equal and equitable access to healthcare is the key to solving the maternal mortality crisis. Sherrell Byrd, co-founder and co-chair of SOWEGA, a civil rights advocacy group based in Albany, says women’s health can no longer be a partisan issue.

“Again, maternal care and maternal health is not a partisan issue,” says Byrd. “Everyone, I don’t care what your party is. I don’t care what your race is. Every woman should have the right to safely have their baby. So let the people decide. Let us decide on what we need instead of leaving it in the hands of people who can’t do it.”

RUN DISNEY

Continued from page 10

thon. “I think running is a way to cope with mental health issues, especially for post-discharge veterans,” she said.

The same could be said for Alicia Frank, a Brooklyn, New York resident, and avid runner who was making her Disney Princess Half Marathon debut on Sunday. This race was on her bucket list and this weekend was her first time at Disney World. Running became a way for Frank to get out of the doldrums of COVID.

“I needed something to do in a bad part of my life so I started running 5Ks, and 10Ks and then I moved on to half marathons,” she said. That bucket list of races included the world famous New York City Marathon, but she checked that off her list last fall. Now she was on to Disney for the Disney Princess Half Marathon.

Former college basketball player Crystal



Vee Johnson, a veteran, wants to advocate for mental health wellness for discharged veterans. Photo by Donnell Suggs/The Atlanta Voice

Cleveland and her sister Jasmine were here too. A native of New Jersey now living in North Carolina, Crystal ran her first Disney Princess Half Marathon last year following the death of her grandmother. “I said that if I get in I was going to run,” explained Cleveland about last year. She completed the half marathon with her grandmother in her heart and this year the sisters will do it again as a team.

Atlanta native Robin Alexander stood by a large 13.1 and posed for her photo. Not a runner by nature or sport, Alexander was all smiles as she made her way to the starting line. “I have never done anything like this in my life,” she said. The 61-year-old grandmother said a friend raked her into applying and here she was. “At this point in my life I might as well try,” she explained.


From first timers to veteran runners, from breast cancer survivors to mental health advocates, there are so many reasons to run Disney.


Brittany Dobbs and Brittanie Denis were preparing to make their way over to the starting line. Dobbs, an Atlanta native and Florida resident, and Denis, her friend from Hawaii, who now lives in Florida too, were both dressed as versions of Princess Tiana. Denis’ neon green race top and matching tutu glowed in the dark of that morning. “She’s the one that signed me up for this,” Denis said. “I love to take on new challenges.”

Dobbs, who started running 5Ks to stay in shape a year ago, said she wanted a challenge that was a bit longer than three miles. “I wanted something to top it off,” she said.

Whether running 13 miles with friends, family, or with the ghosts of loved ones, the Disney Princess Half Marathon was full of stories.

What's Next: Registration for the Disney Wine and Dine Half Marathon weekend opens March 12. Go to runDisney.com to learn more. Registration fills up quickly.





ONLINE

Rideshare service Blacklane plans to expand service within Georgia

5 Questions I Asked After Two Heart Attacks

BY LENTHEUS CHANEY

As the surgical technician rolled my hospital bed into the frigid operating room, my uneasiness grew, and my mind raced with questions about how and why this was happening again. Within a four-month period, I required the placement of a fourth coronary stent to restore proper blood flow to my heart. This procedure was more intense than the previous; this time my right arm felt like it was on fire, and I could feel the heart catheter inching its way from my right wrist to the left side of my chest. All I could do was lie still and pray to survive this unexpected diagnosis of heart disease.

According to the CDC Interactive Atlas of Heart Disease and Stroke, from 2018 to 2020, the heart disease-related death rate for Black people ages 35 and older in Fulton County, Georgia, was 41% lower than the state average and 55% lower than the national average.

Although death rates in my county were improving, it didn’t make me feel any better. My cardiologist could not explain why I had experienced another cardiac event in such a short time. The uncertainty took an emotional toll on me, making it difficult to sleep for fear of not waking up.

A week later, I received a sign from God. I stumbled upon actor Malik Yoba being interviewed on a radio show. He spoke about his quadruple bypass heart surgery and mentioned having elevated lipoprotein (a) levels. I immediately began researching lipoprotein (a). Could this be the reason for my rapid progression? Why hadn’t my cardiologist tested for this?

I advocated for my health and demanded a blood test to measure my lipoprotein (a) levels. Bingo! My levels were extremely high.

So, whether you are experiencing heart-related issues or not, keep reading to discover what I learned about lipoprotein (a), what I learned about myself, and why you should get tested.

1. What is lipoprotein (a)?

After my cardiac events, I learned that lipoprotein (a) plays a significant role in heart disease. These sticky particles are made of fat and proteins in my bloodstream and cause a buildup of plaque in my arteries. High levels of lipoprotein (a) increase my risk of heart attack and stroke, and understanding this has become a critical part of managing my heart health.

