

the **Stand** south side news

www.mysouthsidestand.com

Syracuse, NY

April 2011

issue 10

FREE

MESSAGE IN MURAL

'End violence' is what
teens tell community
through artistic talents

A Changing Community

Richard Breland reflects on his South Side neighborhood of 45 years

keep faith

African-American
church applies to be
on historic register

Cancer Screenings

Cancer survivors encourage women at
health forum to be checked regularly

LIBRARIES LACK FUNDING



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IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.**HEALTH** | Women learn to listen to their bodies at an annual health information forum that raises awareness for various health topics. The focus this year was breast cancer.**FEATURES** | After working for nearly five months, students at the Creative Arts Academy have completed a colorful mural that promotes an end to violence in the city.**COMMUNITY** | Discover how longtime resident Richard Breland has watched the South Side community change since he moved there more than 45 years ago.**EDUCATION** | Two students from Corcoran High School share their expectations of college before they spend a day at Syracuse University to get a feel for the campus and classes.**EDUCATION** | Read about the hopes for the next superintendent in the Syracuse City School District, as it tackles a \$50 million budget gap and hundreds of job cuts.**SCHOOL AND YOUTH** | Find out the effects of funding cuts to local libraries and possible budget cuts to health services in the Syracuse City School District.**CHURCH** | A Syracuse resident and team of historians work to preserve a church that is rich with history but in need of extensive renovations.

■ Cover photography of Adrianna Cummings by Mary Desmond

CALENDAR | APRIL

What: Conference on Relationship Education and Sexual Responsibility for Teen Males**When:** 8:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. Saturday, April 16**Where:** The Institute for Human Performance, 505 Irving Ave., Syracuse**Cost:** No cost to attend but interested attendees must register; continental breakfast and lunch will be provided**Contact:** Charlie Lester at (315) 436-1441 or lesterc@upstate.edu**More Info.:** Organized by the Iota Kappa Lambda Alumni Chapter of Alpha Phi Alpha Fraternity, the conference will feature professionally trained presenters covering such topics as: peer pressure, relationship building, abstinence and the consequences of early sexual activity, HIV/AIDS, teen pregnancy, STDs and understanding male responsibility across the life span.**What:** Film Screening and Panel Discussion: "Waiting for Superman"**When:** 4 p.m. Tuesday, April 26**Where:** Joyce Hergenhan Auditorium at Syracuse University, in Newhouse III of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications**Cost:** Free; interested attendees can also ride the Connective Corridor bus to campus for free**Contact:** Marcelle M. Haddix at (315) 443-7642**More Info.:** The film is a deeply personal exploration of the current state of the public education system. Following the film, a panel discussion on "Who are we waiting for? Profiling Superman in Syracuse" will be held. Sponsors include SU's School of Education and Newhouse School, as well as the Community Folk Art Center and Say Yes Syracuse.

HOW TO BUY AN AD

If interested in **running an ad**, contact Ashley Kang to request a **rate card** and discuss options by emailing Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or by calling (315) 882-1054. The Stand's rate card can also be found online at www.mysouthsidestand.com

As we say goodbye to dedicated community correspondent Ame Donkor, who has been writing for The Stand since its launch as a print newspaper, we welcome a number of new community members eager to take on the challenge of reporting. Ame covered a number of local events and even once made deadline by completing a story on his BlackBerry after being forced to leave the library at closing time.



Future community correspondents have a big job ahead, but even after our first two meetings I am impressed with the eagerness and drive our new reporters are showing to tell local stories. Writing is a very challenging endeavor. You start with a blank page. The total emptiness appears as a huge obstacle. And with journalism, you tack on the task of interviewing sources and the added pressure of getting down everything correctly. Our sessions not only provide an opportunity to teach skills on composing a story, but they also provide a place where we can discuss how to get started and overcome those initial hesitations.

In addition to training community correspondents, a top priority of The South Side Newspaper Project is to secure more advertisers for The Stand. Local businesses can support and sustain this project by contacting me to learn about opportunities to purchase ads in the print issue and online, and to even place inserts.

As always, flip through the pages in this issue to learn more about your local community.

To reach me, email me at Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or call (315) 882-1054.

Ashley Kang

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor can be mailed to:

The Stand c/o Ashley Kang
South Side Communication Center
2331 South Salina St.
Syracuse, NY 13205

or emailed to:

The Stand's director,
Ashley Kang, at Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

All letters must be no more than 200 words in length and must contain the writer's full name, address and contact information.

WHY I JOINED THE STAND, AND WHY YOU SHOULD, TOO

By | Ame Donkor
Community correspondent

From the very first workshop I attended for The Stand, I knew that I was on the cusp of a life-changing experience. I was introduced to The Stand through its director, Ashley Kang, who sent out a slew of emails to drum up interest in the newspaper project.

I've enjoyed writing since I was a kid. I saw contributing to The Stand as an opportunity to exercise my talent and to travel around the local area. I was excited about meeting the residents, business owners and politicians. I really wanted a better idea of this

new city that I had come to. By attending the free workshops and learning the writing styles, interviewing techniques and photography lessons, it all came together.

