

# the **Stand** south side news

[www.mysouthsidestand.com](http://www.mysouthsidestand.com)

Syracuse, NY

**October 2011**

**issue 13**

**FREE**

## THE EDIBLE FOREST

Clinic, urban farm  
grow a community  
with healthy lifestyle

## smart space

Andrew Maxwell teams  
with community on  
issue of vacant housing

## Strolling spotlight

Libba Cotten Grove is the first place  
featured as we walk the South Side

## Making balloon biz pop

Kevin Henry helps community with home-grown businesses

## MEET OUR FIRST ACHIEVER



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ASHLEY@MYSOUTHSIDESTAND.COMTHE STAND IS BASED OUT OF THE  
SOUTH SIDE COMMUNICATION CENTER  
2331 SOUTH SALINA STREET  
SYRACUSE NY 13205**DISCLAIMER**

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**12 BUSINESS** | Despite economic hardships, Kevin Henry has managed to find success in an unusual business enterprise that he started — balloons.

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**16 ENTERTAINMENT** | The Syracuse music scene has seen its fair share of changes over the past 50 years. One constant has been musician Marcus Curry.

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■ Cover photography of Magda Bayoumi from South Side forest gardens by Lena Budd

## CALENDAR | OCTOBER

**What:** Syracuse Neighborhoods Action Conference**When:** 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 22**Where:** Le Moyne College's Greuen Conference Center, Syracuse**More details:** To educate, engage, empower and build the capacity of city neighbors and neighborhoods in an effort to unify voices and increase influence as a community.**More Info.:** Call (315) 448-8100, The Gifford Foundation at (315) 474-2489 or email [cnysummit@gmail.com](mailto:cnysummit@gmail.com)**What:** Halloween Spooktacular**When:** 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 27**Where:** Beauchamp Branch Library Auditorium, 2111 S. Salina St., Syracuse**More details:** Attendees can enjoy food, games, crafts and activities for the entire family, and everyone is welcome to come in costume.**More Info.:** Call the library at (315) 435-3395

## MEET A COMMUNITY CORRESPONDENT

Miguel Balbuena has been a South Side resident since 2006. He graduated from the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs with master's degrees in public administration and economics. His mission is to give back to the community by empowering South Side residents and raising awareness in environmental and public health issues. He's been writing for The Stand for almost two years. Balbuena's coverage of a community event promoting a community garden can be found on Page 18.





We're excited to debut two features in this issue – South Side Achiever, which highlights a person of accomplishment from the community, and Strolling the South Side, which shines a spotlight on a little-known historical fact from this neighborhood.

Our first Achiever feature, by Sistina Giordano, introduces the Rev. Tongela Smith and her husband, the Rev. Kenneth Smith, who established New Direction Community Network a year ago to build social skills and self-esteem among girls 12 to 19.

The first Strolling the South Side feature, by staff reporter Tara Donaldson, explains how the Libba Cotten Grove came to be named. This feature will rotate from focusing on a person to a historic structure or an undiscovered landmark. It will often include a map of the spotlighted location.

The community is invited to nominate future achievers or offer suggestions on a facet of the community they'd like to learn more about, such as the Libba Cotten Grove.

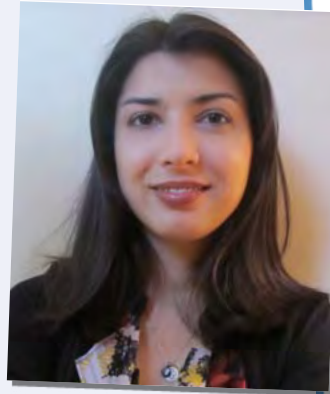
Another new feature in the works is planned for our website. This regularly updated column will allow local churches and faith centers to share announcements, news and upcoming events. For this to be successful, faith centers must participate by submitting items to me either by email to [Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com](mailto:Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com) or by mailing to The Stand, South Side Communication Center, 2331 S. Salina St., Syracuse, N.Y., 13205. These items will be posted online for free.

We're also happy to again feature local community correspondents online and here from The Stand's recent September Journalism Workshop where five participants — Ruthnie Angrand, Rasheeda L. Alford, Vickie Patterson, Laura Finkbeiner and Miguel Balbuena — ventured out during the annual Acts of Kindness Weekend to report, take photos and shoot video. Read Miguel's story on Page 18 and a roundup of the correspondents' work on Page 20. For their full coverage, visit [www.mysouthsidestand.com](http://www.mysouthsidestand.com).

Finally, staff reporter Tara Donaldson will be a regular guest on Dr. Rick Wright's radio show on POWER 620 AM once a month to share with the community the stories she and other reporters are working on for The Stand. The newspaper comes out the first Saturday of the month, and Tara will be on the radio show the previous Sunday. Tune in from 3 p.m. to 4 p.m. during the community hour to hear from her.

To share your suggestions, you can always write a letter to the editor, attend future workshops or submit story ideas. Let us hear from you.

Ashley Kang



## UPCOMING EVENT

### Oct. 8

#### Behind the Scenes of The Stand

10 a.m. to noon

South Side Communication  
Center, 2331 S. Salina St.

Staff reporters with The Stand will share how they developed their story ideas and the process taken to put together an article for the print issue.

Event is free and open to anyone interested in learning more about how stories get into the paper. Community members are welcome to come with questions and share story ideas.

Contact Ashley Kang at [Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com](mailto:Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com) or call (315) 882-1054

### 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 S. Salina St.  
Syracuse, NY 13205

or emailed to:

The Stand's director,  
Ashley Kang, at [Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com](mailto: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.

### ONLINE COMMENT

*"I enjoyed meeting the reporters from The Stand at various locations. You do a great community service. Thanks for the video."*

— Comment From A-OK! Weekend's Facebook page

## LOCAL ACHIEVERS

The South Side Achiever is a new feature in The Stand that highlights an accomplished person in the community.

### ORGANIZATION

New Direction  
Community Network

### ESTABLISHED

Nov. 11, 2010

### PRESIDENT AND FOUNDER

Tongela Smith

### NOMINATE SOMEONE

Do you know a South Side Achiever? Nominate that person by contacting Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or (315) 882-1054

### FOR MORE INFORMATION

**Need more info or want to become a mentor?**

#### Contact Tongela Smith

- (315) 706-8339
- tsmith@newdirectioncommunitynetwork.org

#### Donations

- <http://newdirectioncommunitynetwork.org>
- New Direction Community Network Inc.  
P.O. Box 2903  
Liverpool, NY 13089



## Tongela Smith

**Smith's organization mentors and inspires**

By | Sistina Giordano  
*Staff reporter*

**The New Direction Community Network was established to empower young women**

Tongela Smith was driving one day in 2008 when she had a vision. So the reverend and mother of three pulled over to the side of the road and began to pray.