2. What Don’t I Know About My Family History?



Photos courtesy of Lentheus Chaney

I discovered that genetics has an impact on lipoprotein (a) levels, and these levels can vary greatly among people. I made phone calls and sent messages asking health-related questions about my deceased and living family members. This has been a pivotal first step in evaluating my own cardiac risks.

3. How Would I Have Known What to Ask For?

Despite the importance of lipoprotein (a), it was never included in my routine health checks. Even though I have normal LDL and HDL cholesterol numbers, my untested lipoprotein (a) levels remained a hidden risk factor that left me in the dark about my underlying cardiovascular risk for years. It’s important to note that the lipoprotein (a) test must be specifically requested by the patient and isn’t always covered by insurance plans.

4. How Do I Manage High Lipoprotein (a) Levels?

I found out that there are no absolute methods to lower lipoprotein (a) levels. The current treatment focuses on reducing overall cardiovascular risk factors by adopting a healthier lifestyle, controlling cholesterol levels, and taking prescribed medications.



Photos courtesy of Lentheus Chaney

There are no FDA-approved drugs to lower lipoprotein (a) levels yet. However, clinical trials are underway for the testing of potential drug therapies.

5. Should I Fire My Cardiologist?

I now incorporate regular monitoring of lipoprotein (a) levels into my heart health-care regimen. Given my cardiologist’s inability to provide effective treatment, I’ve requested a referral to a specialist known as a lipidologist. Unfortunately, appointments are scarce, and I can’t be seen by the specialist until October 2024. But being informed about my lipoprotein (a) levels has enabled more personalized strategies for managing my heart disease.

Confronting the intricacies of heart health can be challenging, especially when armed with incomplete information. My experience with high lipoprotein (a) levels serves as a reminder to take ownership of my health, advocate for comprehensive testing, and seek out specialized care when necessary.

I admit this process is scary, but it forces me to say “yes” more than ever before. Yes to pursuing journalism, yes to vulnerability, yes to adopting a puppy, and yes to embracing life fully.

Business



ONLINE
MARTA Artbound announces
call for artists

Swing: Georgia's only black-owned mini golf & food truck experience

BY ISAAH SINGLETON

Swing, located in Fairburn, is a Black-owned and operated miniature golf course and food truck experience.

Swing officially opened June 2023 and became the only Black-owned outdoor mini golf course and food truck experience in Georgia. Swing features an 18-hole mini golf course with a natural-rock waterfall and stream as well as a fun outdoor eating area.

There are four owners of Swing ATL; Nekeidra Taylor, her husband Richard Taylor, Jonathan Phillips, and Masika George. The ownership team are neighbors, and brainstormed the idea together one afternoon.

"We live in Princeton Lakes and during Covid, the guys were working out together. They would ask each other about different ideas and one day it was kind of like, 'let's do a food truck park,'" Nekeidra Taylor said.

The idea behind Swing was originally only a food truck park, however, Taylor said the conversation turned into wanting to add something to help sustain the business.

"When food trucks go away, we still want to be able to have something. In 2021, we started looking for places and came upon this place and we liked it," she said.

Taylor also said the reason, at least for her and her husband, for wanting to open Swing was because they have younger kids and there's not a lot for them to do as a family.

"Our business partners have older children, and our kids are 8, 10, and 12," she said. "One of the things that's unfortunate is there's not a lot of things for us to do and we always would have to drive to the north side, to Buckhead or Norcross, and we decided if someone is not interested in you having a seat at the table, then you make your own table."

Appreciating success

As Swing approaches a year of being in business, Taylor said it's hard sometimes to acknowledge what the four of them accomplished.

"When you say it, it's like 'oh okay', but when you're in it every day, you probably don't even recognize what you're doing because you're in it," she said. "Sometimes I think because we're so close to it, we don't recognize what we have done, and when we



There are four owners of Swing ATL; Nekeidra Taylor (above), her husband Richard Taylor, Jonathan Phillips, and Masika George. The ownership team are neighbors, and brainstormed the idea together one afternoon. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

sit back and take a moment to say, 'wait a second, like we actually own a miniature golf course and we're black, not a lot of people can say that.'

Taylor said it's a good feeling to be almost a year in and to have reached their primary goals with opening Swing.

"We must take a step back as the owners to recognize that because we will have people walk up and they're like, 'thank you so much for bringing this because we didn't have anything' and that's everyone, not just people who look like me," she said.

Alongside co-owning Swing, Taylor has been running her own Public Relations firm called Niki Taylor PR for 25 years, which has aided her in Swing.

"The good thing is with my background; it helps with things like this and trying to get people interested. My background is communications so that's my piece of the puzzle and what I bring to the group," she said. "We all have our own individual areas of expertise."