Although I'm leaving Syracuse, I'd definitely like to see more people from the South Side community contribute their views and positivity on what is happening in this part of the city. The idea is that the newspaper will eventually be handed over to the community to be run as a locally owned and operated publication. I'd like to check out the news at The Stand's website, mysouthsidestand.com, in the coming years and read stories written by the South Side youth reporting about friends, neighbors and relatives ... and about the good things that are happening in their part of the city.



> Ame Donkor | John Liau, Staff Photo

HOW TO GET TESTED

The Cancer Services Program Partnership offers free cancer screenings and diagnostic services for those without health insurance by appointment at a variety of locations throughout Onondaga County.

Clients who receive positive screening tests also receive diagnostic testing and are referred to treatment if needed. Eligible clients are also enrolled in the Medicaid Cancer Treatment Program for Medicaid coverage for the duration of their breast, cervical, colorectal or prostate cancer treatment.

CANCER SCREENING

John H. Mulroy Civic Center, Floor 9
421 Montgomery St.
Syracuse, NY 13202

315-435-3653

CANCER AWARENESS

Health forum stresses importance of being proactive in fighting cancer



> Children of the Bethany Baptist Church compiled inspirational quotes for anyone dealing with cancer. The book of quotes was on display at the 13th annual Health Information Forum. | Bethany Bump, Staff Photo

By | Bethany Bump
Urban Affairs reporter

Knowing the steps to prevent cancer is one thing; following them yourself is another

Betty Brown's annual mammogram was scheduled for September last year. As a nurse in radiation oncology for 30 years, Brown regularly talked to patients about the importance of listening to their bodies. Had she not listened to her own body last August, she might not have stopped the tumor growing in her breast.

"I could have said, 'I'll wait till September, you know, it's only a month away,'" Brown said. "But that month might have meant the difference between how I was treated and how advanced my cancer was."

Brown organizes a health information forum every year to raise awareness for community members on different health topics. The first forum, in November 1998, was on Breast Cancer Awareness. This year, Mary Lockett, co-chair of the annual forum with Brown, decided to revisit the topic because it hit so close to home.

About 40 African-American women turned out at Bethany Baptist Church for the 13th annual Health Information Forum on Saturday, March 5, sponsored by the Syracuse Section of the National Council of Negro Women. The women learned about screening opportuni-

ties from Onondaga County's Cancer Services Program, which provides free breast, cervical and colorectal cancer screenings by appointment to women who are uninsured and of age at locations throughout the county.

After having their blood pressure taken, the women spent the next two hours listening to survivors of breast and colorectal cancer speak about the importance of listening to their bodies.

"Had I not listened to my body, I probably would have been at a further advanced stage than I was when I was diagnosed," Brown said. "All of the symptoms that you hear about breast cancer are about finding a lump. They don't talk about the fact that you can have pain. That's what happened to me. I had pain in my breast and thought, 'You know, this is not normal.'"

Lockett, co-chair of the event and New York state convener for the Syracuse and Rochester Section of the National Council of Negro Women, came up with the idea for a health forum when she took over as council president in 1998. Lockett said she felt that the large organization, which serves African-American women, could easily raise health awareness.

"Our basic goal is to make women aware, to make them aware of these diseases and how they should take care of themselves," Lockett said. "People get caught up in their lifestyle and their business, and they just don't take the time

to take care of themselves. I think they're aware of what's out there, but they just don't take advantage of it."

As guest speaker at the March health forum, Sheila Walker, an Onondaga County Health Department adviser and member of the Witness Project, shared a video and cancer detection tips with the audience.

The video highlighted the history of the Witness Project, a national breast and cervical cancer education program. It was founded because of the disparity in cancer's effects on African-Americans. The mortality rate from breast and cervical cancer was higher among African-Americans, though nobody was sure why.

"If you do nothing else, listen to your body."

—Betty Brown

Focusing on early detection, Walker said anyone 40 and older should schedule an annual mammogram, in addition to a monthly self-exam. Women should screen for cervical cancer by age 21, or by the time they are sexually active. By 50, women should screen for colorectal cancer with a colonoscopy. For anyone with a family history of colorectal cancer, it's important to begin screening 10 years earlier than the family member's onset.

Unlike many other cancers, colorectal cancer can be cured if it's caught in time, Walker said.

"Whatever your family history is — diabetes, any type of cancer, hypertension — let your family members know," Walker said. "Let your children know that they should screen for these things early. We need to know. Just like with being aware of your heritage, your medical history is just as important. Pass that on to your children."

Mildred Turner's family had the cancer gene: Her mother, her uncle and her aunt all had cancer. When she was diagnosed with breast cancer in 2003, she said she felt alone. "When I first learned that I had breast cancer it seemed like I had nobody that I could go to," she said. "I'm the only child and my mother was gone."

But Turner had her church family, she said. And since her cancer was caught in its beginning stages, she is cancer-free today. But she makes sure her daughter and son get cancer screenings.

"My message to you is to get checked. Have everything checked," Turner told the audience.

Joan Hicks always received breast exams at the doctor's office. That was always the concern, but colon cancer

was never on her mind or her doctor's mind, she said.

"It's something that does not necessarily flare up or swell up," Hicks said. "You don't hurt. You don't feel anything. You just are walking around feeling absolutely healthy, and there is this thing that is developing inside of you that you don't have a clue about."