"I knew that I was called to do something bigger with my life," Smith said as she looked back on that day three years ago. Smith said it was His words that created the inner workings of her need to inspire women to "pursue life on purpose."

Smith's calling led her to create New Direction Community Network.

Today Smith, who is president, and her husband, the Rev. Kenneth Smith, reminisce about the good work that New Direction Community Network has already done in one short year. The nonprofit youth development program focuses on mentoring girls ages 12 to 19 in building social skills, self-esteem and educational activities — in the community and in partnership with the Syracuse City School District.

Smith, who grew up in the rough neighborhoods of Niagara Falls, N.Y., said she knew firsthand what it was like to struggle. Once a backup vocalist for James Brown, she admits that she learned some of life's important lessons the hard way.

But with the help of women who believed in her and under the guidance of her mentor, Kathy Sharpton, the wife of the Rev. Al Sharpton, she realized what believing



> Tongela Smith created New Direction Community Network. It marks its one-year anniversary Nov. 11. | Provided Photo

in someone could do for a young girl.

By the age of 19, Smith was organizing fashion and talent shows to encourage women; by 1996, she had created weekend workshops in her home.

"It was the blizzard of '97 and our home was full of women on every floor," she said of the workshop that empowered women of all ages and became a stepping stone for the nonprofit.

Now, on the cusp of its one-year anniversary — Nov. 11 — New Direction has broadened its program with a team of 45 people.

"The best is yet to come," Smith said.

She and her husband hope that the community will realize the difference they're making.

"I'm a visionary. I see it; I proclaim it, and I believe it," she said. "We're here to change lives one person at a time."



> Mentors and students at Blodgett School from the New Direction Community Network, in partnership with the Syracuse City School District, celebrate together. | Provided Photo



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To find out what Say Yes to Education means for you and your family, go to [sayyessyracuse.org](http://sayyessyracuse.org), or call **315-443-4260**.

**SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY:** Scholarship in Action





ON THE SIDE

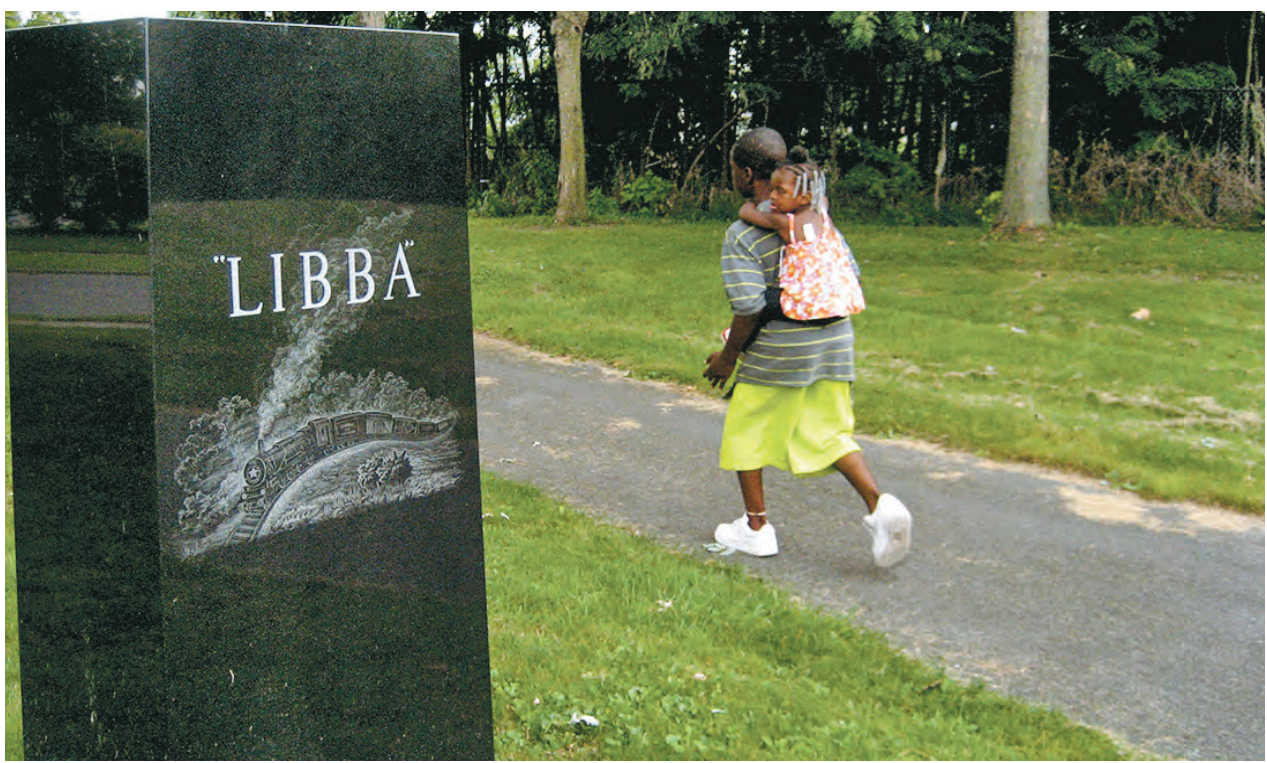
## SOUTH SIDE FEATURE

The Stand is pleased to unveil this feature about places, people and community aspects of Syracuse's South Side.

Strolling the South Side will spotlight undiscovered landmarks and historic structures.

# STROLLING *the* SOUTH SIDE

*Local park's name, design taken from Grammy Award-winning folk singer*



> A child rides piggy-back past a monument in Libba Cotten Grove on the South Side. | Tara Donaldson, Staff Photo



> A portrait of Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten, named in 1983 as Syracuse's first Living Treasure — an award that recognizes the community's greatest asset, its people — hangs in city hall. | Tara Donaldson, Staff Photo

By | Tara Donaldson  
*Staff reporter*

**Libba Cotten Grove is at once a place of recreation and considerable historical value**

For as long as he has lived on the South Side — 27 years — Ray Harris said he never knew there was a lady named Libba; he figured that was just the name of the park.

"We have fun at that little park, taking the kids and having cookouts and stuff," Harris said. "I just never knew what it was."

What the park is, in fact, is a memorial to Syracuse's first living treasure and a woman who, at the age of 90, won a Grammy Award for Best Ethnic or Traditional Folk recording in 1985.

### REMEMBERING COTTEN

Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten, born in 1895, was an African-American folk musician best known for her song, "Freight Train," and for playing her guitar upside down, making it easier for

### SUGGEST A LOCATION

To submit an idea for Strolling the South Side, contact Ashley Kang at (315) 882-1054 or Ashley@mysouthsidedstand.com





> Libba Cotten Grove is designed as a guitar shape. The play area represents the guitar's body. | Tara Donaldson, Staff Photo

her to play left-handed.