Additionally, Taylor said the community has been welcoming since opening. She also said everyone who comes to Swing says they are glad there's something on the south side because there's relatively nothing to do between Camp Creek and Newnan.

"We've had people come up from Newnan, Palmetto, Sharpsburg, Peachtree City and

Peachtree Corners because it's a golf community already. People have come and asked if we're going to do golf simulators because there's a course right up the street," she said.

The community, Taylor said, has been welcoming since opening Swing, especially when they find out it's black-owned.

"It's been a great experience, just learning different things," she said. "My husband and I had a barbershop before this in East Point, and this is a whole different animal. One is a lot more responsibility because you own land, but it's been good owning a business, operating it, and being here all the time. There are ups and downs, but you just try to work through them and get past them."

Swing and beyond

As far as 2024 plans for Swing, Taylor said they will be adding phase two, which includes ax throwing and a bar.

"We are hoping to expand the back area where the umbrellas and furniture are and that's probably going to happen over the course of the next 60 to 90 days. We just got approval for our liquor license," she said.

Taylor said hopefully those will be done by early mid-summer. Phase three will probably start around 2025 or 2026, which will include expanding the miniature golf course and possibly a zip line and go karts.

For advice to future business owners, Tay-



Swing ATL, located in Fairburn, is a Black-owned and operated miniature golf course and food truck experience. Photo by Kerri Phox/The Atlanta Voice

lor said have a plan.

"When you do have a plan, think about it from the standpoint of like one, two, three, or five years and really think stuff through because it's really hard to operate in a business and own one," she said.

She also said future business owners should be mindful of the stuff that could come up unexpectedly.

"Just jot it down so that when it comes, you're prepared. Obviously, there are things that happen that you just cannot prepare for, but it's always good to have backup plans," she said.

Additionally, Taylor said if you're going into business with partners, make sure you know your partners and know if they have similar mindsets as you.

"Everybody needs to start on the same playing field because you don't want to have any internal things where you're fighting over things that you just don't have the time to, because you have to keep moving. You got to open the doors, you got to keep the lights on. You got to keep the people happy," she said.

Furthermore, Taylor tells future business owners if you must invest into the business,

"What happens sometimes is we don't recognize it's better to spend the money now than have to double it later, because you didn't put it in the beginning and now, you're backtracking. It's hard and this is where I think the struggle comes with black-owned businesses. Sometimes we don't recognize that," she said.

For more information, visit <https://www.swingatlanta.com>.

Arts



ONLINE

50 years ago Maynard Jackson was elected Atlanta’s first Black mayor.

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Artists Melissa A. Mitchell wants to leaving a lasting legacy

BY NOAH WASHINGTON

Born and raised in Miami, fine artist Mitchell moved to Atlanta in 2007 after graduating from Florida Agricultural and Mechanical University (FAMU). Following the passing of her father, Michael A. Mitchell, in 2010, a desire to leave a lasting legacy came upon Mitchell’s soul.

"I noticed how the world mourned his loss and in that room, I said, 'God, give me something to be remembered,'" Mitchell told The Atlanta Voice during a recent interview.

Then in February amidst a snowstorm in Atlanta, Mitchell stumbled upon a box of forgotten art supplies in her garage. Wanting to create a piece of work for her recently inducted Alpha Kappa Alpha incorporated sister, Melanie, she decided to get to work. "I'm not an artist, but overnight, on February 11th, 2014, I became a painter," Mitchell remembered. That moment marked the genesis of her artistic career.

Mitchell says she draws inspiration from her surroundings, including patterns on carpets, designs on wallpaper, nail designs, patterns in leaves, and even the architecture of skyscrapers. She looks at the world through a different lens, constantly seeking inspiration in everyday objects and phenomena. "I real-



Local artist Melissa A. Mitchell was inspired to create art (left) by a number of things and people, including boredom and a snowstorm. Photos by Noah Washington/The Atlanta Voice

ly just look at the world around me through a different lens. I have a kaleidoscope that's showing me something special. That's just how I get inspired," Mitchell said.

This next milestone in Mitchell's career came in 2016 when she clinched a victory in a design competition hosted by Spanx. She became the first Black woman to win the cov-

eted accolade. "I knew that I was more than just an artist, I was a global brand," she said.

Beginning in 2023, Mitchell found herself catapulted from the confines of her studio to the prestigious halls of Bloomingdale's, a journey marked by synchronicity and divine intervention.

"It was like a dream unfolding before my

eyes," Mitchell reminisces, reflecting on her unexpected collaboration.

In a fortunate twist of fate, Mitchell's friend, Alexandria Ali, founder of FW Style, approached her with a proposition: a collaboration for Bloomingdale's during Black History Month.

Mitchell remembers eagerly accepting, "It felt like the universe was aligning in my favor," she said.