When her doctor found polyps in her colon after an exam, Hicks was put on a diet and scheduled for another exam six months later. They had missed a tumor.

"I knew when I saw it," Hicks said. "There was this really dark mass that was in there. And when you see that you go, 'OK, all right,' and you're still not quite receiving that there's something really wrong with you."

After surgery, six weeks with a chemo pad, radiation, and another series of chemotherapy treatments, Hicks found the most important thing for women to do is ask.

"Ask your doctor. If they don't talk to you about colorectal cancer, ask them. Because you don't feel a thing until it gets to the point where it requires surgery. And at that point you have to make a decision," said Hicks, who is now eight years cancer-free.

Brown worked in oncology for most of her life. She knew what to expect. But being the patient was surreal to her.

"It's very, very different when it's you," Brown said. "Because it's one thing to talk to someone else about what you're supposed to do, but when you are the one that is the patient, it is scary as hell. I'm sorry, it is scary as hell. Even though intellectually and mentally, you know what to do, emotionally you are on a roller coaster."

Everything moved quickly, Brown said. Biopsy. Sonogram. Diagnosis. Surgery consultation. Mastectomy. Chemotherapy. It ended March 21, with her last chemotherapy treatment — her "graduation day," as Brown called it.

"More than anything else, listen," Brown said. "You know your body. You know what your body is telling you. If you get up this morning and it says, 'That's not normal,' listen to it. Don't ignore it. Because ignoring it could mean life and death. If you do nothing else, listen to your body."



> Adjua Williams, a member of the Syracuse Area Black Nurses Association, takes blood pressure readings from women at the annual forum. | Bethany Bump, Staff Photo

TESTS AVAILABLE

Breast screening for men and women, age 40+

- Breast exams
- Mammograms

Cervical screening for women, age 40+

- Pelvic exams
- Pap tests

Colorectal testing for men and women, age 50+

- Home stool kit (Fecal Immunochemical Test)
- Screening colonoscopy

Source:

<http://www.ongov.net/health/cancerscreening.html>

HOW TO APPLY

Interested students still have the opportunity to apply for the current semester, or any future semesters.

For more information call (315) 442-2230, or email cfac@syr.edu, or stop by the Community Folk Art Center between 4:30 and 6 p.m. Monday through Friday.

The center provides transportation from any Syracuse school, or even from a participant's home.

PAINTING A MESSAGE

Students from the Creative Arts Academy paint the 'one way to live'



> Artists created a mural that is 7 feet high and 17 feet wide and calls for an end to violence. | Mary Desmond, Staff Photo

By | Mary Desmond
Urban Affairs reporter

The academy encourages students who love the arts to explore creativity through education

Six adolescents, all student artists at the Community Folk Art Center, at 805 E. Genesee St., circled around Adrianna Cummings, a sophomore at Corcoran High School. As they watched, Cummings pooled bright red paint onto the word “violence” inscribed on a section of what will be a 120-square-foot mural. Once the paint was applied, the group lifted the mural board, allowing the red to flow across the painting like streams of dripping blood.

Later, when the students reflected on the day’s achievements, Brenda Casnave, a Henninger High School sophomore, praised Cummings’ efforts.

“She really worked hard on the ‘violence.’ She brought it home.”

The student artists are members of the center’s Creative Arts Academy — an arts and education program for Syracuse students in grades seven through 12. For almost five months, they have worked under the guidance of a local painter, Arthur Brangman, to create a

mural 7 feet high and 17 feet wide that calls for an end to violence in the Syracuse community. With the “blood,” the mural is one step closer to completion.

After a few more steps, the artists finished the mural, which will be displayed on the west side of the Community Folk Art Center for people in Syracuse to see.

The project started in November 2010, when the students met with Ricardo Gouveia, a political artist and muralist who goes by the name Rigo 23.

With Rigo 23’s help, the students developed a concept for the mural. “We talked about violence, how we felt about it, some of us had been dealing with it so much we’d gotten used to it, emotionally detached from it,” Cummings said.

Ever since, they have worked each week to transform the idea into a work of art. The mural has been evolving over time to reflect its makers’ ideas and creativity.

“He gave us an idea, we started with that idea. But then we changed it to fit us a little more,” Cummings said. The mural’s evolution highlights what Brangman says is one of the strongest aspects of the Creative Arts Academy.

“That’s what I like about this program,” Brangman said. “They’re not like puppets. They come to me with

new ideas, and we talk it over.”

The Creative Arts Academy was founded by a group effort at the Community Folk Art Center two years ago. Academy coordinator Ty Marshal says the tuition-free program receives funding from local institutions and corporations, including Syracuse University, Syracuse Stage, Wegmans and Wal-Mart.

Its aim is to inspire local high school students to engage in their education through programs in the arts. Marshal says the academy wants to give students an outlet to explore their creativity while “defining their futures in terms of college.” Students can choose to follow one of three disciplines: dance, theater or visual arts. Creativity and determination are the main requirements for program applicants.

“We are looking for students who are really heavily devoted to their craft,” Marshal said.

To join the Creative Arts Academy, students must submit a formal application, as well as an example of their work. Aspiring visual artists must submit a portfolio, dancers must audition with a dance, and theater students must perform a monologue or song. The process is implemented to ensure that applicants are truly determined.