"I watched her play all the time, and it confused me," said the Rev. Larry Ellis, Cotten's grandson. "All I knew was it sounded good."

Ellis said what he remembers most about his grandmother is that her greatest joy was to be responsible for someone else's happiness or joy.

There was no prejudice in her love, Ellis said. "She gave to everyone. If they came over, they got rolls and dumplings; didn't matter who you were."

### KEEPING HER MUSIC ALIVE

Once known as State and Castle Park, the Grove was dedicated to Cotten in 1983 to keep her value and memory alive in the community.

An aerial view of the park would reveal the shape of a guitar at its core. The play area represents the body, and the sidewalk is the neck connecting to the gazebos at the head of the guitar.

"The idea was to turn the park into a musical park where there would be concerts and events that would be reflective of the things Libba did for us," said David Rufus, executive director of the Southeast Gateway Community Development Corporation who was a part of the plans for Libba's Grove.

While funding did not permit the full development of the park to include a sculpture of Cotten and an amphitheater, Rufus said he hopes there will be a movement to continue the vision in the future.

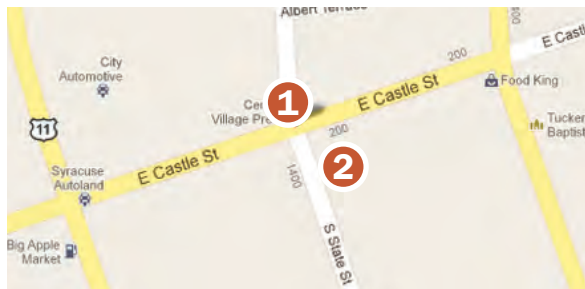
Cotten's grandson said the park is great, and he

hopes it represents what Libba Cotten meant in life.

"It should be a place where a variety of people and personalities can sit around and have mutual joy and music in their lives," Ellis said. "That's what she would want."



> This is the home in Syracuse where Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten once lived. | Tara Donaldson, Staff Photo



## PARK INFO

Libba Cotten Grove was dedicated in November 1983 to honor Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten.

This neighborhood park is 1.84 acres on the corner of South State and Castle streets on Syracuse's South Side.

The park is guitar-shaped as a homage to her musical career.

## ABOUT COTTEN

Before her death in 1987, Elizabeth "Libba" Cotten had some standout opportunities.

- She performed for John F. Kennedy and toured the country sharing her music.
- She was honored by inclusion in the book, "I Dream a World: Portraits of Black Women Who Changed America," by Brian Lanker.



## FROM HERE TO THERE

Here are the nearest post offices from the Colvin Street area:

Colvin Street to  
444 S. Salina Street

1.5 Miles  
29-minute walk

Colvin Street to  
720 University Ave.

1.7 Miles  
36-minute walk

Colvin Street to  
4912 W. Seneca  
Turnpike

2.4 Miles  
55-minute walk

# IN FEAR OF CLOSURE

*South Side residents worry about the fate of their local post office*

By | Laura Liera  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

Salina Street branch customers rely on location of post office because many walk to get there

With the United States Postal Service embroiled in well-publicized financial troubles, concerns have grown among some South Side residents that the neighborhood's last local office — on the corner of Colvin and South Salina streets — could be closed.

Regional Postal Service officials say they have made no decision, pending a study of residents' use and revenues coming into the branch, which is located at 2200 S. Salina St.

"The study for the Colvin Street post office hasn't started yet — so to say it is closing is a bit premature," said Maureen Marion, a spokeswoman for the Postal Service in New York and New England. "In our review, we will be looking for dollar revenues coming into the post office, along with workload and historic data."

But Marion also said that the Postal Service is considering closing up to 3,600 branches nationwide. Given that the service shuttered its Elmwood branch, at 1225 South Ave., in January, some South Side residents fear that Colvin could be closed, too.

"If they close this post office, I would have to go far away to get my money orders and send my bills," said Phoenix Phan, who lives near the post office. "Every area has more than one post office, so why do we have to be left with none if the population is big here?" The 13205 zip code of the South Side has an average population of 19,201, according to the ZIP Code database.

Other residents share Phan's concerns. Eric Moore, a local South Side community member, walks to the post office more than four times a week and does not feel that it's right for the post office to close. "It would affect me real bad because my P.O. box is here. I live in the neighborhood, and because I have disabilities that don't allow me to go too far, I would have a hard time getting around to the closest post office from here," Moore said.

The U.S. Postal Service relies on sales of postage, products and services, so it does not receive tax dollars for operating expenses, Marion said. According to the U.S. Postal Service website, the post office delivers to nearly 151 million homes and businesses a year. The Concerned Citizens Action Program, a nonprofit organization located at 2309 S. Salina St., across the street from the Colvin post office, would be affected if the post office were to close. Pam Clark, office manager of Concerned Citizens, which works on tearing down abandoned housing in the community, relies on the close



> The post office at South Salina and Colvin streets would undergo analysis before any decision would be made about its future. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo

walking distance to the post office.

"We go to the post office around three times a week to send letters and fliers, and as a nonprofit organization, it's hard to get money," Clark said. "So if it closes down, we would be spending money on transportation, and that would cost us extra money that we may not have."

**"We go to the post office around three times a week to send letters and fliers."**

— Pam Clark





> Maureen Marion, spokeswoman for the USPS in New York and New England, stresses that no decisions have been made regarding the possible closing of the Salina Street branch. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo

Marion said that much of the labor intensive work of first-class mail — letters that require postage stamps — has gone to different locations, no longer just the post office. “A lot of our work has gone to the Internet, and people can buy stamps, ship a box and manage their mail all online,” she said.

But not everyone has Internet access, Clark said. “Some people don’t have access to a computer at home so the post office needs to take into consideration that the neighborhood and community relies on this post office more than they think,” she said.

And even with those who do have access to a

computer and Internet, it is not as reliable as having a post office across the street. Gwendolyn Fagan, owner of Suit “U” Now, 2315 S. Salina St., relies on the post office to receive packages for her clothing store. “I rely on the post office across the street to pick up and send packages, and I can’t rely on computers because they go down sometimes,” Fagan said.

If the Postal Service does review the Colvin branch for possible closure, the service will provide questionnaires for community members to have a voice in the decision being made, Marion said.

“We are being put in a difficult position,” she said, “but our role in the end is to be sure to do the right thing for our post office and community members.”



> The postal boxes from the closed Elmwood branch have been transferred to the South Salina Street branch. If this branch were to close, the postal boxes would have to find a home at another branch. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo



## Community Folk Art Center celebrates National Hispanic Heritage Month

*From Cuba to 'Cuse*

**Friday, Oct. 7, 8 pm**

**Saturday, Oct. 8, 3 pm**

A one-man show by José Miguel Hernández Hurtado. \$10 admission.