Armed with 22 completed pieces of art, Mitchell wasted no time in seizing the moment. Within days, her artwork adorned the walls of Bloomingdale's, transforming a back Bloomingdales storeroom in Lenox Square into a vibrant gallery.

"It was surreal seeing my art come to life in such a prestigious setting," Mitchell said.

The response has been nothing short of awe-inspiring, according to Mitchell. "It was a humbling experience to witness people connecting with my art on such a deep level."

For Mitchell, the journey into Bloomingdale's was more than just a professional milestone; it was fulfilling her promise to herself.

"With passion and purpose, anything is possible," Mitchell said. "Never underestimate the power of your dreams. With each brushstroke, you paint a portrait of possibility."

Lifestyle

Street Lines: 2023 Audi Q5 S Line 45 TSFI quattro

BY DENNIS MALCOLM BYRON AKA ALE SHARPTON

When looking for great deals regarding 2023 models, consider the Audi Q5 S Line 45 TSFI quattro which presents a winning combination of performance, technology, and luxury.

Audi is renowned for providing dynamic driving experiences, and they continue to do that with the Q5. Powering this SUV is the 2.0 TFSI engine topping out at a respectable 261 horsepower with the dual-clutch, seven-speed, S tronic transmission, and all-wheel-drive system for optimal maneuvering. Drivers can reach 60 mph in 5.7 seconds, and there is some impressive power if towing is a consideration as well, topping out at 4,400 pounds. The 18-inch, 5-arm-turbine design wheels equipped with all-season tires come standard as well.

Behind the wheel, the Q5 S Line doesn’t disappoint, featuring adaptive cruise control, Audi drive select, and the Audi MMI touch display with a 10.1" screen. The Audi smartphone interface (that is both Apple CarPlay and Android compatible), Bluetooth with audio streaming, and respectable sound system by Audi make any errand worthwhile.

Safety is a priority and Audi gets high rankings consistently; features like the front and rear parking sensors with a rearview camera, Audi “pre sense” activations, lane departure warning, Audi side assist (blind spot warning), and a long list of other features to boost the confidence for owners and passengers.

The standard version for this Q5 S Line 45 goes for \$46K. To truly embrace the “Luxury” designation, the Prestige package reviewed (\$11,000) is highly recommended. The attractive “District Green” metallic exterior paired with the 19-inch, bi-color,



Photos courtesy of Audi

5-double-arm design wheels (we reviewed the 20-inch version priced at \$800) surely accomplish the mission. The Bang & Olufsen system (one of my favorite brands) with the-ateresque 3D sound; head-up display; auto-dimming, power-folding exterior mirrors; a Wi-Fi hot spot; wireless device charging; and the industry-changing Audi virtual cockpit are some of the other standouts. The cool factor also gets a boost with other enhancements including the auto-adjusting Matrix-design LED headlights with wash-

ers, a top view camera system, and traffic sign recognition. The interior is also raised another level with the comfortable Okapi brown seats with contrasting gray stitching, walnut wood inlays, side window shades, and panoramic sunroof.

To ease the mind upon purchase, the Audi Q5 S Line 45 TSFI quattro also comes with a warranty package, including a 12-year limited warranty against corrosion perforation and a 4-year/50,000-mile new vehicle limited warranty.

Overall, the Q5 S Line provides sophistication, comfort, and a satisfactory driving experience for a luxury SUV set at a very reasonable price. It’s up to you to customize it to the way you want your Audi to be.

Price: \$46,000 MSRP (\$60,340 as reviewed including Prestige Package 20-inch wheels)

Gas economy: 22 city/29 highway/25 combined

For more information, visit Audiusa.com.

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NOTICE

NOTICE OF PUBLIC HEARING

The Housing Authority of the City of Atlanta, GA (AH) will hold a Public Hearing on Thursday, March 7, 6 - 8p in Roosevelt Hall at 660 Student Movement Blvd. to present and receive comments on its Fiscal Year 2025 MTW Annual Plan (Plan). The Plan outlines AH's vision and describes planned activities that AH will undertake during the fiscal year. A draft of the Plan is available for review at all AH-owned communities and online at <https://www.atlantahousing.org/about-us/plans-reports/> through Friday, March 8, 2024.

You can comment on the Plan in person at the Public Hearing, by email at strategy@atlantahousing.org, or by US mail: Atlanta Housing, OSPRA MTW Office, 230 John Wesley Dobbs Ave. NE, Atlanta, GA 30303. Comments received before March 13 will be included in the Plan. All interested parties, esp. families assisted by AH, are invited to attend the Public Hearing.

If you require special assistance or accommodation(s) to review the Plan or attend the Public Hearing because of (1) a disability or (2) limited English proficiency, please call Haniff Graham at 404.817.7493 or send an email to accessibility@atlantahousing.org by February 28, 2024 to request reasonable accommodations for your needs.

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