“They don’t get students in here who don’t want to be here,” said Brangman. “It’s kind of neat because they actually like what they’re doing, they audition, they bring in portfolios. It’s just more professional.”

For Cummings, the academy is exactly what she was searching for because she had found that other art

workshops were too elementary.

“Every time I’d go look for an art program, it was like little stuff, like making a mask out of paper or Martha Stewart stuff. But I was looking for a serious art program.”

Chaz Griffin, a Fashion Institute of Technology graduate, shadows Brangman’s art classes. Griffin said he hopes to one day teach classes at the Creative Arts Academy. After his first two weeks, Griffin said that of all the things he has seen, he is most impressed by the students themselves.

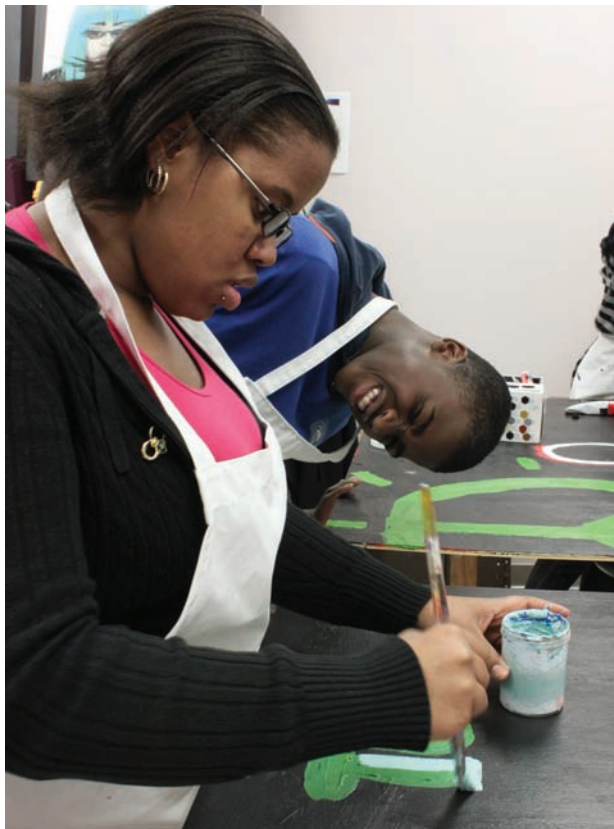
“Honestly the kids, even though they are teenagers and they’re a little young, at the same time they’re artistic, they’re very intelligent. They’re smarter than I was when I was their age.”

The Creative Arts Academy provides transportation, a snack and academic tutoring for participants. In return, Marshal said students must maintain a good attendance record to the art classes, and above a “C” average in their academic courses.

Today, the program has 13 students, but Marshal says the program is still accepting applications for the current semester.

“A lot of artists can be shy,” he said. “I would encourage them to get over their shyness and be in touch with us.”

Marshal said the community will benefit, too. “Young artists are the community members that give back to the community.”



> Brenda Casnave, a sophomore at Henninger High School, adds touches. | Mary Desmond, Staff Photo



> A student paints details on part of the mural, which will be displayed on the west side of the Community Folk Art Center. | Mary Desmond, Staff Photo



> Richard Breland on the porch of his home, which he bought in 1969. | Shayna Meliker, Staff Photo

By | Shayna Meliker
Staff reporter

Two generations of Brelands focus on positive aspects of South Side, such as decent neighbors

From the second story of a yellow house, Richard Breland has watched the South Side change for almost half a century.

When the 15th Ward was demolished, Breland — like many of his displaced neighbors — relocated to the South Side. But he missed the “it takes a village” feeling of the ward, where he lived for more than 30 years.

“We didn’t have very much,” remembers Breland. “We were very, very low-income people — very low-income people — but we were able to survive very well.” He moved to the South Side in 1965, helping his aunt

run a 76-unit apartment complex on the corner of Willow and Clinton streets. In 1969, he bought the house on South Salina where he still lives. He was the second black person to live on his block. The woman who sold him the house asked that he pay her as much as he could toward the cost, and then she gave him a second mortgage for the rest.

Breland, now 79, does not remember many safety issues when he moved to the South Side. But over time, it has become problematic.

“Safety on the South Side is not to my liking, or anyone’s liking, right now. But time has changed,” he reasoned. “The families have become working families. The mom and dad have to work, whereas before it would be only just dad who would work, and mom would stay home and watch the children.”

Still, he thinks people are doing the best they can,

given the stress on their time and limited income. Some people are victims of circumstance, Breland said. The kids do not care to work but want easy money, and drugs are established in the area.

Nowadays, Breland's downstairs neighbors are his nephew, his nephew's wife and their daughter, Diamond Breland — a senior at Syracuse University. Diamond said she knew she never wanted to be involved in any of the drugs or crime.

"I kind of feel like my house is just here, and my environment really has nothing to do with me," she said. "But it's not like I'm oblivious to what's going on. It's pretty obvious. But you just have to disassociate yourself from it, and take it as something that's not what you want to be part of."

Growing up in that yellow house, Diamond has

also seen the changes: She remembers a law firm in the neighborhood and better-maintained houses. But she said she doesn't think it's a "mainstream ghetto."