**La Familia de la Salsa**

**Thursday, Oct. 20, 6:30 pm**

featuring Salsa-Son-Timba Orchestra. \$5 admission.



805 East Genesee Street, Syracuse, NY  
phone: (315) 442-2230 email: cfac@syr.edu  
[www.communityfolkartcenter.org](http://www.communityfolkartcenter.org)

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> Denicha Goolsby, 13, and her cousin Tyler Jackson, 13, shovel mulch into a wheelbarrow at the site of an edible forest garden, which is under development. They both live on the South Side and were walking by the site the morning when volunteers were working. So they stopped and decided to help out. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo

By | Heather Wentz  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

### Two nonprofit organizations team up to build community garden for the South Side

Two Syracuse nonprofit organizations — one a nursery, the other a free clinic — are turning a vacant South Side lot into an edible forest garden to provide a healthy crop of fruit and vegetables to local residents.

Members of the Alchemical Nursery and the soon-to-be-opened Rahma Clinic, together with a small crowd of neighborhood volunteers, spent a sunny Saturday last month laying cardboard, turning soil and planting seeds at 3100 S. Salina St.

“We wanted landscaping that would be an opportu-

nity for the neighborhood kids to eat from,” said Magda Bayoumi, one of the moving forces behind the garden.

Two years ago, she and her husband, Mohamed, purchased an abandoned lot with plans to open a free clinic. The couple, natives of Egypt who have lived in Syracuse since 1979, had secured support from a group of local doctors who shared their dream of providing medical services to South Side residents.

“We figured we have a lot of doctors on hand, so we approached them about a free health clinic since health care is something that is needed around here,” Bayoumi said.

The doctors were very supportive, and the free clinic was off the ground. But after work began on the Rahma Clinic — the name is Arabic for “mercy” — Bayoumi said she discovered the lot contained ample space



for a garden.

Forest gardens are new to the United States, and this will be the first one in Syracuse, said Frank Cetera, a board member at the Alchemical Nursery, located at 200 S. Geddes St.

“The forest garden will become self-sufficient over time,” Cetera said. “The leaves from the trees will fall and become mulch and fertilizer on a regular and ongoing basis.”

The Alchemical Nursery is a nonprofit organization dedicated to regenerating urban “lifestyles and landscapes utilizing the principles and ethics of permaculture,” according to the Alchemical Nursery’s website. Permaculture — or permanent agriculture — means to design “human settlements and perennial agricultural systems that mimic the relationships found in the natural ecologies,” the website states.

Cetera said there are many community gardens in the area, but the problem with regular gardens is that they require replanting and harvesting every season. Cetera said he originally became involved with the forest garden initiative when he and Bayoumi served on the Syracuse Peace Council Advisory Board together.

About 30 people helped throughout the day in September to build the garden; children and adults alike wanted to lend a hand. The empty lot was covered with mulch, woodchips and cardboard, waiting to be arranged for the base of the garden.

Cetera said they planted some annual vegetables like cherry tomatoes to carry over to next season because a lot of the perennial plants will not be fully developed until next fall. However, he said there are some berry plants that will be ready by next summer.

Some people, like Dave Greene and his daughter Isabel, 12, came merely because they believe in what an edible forest garden can bring to the South Side.

Greene said he had known about the forest garden for a while and wanted to help in any way he could. He



>Steve Gabriel of the Cornell Cooperative Extension collects soil samples in order to ensure that the soil is safe for planting. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo

***“We wanted landscaping that would be an opportunity for the neighborhood kids to eat from.”***

**— Magda Bayoumi**

said the idea of a snack garden is rare, and he strongly believes in taking what the Earth can give.

“I’ve been a forager for 35 years now,” Greene said. “I used to pick blueberries from the backyard when I was a kid.”

Lindsay Speer, a member of the Peace Council and Neighbors of the Onondaga Nation — a nonprofit organization that supports native people’s rights to reclaim land — turned out to help because of her concern over a lack of fresh food available on the South Side. The garden, she said, could provide healthy alternatives to fast-food snacking.

“I don’t think we’re going to take too much business away from the corner stores to be honest, but it’s a way of illustrating where food comes from and just do something good for the community,” Speer said.

Educating the community members was another reason Cetera and Bayoumi wanted to build the garden.

“It’s an opportunity for people to learn about ecological wisdom, and bring it back to the city,” Cetera said. “People are not comfortable with gardening. They’re not sure how it works, so it’s a way for them to get involved.”

Not only were there community members helping out, but the event also drew a local political activist showing his support. Howie Hawkins, who is running for Syracuse 4th District Common Councilor as the Green Party candidate, said he sees the garden and the Rahma Clinic as a resource for the community. With the increasing number of uninsured people and a lack of healthy food options, he said, “This clinic can fill the gaps, so I’m here to help them get set up.”

*See photo collage on Page 20*

## FOREST FACTS

Forest gardens are replications of large forests scaled down to fit in a small lot or yard. The gardens are built with multiple layers, much like the natural composition of a forest.

- The canopy layer consists of fruit and nut trees.
- The shrub layer is filled with various fruit and nut bushes.
- The ground layer contains edible plants spread horizontally across the area.

Source: *Federation of City Farms & Community Gardens*

[www.farmgarden.org.uk](http://www.farmgarden.org.uk)

## BUSINESS DETAILS

### BALLOON CREATIONS

Kevin Henry and his wife, Desire, started Balloon Creations 10 years ago.

He creates a variety of balloon designs for **parties, weddings and other celebrations.**

**For more information** or to book your next party, contact Henry by phone at (315) 863-0808



### VENDING BUSINESS

Henry also created a vending business where he **cooks and sells food**, such as fried chicken, at local events.

# RISING TO SUCCESS

*City official creates opportunities with two family businesses*



> Kevin Henry, his wife, Desire, and their son stand in front of their fried chicken booth at a local event. The family runs a food vending business and also has a balloon business. | Photo courtesy of Joe Walker

By | Safa Browne  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

### Kevin Henry used an adverse situation to his advantage, creating two popular businesses

To describe Kevin Henry as a city official is just a small part of his story. Henry has been working as a superintendent for buildings and grounds for four years, supervising a total of 70 employees. He is also an entrepreneur. And he's a mentor, each summer, for a few fortunate high school students seeking work.

Henry, 38, runs what he calls "the balloon business" — a modest name for a small enterprise he started called Balloon Creations. The business provides blown-up decorations such as arches, pillars or themed characters for weddings, birthday parties and other celebrations.

"When I walk into a room with a bag of balloons, the whole atmosphere changes," Henry said. "I create multi-color balloons shaped into centerpieces, arches, sculptures."