"It's really not as bad as people make it out to be. There's only like a few people that make the South Side sound like this horrible place, but there are a lot of people in the neighborhood that take care of their houses, clean their yards, are decent neighbors."

These positive qualities are what the two generations — Richard and Diamond — said they hope for the future of the South Side.

"I can tell that he has a sense of disappointment with how it is now," Diamond said of Breland. "And I kind of feel like he wants to hold on to this house, because he still has hope that eventually things will revert back to how they were."



> Richard Breland with his nephew's daughter, Diamond Breland, who lives downstairs. | Courtesy of Richard Breland



> A party at the Dunbar Center in the 1950s. | Courtesy of Richard Breland



> Breland and members of the Syracuse United Neighbors show their signs at a protest in Chicago. | Courtesy of Richard Breland



> Boys at the Dunbar Center, where Breland sang and played basketball. | Courtesy of Richard Breland



> Breland shows off the first car he ever bought, near the 15th Ward. | Courtesy of Richard Breland

LISTEN ONLINE

the **STAND** Listen to audio of Richard Breland and Diamond Breland talk more about the South Side at www.mysouthsidestand.com. Topics they cover:

» RICHARD:

- Growing up in the 15th Ward
- Buying his South Side home
- Racial integration
- Employment
- On Diamond
- Safety
- Cleaning up the South Side

» DIAMOND:

- On Richard
- Influence of growing up on the South Side
- Safety
- How the neighborhood has changed

ABOUT TONISHA



Tonisha Gunn is a senior at Corcoran High School and a South Side resident. She is a member of Kristie Yarnell's journalism class.

If you are a high school student and would like to write for The Stand, contact Ashley Kang at AshleyKang@mysouthsidestand.com.

THE DAY

Here is the schedule of events set up for the Corcoran students:

- Visit two college courses of their choice and sit in on classes.
- Spend time at Archbold Gymnasium to enjoy some recreational activities.
- Eat at a dining hall to enjoy a college meal.
- Attend a two-part admissions discussion hosted by the Office of Admissions and current SU students.

A DAY SPENT AT SU

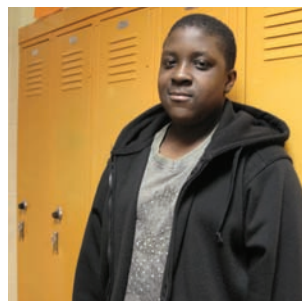
Program gives Corcoran students a chance to experience college

By | Tonisha Gunn
High School columnist

Two students tell why they are looking forward to visiting Syracuse University to attend classes

On Thursday, March 24, 2011, students from Corcoran High School attended Syracuse University's "A Day at SU." Students were able to attend classes and experience life at SU for a day. The event was hosted by SyraMatics, a nonprofit group on Syracuse University's campus, according to Michael Foulkes, president and founder of SyraMatics.

Two students who attended were Jaquann Kelley and Myennah Bowden. I spoke with them a few days before they went on the field trip.



JAQUANN KELLEY

Jaquann Kelley is a 9th-grader at Corcoran. He likes to read lots of books, and he also especially enjoys Manga. Jaquann can usually be found in the library after school. He reads a new

book every day. Jaquann was asked a few questions about his expectations before going on the trip to SU.

Q: What do you expect to get out of the trip?

A: I expect to get information for my future. I want to know if SU is a place I could go and see the different sites they have. I want to learn about college.

Q: What do you expect to learn from this trip?

A: I expect to get a feel or a sense of the direction of the school, and to meet new people.

Q: Would SU be somewhere you would want to attend college?

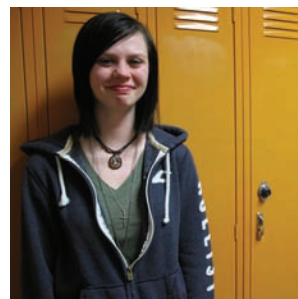
A: Yes, I would like to attend SU, because it's a big school and a great university. It also has a lot of programs I am interested in, and it is very close.

Q: What do you want to major in?

A: I am interested in things like physics and science and biology ... so something having to do with those areas.

Q: How are you, as a 9th-grader, preparing for college?

A: I am learning the secret to keeping my grades up. I am also trying to continue working hard in my studies.



MYENNAH BOWDEN

Myennah Bowden is a 9th-grader at Corcoran. She likes to draw and is very creative. Myennah is interested in promoting peace within her community. She is enjoying her first year in high school.

Myennah was asked questions about her expectations for the trip to SU.

Q: What do you expect to get out of this field trip to SU?

A: I am interested to learn more about the college, because it is a good school.

Q: What do you expect to learn from this trip?

A: I expect to meet more people and learn more about the school. I know a little bit already, but I want to know more.

Q: Would SU be somewhere you would want to attend college?

A: Yes, I have always dreamed of going there. It is close to home, a Say Yes school, and I have always wanted to go to a big university like SU. They also have a great education program and art program.

Q: What do you want to major in?

A: I want to be a teacher. I will most likely major in education. I want to help disabled/challenged kids ... so I would like to focus on special education.

Q: How are you, as a 9th-grader, preparing for college?