Tina Hills, owner of Sophistications Jazz Cafe, is a repeat customer of Henry's balloon service.

"I learned about this business through a previous business owner and have been acquiring his services for

about four years," Hills said. "We have used this balloon service for all of our events whether it be birthdays, weddings or anniversaries. It is very dependable, and I would definitely refer his business to others."

The business began in adversity as Henry and his wife, Desire, searched for a solution to an unexpected job loss.

"I started tinkering around with the balloon business on the side when my wife's job let her go because they lost their funding," Henry said. "So I started thinking of ways we could make up for that. It was so hard for her to find a position somewhere, so I created a position by saying you can make that same amount of money from staying home. So we started doing the balloons, and it was very successful and it still is."

### A COMMUNITY MENTOR

Henry has been running Balloon Creations for 10 years, and it is not his only successful business venture. Henry also owns a soul food vending business in which he cooks food, such as fried chicken, and sells it at events within the city.

With summer being a naturally eventful season, Henry was able to play the role of business mentor,



taking on a staff of work-seeking high schoolers. Each summer, he hires three to four students from Nottingham High School and provides them with a summer job. Henry offers a salary in which they make about \$800 to \$1,000 during the course of the summer.

Jana Greene, a freshman at Syracuse University, worked for Henry's vending business for three years as a high school student. "I definitely learned social skills and experience interacting with different people," she said. "I understand now more about the working side but I understand also when I was on the customer's side not wanting to wait in line ... you don't want to ever make a customer go away unhappy."

Henry explained his philosophy.

"I saw young ladies like Jana that were bouncing around with basketball and trying to balance school and different things," he said. "I don't know if it was as easy to find a job at the time that I met them. So an easy thing for me to do was provide a position for them and at the same time they could stay out of trouble."

An example that Henry sets for his student workers is to keep going, reach the top and even then look for more to be done.

"Every job that I took on it was like a supervisor position, for example. Here, there is no other job that I could get with the city except for me to be a commissioner or to be a mayor. I'm at the top now," Henry said. "And I'm still looking to see what else I can do ... anything I've ever done, I've tried to take it to the highest level."

## THE PAST AND THE FUTURE

With that reach-for-the-stars mentality, Henry was able to develop and maintain these two businesses. He decided to start Balloon Creations after meeting Joe Walker, owner of Balloons Over Syracuse.

***"Whatever the customer desires, I can create"***

**— Kevin Henry**

"I would go and look at his work and say that's something I can do," Henry said. "To get the balloon business started consisted of just you having the talent, buying the balloons, and the machines I created on my

own, then I went home immediately and taught my wife everything that I knew."

Walker takes no credit for the success of Balloon Creations but values Henry's work as an equal.

"I didn't give him any advice," Walker said. "I see



> Joe Walker, of Balloons Over Syracuse, inspired Kevin Henry to start a balloon business. | Safa Browne, Staff Photo

myself in Kevin ... and I have more in common with a guy scrambling trying to get a balloon business together than anyone else in America. It's not teacher and student, everything he says I'm listening to it, too."

As entrepreneurs, Henry and Walker agree that family is important to the success of a small business.

"My wife is my best friend, my co-worker and my business partner," Henry said.

He expressed his desire to encourage his three children, a daughter and two sons, to take over the balloon and vending businesses one day.

"I think the way that things are going right now there is no way of us determining whether there will be jobs or things like that in the future for the kids," Henry said. "So I'm taking my steps right now to create those types of positions for my children when they get older."

He met potential clients in his position as vice president of the board of directors for Juneteenth, an annual African-American cultural celebration held in Syracuse.

Community leaders, as well as hundreds of citizens who attend, keep Henry at the top of their list when thinking of an event that requires balloons or catering. Modestly, he has gained the respect and trust of many in the community for all that he has done and is still doing.

"It's overwhelming the people you get to reach out to," Henry said. "I don't do it for recognition; I like helping the people I help. People like Joe took a couple minutes to talk and share things with me, so I don't have a problem doing it for the next person. To young people who want to be entrepreneurs, my advice is: don't stop!"

## UPCOMING EVENT

**What:** Alpha Kappa Alpha Sorority Community and Business Networking Fair

**When:** 11 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Saturday, Oct. 22

**Where:** Dunbar Center, 1453 S. State St.

**To Register:** Provide type of business, name of business, participant's name, address and phone number by email to s\_martin620@hotmail.com. RSVP no later than Friday, Oct. 14. Space is limited.

**More Info.:** Contact Simone Martin by phone at (646) 824-3073

## AKA'S GOALS FOR THIS VENTURE:

- To educate our community on how to become entrepreneurs
- To raise awareness on businesses that exist in our community
- To prepare the community for investing properly
- To offer financial information
- To offer the opportunity for businesses to network with other professionals in the community

## BY THE NUMBERS

IBM launched the largest single philanthropic program, “Smarter Cities Challenge,” in 2010.

The program enables up to 100 cities to become “more vibrant and livable places for their citizens,” according to the program’s website.

It’s expected to donate a total of \$50 million to the chosen cities over the next three years.

IBM had upward of 250 applicants from around the world.

Syracuse was one of 24 cities worldwide and one of eight in the United States to receive the grant.