A: I am trying my hardest to stay focused and keep earning good grades.



> Jaquann Kelley, left, and Myennah Bowden share their expectations with Tonisha Gunn. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photos

CONTRERAS

'Collaborative spirit' helped get her the job

By | Jennifer Cheng
Urban Affairs reporter

Sharon Contreras looks to bring her success from previous jobs to Syracuse City School District as its next superintendent

Sharon Contreras, 41, will take the reins as superintendent of the Syracuse City School District after a unanimous vote of approval by the school board March 16.

In her new role, Contreras will oversee a school district with 34 schools, roughly 20,000 students and 4,000 staff members. She will also inherit a district that has wrestled this spring with a \$50 million budget gap and a plan to cut 584 staff members. The district's 2011-12 budget of \$331.7 million is 6.4 percent lower than last year's, due to cuts in state aid.

"The number one quality that Sharon has, in my perspective, is her expertise in helping urban districts improve student outcomes," said Richard Strong, school board president. "She has had great success in Rhode Island and Illinois, and we're hoping to have her do it here."

Strong said he admires Contreras' collaborative spirit in managing situations, which he said is preferable to a top-down style.

"Our hope is that Sharon Contreras will use her ability to build consensus, improve graduation rates and test scores, and in learning overall," he said.



> Sharon Contreras | Mike Greenlar,
The Post-Standard Photo

Contreras signed a three-year contract, specifying \$204,000 as her starting salary. The contract offers a \$10,000 bonus in the first year, and \$15,000 in the second and third years if she meets goals set by the board. Current Superintendent Dan Lowengard's salary was \$199,000 last year and \$207,000 this year. He will retire June 30. Strong said the board offered Contreras the salary to ward off competitive bids. "We weren't her only suitor," he said.

Contreras is the chief academic officer of Providence Public School

District, a position she has held for four years. The district has 42 schools, 23,561 students and 3,236 staff positions. It shares similarities with the Syracuse City School District, with its high minority student population, low graduation rate and a budget crisis.

Born to a Latino father and African-American mother, Contreras will be the first woman from a racial minority background to serve as superintendent.

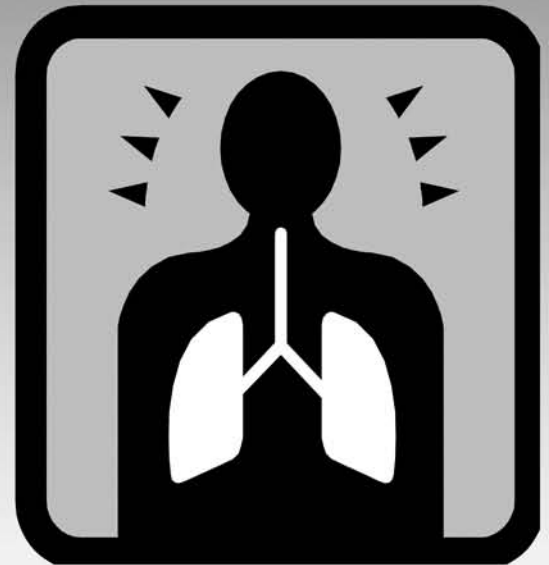
Bernard Taylor, the superintendent for the Grand Rapids Public Schools in Michigan, was the board's other choice as final candidate until he withdrew. He said in a written statement he felt he belonged in Grand Rapids.

Strong said a consensus emerged among board members behind Contreras before Taylor dropped out. Speaking of Contreras, Strong added, "She will get up to speed on issues like the budget, layoffs, construction projects, improving the curriculum, building relationships with stakeholders like county executives and Say Yes."

A native New Yorker, Contreras was born in Uniondale on Long Island and graduated from the State University of New York at Binghamton.

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Joanne M. Mahoney
County Executive



Cynthia B. Morrow, MD, MPH
Commissioner of Health

www.ongov.net/health

INTERPRET POETRY

What: First Movement of the Heart: Poetry and Interpretive Dance Classes for Teens

When: 3:30 to 5 p.m., April 8, 9, 15, 16 and 22

Where: Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.

Cost: Free, but interested teens must register

More details: Poet Jackie Warren-Moore and dance artist Cheryl Wilkins-Mitchell will each lead two sessions on poetry and on interpreting poetry through movement. Warren-Moore and participating teens will present their work in a performance to be held at 2 p.m. Saturday, April 23, at the library.

More Information: To learn more, visit www.onlib.org or call (315) 435-3395

LIBRARY LOSSES

Students, community members, job seekers threatened by budget cuts



> Sixth-grader Williasia Williams and fifth-grader Shani Lewis of South Side Charter Academy spend a Friday morning reading at the Beauchamp Branch Library. | Mary Desmond, Staff Photo

By | Mary Desmond
Urban Affairs reporter

Local public libraries reduce services, limit events while trying to meet people's needs

In April, the Beauchamp Branch Library, at 2111 S. Salina St., will host a series of "First Movement of the Heart: Poetry and Interpretive Dance Classes for Teens." Jackie Warren-Moore, a local poet, and Cheryl Williams Mitchell, a dance instructor, will teach five afternoon sessions in which adolescents between the ages of 13 and 18 will learn to write poetry and then interpret their poetry as movement.

The workshops will culminate with a performance at the library April 23. Poets and Writers Inc., a national nonprofit literary organization, funds the workshops.

This program is possible due to a grant from the organization, but special events are becoming more difficult to plan, said Paschal Ugoji, a Beauchamp librarian.

"The constraint we have is funding," Ugoji said. The library often receives offers for events, he said, but they do not happen because the library cannot afford them.

Public libraries suffer from federal, state and local underfunding. In February, President Barack Obama's budget proposal called for a \$20.3 million decrease in funding for the Institute of Museum and Library Services, the main source of federal aid for the nation's

museums and libraries. In January, New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo proposed a 10 percent cut for library aid in the Education Department's annual budget.

City residents fund branch libraries like Beauchamp, and county residents support the Central Library, said Elizabeth Dailey, executive director of the Onondaga County Public Library. Higher funding does not directly support local libraries, Dailey said, but federal and state grants fund special programs, such as the development of publicly accessible databases.

Onondaga County's appropriations for branch libraries in the city of Syracuse have increased from \$6,116,739 to \$6,202,676 or 1.4 percent, between 2010 and 2011. But Dailey said the numbers are misleading.

"In dollars, the amount has gone up every year," she said. "However you'll hear almost everyone say libraries have been cut because the same amount of money supports fewer people and fewer materials."

Reduced funding requires libraries to strip some services. In December, the Onondaga County Public Library announced its branches would not stay open past 7:30 p.m. Dailey said the change resulted from a decrease in staff and a decision to keep more employees at the libraries during the most popular visiting hours.

"It's a challenge because we need to meet people's needs," Dailey said. "We have to meet people's needs, so we have to use resources in the best way."

Library users are so varied and their needs so different that it is difficult to determine what services to drop.

The American Library Association says libraries are “the one place in America where the doors are open to everyone.” The libraries provide services to everyone, from college students studying for exams to grandparents emailing relatives living abroad. Computers and access to the Internet are vital for many library patrons. And that is becoming even more important during a recession.

Pamela Crane, the branch manager at Beauchamp, said computers give library users access to information.

“Public computer usage has increased,” she said. “We offer wireless access that’s being used more and more.”

Dailey explained the importance of having access to information about job opportunities online. “I don’t know if people realize this, but every major employer in Onondaga County requires a job application online.”

Computer use is on the rise, but the age-old practice of lending books and now DVDs is still a fundamental role of public libraries. So is providing a place to meet and a place for children to learn.

In the rear of Beauchamp, a flight of stairs leads to an auditorium that is often used for community meetings.

“The branches really are neighborhood centers,” Dailey said. “They are places where community members get together.”

Some of the greatest beneficiaries of public libraries are children. Richard Rogers, a sixth-grade teacher at the

Edward Smith School in Syracuse, said public libraries are necessary for students, especially the less fortunate.

“Many of my students, up to 40 percent on a yearly basis, don’t have the means to buy books to read, let alone a computer and the Internet. Without a public library system, students would lack the resources necessary to complete some assignments expected to be completed,” Rogers said.

Dara Walker, a graduate student in Syracuse University’s African American Studies program, said events at the library, like last month’s “Black History Jeopardy,” inspire children to learn about their history and heritage.

“The key point is that they understand there is so much more about Black History and there is a way to learn about Black History that is A, culturally relevant, and B, can be fun,” Walker said.

Tatjyjana Verhage, a third-grader who played the quiz game, said she enjoyed “Daily Double” and learning about people like Martin Luther King Jr. and Rosa Parks.

Dailey said community members interested in supporting their libraries can contact local representatives.

“Some people don’t think their elected officials want to talk to them, but they do,” Dailey said. She said citizens should tell their local politicians, such as Assemblyman Samuel D. Roberts or County Legislator Monica Williams, what they need from their local public libraries.

“I would focus on what is needed, whatever your personal needs are, and ask for support.”

COMPUTER SERVICES

Computer usage at the **Beauchamp Branch Library** has increased, said Pamela Crane, the branch manager at Beauchamp.

On a weekday afternoon, **adults** searching through job listings or updating resumes occupy almost every computer in the Beauchamp Library.

Students, such as Merissa Justafson, fill the rest. Justafson, a psychology major at Onondaga Community College, visits the library several times a week to **type papers** for her courses.

Community members **search** for information about jobs, continuing **education** opportunities and local **businesses**, which are fundamental for **job seekers**, Crane said.

NURSES SPEAK OUT

By | Beckie Strum
Urban Affairs reporter

Pending cuts to school district’s health services have nurses worried about caring for students

A late wave of influenza cases in Onondaga County has revealed the strain that pending cuts could have on health services in the Syracuse Central School District.

City school nurses already are stretched thin by a high number of chronically ailing children, many of whom depend solely upon in-school health care.

The school board passed a budget March 9 that proposed districtwide cuts of about 20 percent, in response to a \$65 million deficit. The budget, now waiting for Mayor Stephanie Miner’s approval, calls for a 12 percent cut to health services. The cut will likely compromise the nurses’ ability to provide adequate care for more than 20,000 students across district schools, said Maritza Alvarado, the district’s director of health services.