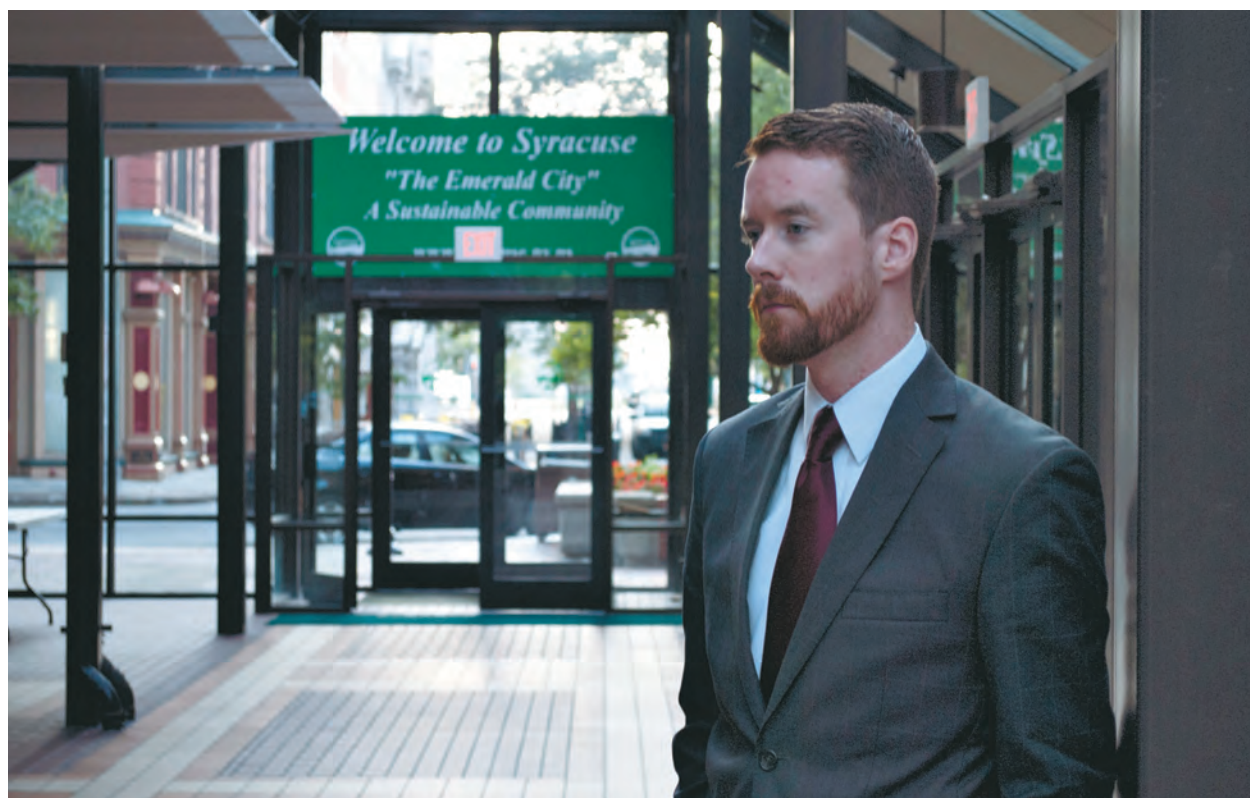
The Post-Standard counted 2,100 vacant properties last March, an increase from 1,863 vacancies in 2010.

Close to 45 percent of vacant properties in Syracuse are in the Syracuse United Neighbors target area, including the South Side. The group is devoted to protecting city neighborhoods.

More Online: [smartercitieschallenge.org](http://smartercitieschallenge.org)

# FILLING VACANCIES

*Director helps city eliminate vacant properties with IBM grant*



> Andrew Maxwell is the director of Syracuse’s Bureau of Planning and Sustainability. He answered questions and listened to concerns from citizens during a TNT meeting in the City Hall Commons Atrium Wednesday, Sept. 14. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo

By | Christina Levin  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

## Andrew Maxwell is revitalizing Syracuse with dedication and help from a new grant

In a Sept. 13 community meeting attended by casually dressed local residents, Andrew Maxwell stood out. Dressed in a crisp navy suit, the 27-year-old director of the Bureau of Planning and Sustainability clenched his hands around his knee, listening intently to his City Hall colleague, Katelyn Wright, describe new zoning codes for the city he cares so much about.

“I just love Syracuse,” Maxwell said in an interview two days after the Tomorrow’s Neighborhoods Today meeting, where community members gather to discuss local issues. “I went to school with people from all over the South Side and other parts of the city,” said the 2001 graduate of Corcoran High School. “So I have a real affinity for those neighborhoods.”

That played a major role in why Maxwell, who holds a master’s degree in public administration from Syracuse University, decided to stay in the city when so many of his fellow graduates decamped for New York City and Washington, D.C., he said. He hoped to make a

difference in Syracuse.

Maxwell, whose mother, Patti, was a social worker, has already helped Syracuse by writing the application that won the city a highly competitive \$400,000 grant from technology giant IBM to study the problem posed by vacant properties.

This initiative will apply IBM’s analytical expertise in addressing the city’s vacant housing issue, said Maxwell, who grew up in the Strathmore neighborhood on Carlton Road. A team of IBM engineers will spend three weeks in Syracuse working with city officials to devise an information-driven tool that will mix data sets on a range of factors — from crime to trash-collecting patterns in a given neighborhood — to predict the causes of vacant properties, he said.

“IBM wanted applicants to select one main problem to focus on,” Maxwell said. “That’s a very difficult thing to do, just focus on one specific problem. But in thinking about neighborhood health, we decided to focus on vacant properties.” Vacant housing has been a growing trend in Syracuse.

Rich Puchalski, director of Syracuse United Neighbors, a grassroots organization devoted to protecting city neighborhoods, said city officials aren’t delivering on this



pressing issue. Close to 45 percent of vacant properties in Syracuse are in the organization's target area, including the South Side, he said.

"Vacant houses present a lot of problems to nearby neighbors," said Puchalski, citing trash and crime. "There's no political will in Syracuse to turn this problem around."

One government-led initiative to refurbish the city is the Land Use and Development Plan 2040, a comprehensive vision that outlines priorities and goals for city and neighborhood-specific development, according to Maxwell's colleague, Wright, who is a land use planner.

Paul Driscoll, the commissioner at the Department of Neighborhood and Business Development who is instrumental in implementing the Land Use Plan, said the plan's goal was not to alleviate the issue of vacant housing. Still, if the plan's objectives are met, such as creating more walkable streets and interlocking commercial centers, vacant housing could be reduced, he said.

"I wouldn't say that we're undertaking this Land Use Plan to address vacant housing," Driscoll said. "Although the byproduct of it should."

Ari Fishkind, the public affairs manager at IBM Corporate Affairs and Citizenship Office, said the project is under way but still in its early stage.

"The IBM team is spending this week getting better acquainted with the stakeholders involved," Fishkind said in a Sept. 15 email. "They'll be conducting more

in-depth analysis of the issues involved next week, then making recommendations to the city by the end of the month. As they are primarily in listening phase right now, they are not in position to offer much feedback — yet. But stay tuned."

Maxwell said he does not know what the IBM engineers are planning, because he doesn't "think they know themselves" yet. But, he said if he can eventually bring more people to reach their potential through his public service, then that's something he wants to attempt.

"Having gone to high school with people that were facing a lot of challenges that I didn't have to face in my own home or in my own neighborhood, I saw a lot of bright and wonderful people not necessarily go on to their potential, because there were things outside their control," Maxwell said. "That was something that bothered me a lot."

His attitude encourages others to work hard for the city, too. Maxwell's "dedication and energy" are contagious, Wright said in an email. She added that Maxwell, who said his hobby is working, is skilled at building consensus and holding a big-picture perspective on projects.

Wright said, "While he certainly understands the need to deal with the daily 'nuts and bolts' of city government, he is really a visionary and adeptly keeps the many pieces of our City Hall team working towards the common long-term goal of revitalization in Syracuse."