The unusually late wave of county flu cases, which doubled in the final weeks of February, caused a rise in students with fevers and other flu-like symptoms,

Alvarado said. Sudden high-traffic times make district nurses aware of understaffing and the impending cuts to their departments in the 2012 budget.

“For us, it’s mostly staffing cuts,” Alvarado said. The district employs about 50 nurses and a dozen health attendants, the secretaries who travel between schools, she said. She did not say how many staff members the district might let go.

Nurses will have less time to treat children once the district cuts medical attendants, who do the secretarial work, Alvarado said. District nurses will take on more clerical duties after the department downsizes.

Kathryn Adamy, a district nurse, called on the school board at its February budget meeting to evaluate the consequences of downsizing a department that often provides the only health care students, insured or not, receive all year.

“We have to remember our obligation is first and foremost to the children of this district, who deserve — for everything else they will be forced to forgo in the coming years of their educational careers — to learn with the confidence that they can breathe and eat and play safely in our buildings and on our watch,” she said.

BROKEN-DOWN ICON

Local group works to restore church, make it a national historic place



> The former home of the People's A.M.E. Zion Church, built in 1911, is at 711 E. Fayette St. | Dan Scorpio, Staff Photo

By | Dan Scorpio
Urban Affairs reporter

A.M.E. Zion congregation aided people during Underground Railroad, Civil Rights Movement

Central New York historians want to give the oldest African-American church building in Syracuse a second life — through a permanent place on the National Register of Historic Places.

The church, located at 711 E. Fayette St., formerly housed the People's African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church. The building stands vacant, as it has since 1975 when the congregation moved to its current location on South Salina Street. Built in 1911, the building was a hotbed of activism during the Civil Rights Movement.

The A.M.E. Zion denomination dates to 1820, and the Syracuse congregation gathered in a former Methodist church, located at 58 Salina St. in downtown Syracuse, beginning in 1837. The Syracuse A.M.E. Zion congregation was officially established in 1842, and it provided shelter for escaping slaves along the abolitionist Underground Railroad before the Civil War.

"It's truly been a groundbreaking effort to try to save this building," said Nancy Keefe Rhodes, a Syracuse

resident, writer and member of the group preparing the church's application for historic designation.

The century-old building shows signs of its age. Weathered bricks line its exterior, and boards cover the building's once-beautiful stained glass windows. The only recognition of this historic building is a red "711" stamped on its boarded front door.

Keefe Rhodes and a team of historians submitted the project's application to the New York State Historic Preservation Office on March 1. If the application gains its approval, the state office would then nominate the site to the National Register for official designation. Each application for historical landmark designation includes an evaluation of the building's physical condition and a detailed description of the site's historical significance. Keefe Rhodes said she expects a decision during the summer.

The Preservation Association of Central New York gave the applicants a \$6,000 grant, donated last November. This grant allows for historical research on more than 80 venerable A.M.E. Zion Churches, each built around the turn of the 20th century, Keefe Rhodes said.

The People's A.M.E. Zion Church is rich with history, Keefe Rhodes said. A local chapter of the Congress

of Racial Equality, a national civil rights organization, operated out of the church during the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s, she said.

"People all across the country would have known that A.M.E. Zion was the place to go as the focal point of old Syracuse," Keefe Rhodes said.

The church serves as a reminder of Syracuse's lost identity, said Gregg Tripoli, executive director of the Onondaga Historical Association. "To save this building is to preserve the history of the old 15th Ward neighborhood and (the) congregation's members who lived there," Tripoli said. "This church is just about all that's left of that neighborhood."

The 15th Ward neighborhood, stretching from Erie Boulevard to East Adams Street, was demolished in the 1960s for urban renewal projects that included new housing developments and Interstate 81 construction. The abandoned church now sits in the shadows of the elevated I-81 overpass.

With boarded-up windows and a blue tarp covering its roof, the gray-brick church is in disrepair. Randy Crawford, partner at the Syracuse architecture firm Crawford & Stearns, said the church needs extensive renovation.

"Our primary concern is protecting the building from being destroyed," Crawford said. "Once we do that, then we can get to work preserving and restoring the structure."

The church needs new windows and doors, in addition to significant masonry work on its exterior, Crawford

said. "We'll also have to do a complete re-roofing to make the building functional again," he said.

Crawford said he expects to recommend substantial mechanical and electrical renovations for the inside. The church is too small to be used as a worship space for the 500-member congregation, but Crawford said he expects it to be a community gathering space.

Crawford is an experienced historical architect in Central New York, having previously worked to restore Harriet Tubman's historical sites in Auburn. "The Fayette Street church is central to African-American history in this region," Crawford said. "So much from that era is gone, so we have to work extra hard to save this building."

South Side residents and members of the current People's A.M.E. Zion Church's congregation have a personal connection to the church. Claire Enkosky, a Syracuse University graduate assistant, spent several months transcribing oral history interviews from the congregation to preserve their memories of the old church building.

"It amazes me how many people's lives went through this church at some point," Enkosky said. "Preserving the building is very important to so many people."

For Keefe Rhodes, the building is part of a daily routine. She said she drives down East Fayette Street almost every day, passing by the church on the way to and from her home.

"I've become very fond of the building," she said. "It's a very beautiful little building."

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