## Join in LAND USE MEETING

**What:** Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today South Side Meeting

**When:** 6 p.m. Monday, Oct. 3

**Where:** Dr. King School, 416 E. Raynor Ave., Syracuse

**More details:** Hear a presentation of the city's proposed Land Use Plan by Katelyn Wright to provide guidance and design standards for development

**More info.:** Contact Babette Baker at [bbaker@ci.syracuse.ny.us](mailto:bbaker@ci.syracuse.ny.us) or (315) 448-8173

"I read The Stand to find out what's going on that I can take the kids to so I can plan my little field trips."

— *Estella Sankey*  
*Sunrise Kids Coordinator at the Dunbar Center and The Stand Reader*



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The song is called  
"Easy Street."

It was originally done  
by the Four Freshmen.

## THE ORIGINAL 'CAT'

Longtime Syracuse musician reminisces about city's jazz scene

By | Reggie Seigler  
*A Friendly Five' columnist*

Marcus Curry, 75, still performs locally, and  
he doesn't plan on stopping anytime soon

Cat(s) is a popular slang term affectionately used by musicians and music aficionados to show respect for musicians — usually men — of stellar ability. During the early years of jazz in America, many would refer to players like Benny Carter (jazz composer, saxophonist, clarinetist), Dave Brubeck (jazz pianist), Miles Davis (jazz trumpeter, bandleader, composer) and Philly Joe Jones (jazz drummer) as the Cats.

One might have been heard saying, "Man, that cat really laid it down," or "Those cats were swinging last night." This meant that the music was being played exceptionally well and that the party was, in a more modern street vernacular, "jammin'."

The cats could lay the rhythm down all night long with finesse, style and endurance.

Occasionally, musicians would call other men cats, too — usually reserved only for those who were close to the music scene like promoters, emcees and devoted fans. If you were referred to as a cat, you were considered to be part of the echelon.

Marcus Curry is one of those cats.

## A CAT'S LIFE

At 75 years of age, Curry still stands up three to four hours a night and lays it down like no other. At the end of the night, he packs up his gear and still carries it out.

I was lucky enough to be on a gig with him once. After it was over, I offered to help with his gear. Being younger and conceivably stronger, I thought that would be the honorable thing to do.

His response: "Maybe I should help you take yours out, baby, you seem to be struggling with that." So being taught to respect your elders, I let him do it.

I asked Curry for the privilege of interviewing him for this column, not only because of his prowess on the guitar, but also because of his recollection of how it was when the cats were still around.

## THE SYRACUSE SCENE

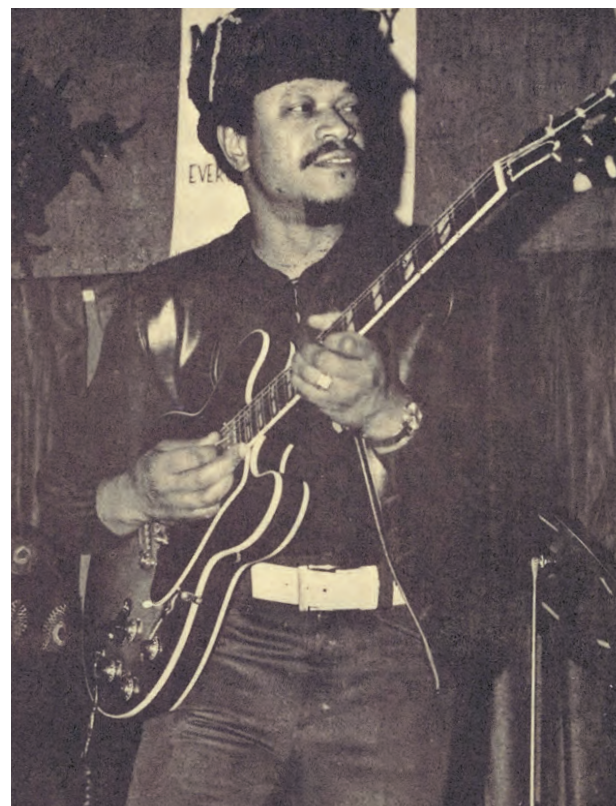
We talked about Syracuse's music scene in the 1950s and '60s. It was a time when Chuck Berry was introducing rock 'n' roll to the world. It was a time when people had jobs and paid their bills and still had a little extra to spend on the weekends.

"There were clubs all over the place, man," he

recalled. "Musicians had places to play like the Clover Club, the Embassy and the 800 Club. There were local cats like Harold Miller (piano), Robert "Steeple" Jenkins (drums), Sax Hunter (saxophone) and Walter Maddox (vocals). These cats could play, man," Curry said.

"Walter Maddox ... wasn't just a singer, he was an entertainer," Curry said. "Cats would entertain back then."

I asked him about others, like The Friendly Five ("a capella" Gospel singing group), Charlie Sparks (singer), Ernest Ringo (drummer) and Dave Wilkins (saxophonist). He acknowledged them all as being good, but raved



> After returning from the U.S. Air Force in 1959, Marcus Curry began performing professionally in Syracuse. This photo is from a performance in 1973. | Photo provided by Marcus Curry

about Charlie's talent and vocal abilities.

"Charlie was the complete package, man," he said.

Curry is a complete package, too. He does a solo act sometimes where he performs as a one-man band playing bass pedals and guitar while singing and scatting to a rhythm machine. He taught himself, although he's very humble about it. That's his style.

Originally from Virginia, he grew up in a musical environment. His father had a piano and could play it and practically any other instrument. His mother also sang a little, and his two much older brothers, Morgan and Cyrus, now deceased, were also musicians — drums



and electric bass, respectively.

His father would invite other musicians over for weekend jam sessions. This was a tradition that Curry carried on with his brothers for a number of years when they moved to Syracuse around 1950.

Curry later spent five years in the U.S. Air Force. For a few of those years, he was stationed in Oxford, England. There, while out on his regular weekend passes, he was exposed to some of the best players in London, as well as the world. He was discharged in 1959 and returned home to Syracuse.

Once home, he landed a gig at the Penguin Club on South State Street. In the mid-'60s, he joined the Chris Powell Trio. He also toured the country with Young-Holt Unlimited. YHU gained fame as the band that recorded the hit song, "Soulful Strut," and for being the former backing rhythm section for the Ramsey Lewis Trio.

### THE BAND PLAYS ON

Currently, you can catch Curry performing with another local cat, Ronnie Leigh.

Before we parted ways, Curry shared with me a few more things. He said that the music is what keeps him young. He also said that he has to believe in miracles because even today, his enthusiasm is stronger than ever.

Curry said he thought that I was a special guy because I'd taken the time to ask him about his story. The reality, though, is that I am the one who is beholden to him. He is the one who has held the door open for me and other local musicians for more than 50 years. In my opinion, that makes him the special one.

Many of the things Curry wanted me to share with you, he wrote down and brought along when we met. He



> Marcus Curry, pictured here in 1998, still performs in front of an audience each week in Syracuse. | Photo provided by Marcus Curry

wanted it to be right.

That's his style. I mean, what else would you expect? He's one of the cats.

*A Friendly Five is created and coordinated by Reggie Seigler to highlight the music and history of Syracuse's South Side music scene. If you are a local musician and have an idea for a future column, contact Reggie at [reggie@softspokenband.com](mailto:reggie@softspokenband.com) or call (315) 479-9620.*

## MORE ON YHU

Young-Holt Unlimited was a group composed of bassist Eldee Young and drummer Isaac "Red" Holt.

Young and Holt attended a music conservatory together in Chicago. There, they met Ramsey Lewis; together they formed a jazz trio.

The trio disbanded after 10 years. After a few other ventures, Young-Holt Unlimited was created in 1968.

The group disbanded in 1974 but got back together with Lewis in 1983.

Source: Allmusic.com

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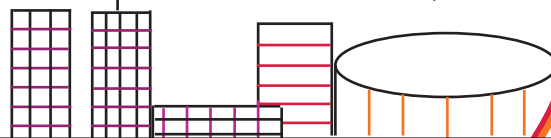
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# PROMOTING GREEN

*Local parishioners volunteer to help community garden flourish*

By | Miguel Balbuena  
*Community correspondent*

Most people would be happy to kill two birds with one stone. However, Matt Brubaker isn't content just with that. He wanted to kill six birds with one stone by volunteering Sept. 10 at the Stone Soup Community Garden on Gifford Street.

He wanted to help build a wood shed for storing tools and other materials, sharpen his gardening skills, support sustainability practices, work together with the community through collaboration with volunteers, give back to the neighborhood and help the community learn about gardening.

Brubaker decided to donate his time after Emily Nisco-Frank contacted King + King Architects, where he works. He was joined by another King + King employee.

The architectural firm is located at 358 W. Jefferson St., about six blocks away from the Stone Soup Community Garden.

The garden was started by St. Lucy's Church parishioners a few years back, said Kevin Frank, who is Emily's husband.

Kevin was pastoral associate and neighborhood outreach coordinator at St. Lucy's for 20 years until May 2010, when he was hired as executive director of the Brady Faith Center, located at 404 South Ave. It serves as a Catholic outreach center for the South Side.

"I see my job as that of a lay minister," Kevin said.

Emily works as musical director of the parish.

The couple was also breaking a sweat on a warm Saturday morning, along with about a dozen other volunteers.

The event was part of the Acts of Kindness Week-



> Mike Slater, his daughter, Summer, and her new friend, Tyban Yunggbauer, walk through the garden on a beautiful September morning. Matt Brubaker can be seen on the ladder in the background working on the wood shed. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo

end organized by Women Transcending Boundaries to commemorate Sept. 11, 2001.

Volunteers like Brubaker weren't only being kind to humans but also to plants by providing them with a nurturing environment in which to develop.

This meant, among other things, watering and improving the topsoil with mulch in the form of peat moss. Both edible and ornamental plants benefited from these acts of kindness.

"I'm an avid gardener," Brubaker said before climbing a ladder to put the finishing touches on the shed's metal roof. "I want more gardens to work on."



> Stone Soup Community Garden is located at 410 Gifford St. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo



# FRESH THINKING

*Plans for food co-op are nearing completion and include cafe, offices*

By | Camille Bautista  
Staff reporter

**Food Cooperative's mission is to ease access to fresh produce and empower the community**

The Southside Community Coalition is nearing the end of its design phase for the planned Food Cooperative to be constructed on the South Side, expecting to break ground in mid- to late April.

South Side residents have been struggling for access to fresh produce since Valley Plaza's P&C closed in 2009. Several neighborhood organizations, such as the SCC, are working on community alternatives. Among them are Jubilee Home's Grocery Store Project and urban farms.

Sekou Cooke, the food co-op's architect, anticipates that the food co-op will bring positive changes to the community.

"It's going to have a huge impact and a very important presence," he said. "It can be a catalyst for a whole new way of looking at construction in the neighborhood."

Located next to the South Side Communication Center at 2331 S. Salina St., the food co-op will have a main floor with a café and a mezzanine with offices, based on Cooke's designs. He estimates construction will take four months.

The café will allow for a third party to lease out the



> The Food Cooperative will fill the empty lot next to the South Side Communication Center. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo

space, with hopes that another member of the community will have an entrepreneurial opportunity, Cooke said.

Joseph Bryant, president of the SCC, said the design phase is about 80 percent complete and should be finished by the end of October. The SCC is in partnership with Syracuse University's South Side Initiative.

With an emphasis on community participation, the food co-op encourages resident ownership and involvement. Each member would pay \$100 for his or her participation, and there currently are 17 member owners who are interested, Bryant said.

Cooke described the food co-op's mission: "It's not just about access to food, it's about community empowerment."



> Sekou Cooke reviews his nearly completed designs for the South Side's Food Cooperative. | Camille Bautista, Staff Photo

## BUILDING TIMELINE

### NOVEMBER 2010

Syracuse University's South Side Initiative approaches Sekou Cooke to design project

### DECEMBER 2010

First budget proposal made at an estimated \$300,000

### FEBRUARY 2011

Pre-design phase of project

### MAY 2011

Community meeting with South Side residents to increase involvement

### JUNE 2011

SCC and SSI pre-development meeting with Syracuse city departments

### OCTOBER 2011

Estimated date for design phase to be completed

### APRIL 2012

Estimated date for breaking ground

**More Info.:** To become a part of the Southside Community Coalition Food Cooperative, contact Margie Gantt at (315) 443-1916.



A-OK!  
WEEKEND

On the weekend of Sept. 10 and 11, hundreds of community members volunteered throughout Syracuse for Acts of Kindness Weekend organized by Women Transcending Boundaries

The Stand’s community correspondents also ventured out to cover local volunteer efforts

- **Kirk Park Clean Up**  
by Ruthnie Angrand, Vickie Patterson & Laura Finkbeiner
- **Stone Soup Garden**  
by Miguel Balbuena, which can be read on Page 18
- **Veteran Build**  
by Rasheeda Alford

the **STAND** To read each community correspondent’s full coverage and to watch a video, visit [mysouthsidestand.com](http://mysouthsidestand.com).

*“I am so excited. I just saw my story online! This is definitely a huge encouragement. Thank you for the opportunity.”*  
— **Rasheeda Alford**

BUILDING A GARDEN



>Steve Gabriel of the Cornell Cooperative Extension gives a presentation on permaculture. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo

Last month, a crowd of about 30 community members gathered at the Rahma Clinic at 3100 S. Salina St. The volunteers spent the afternoon building raised garden beds, spreading out cardboard and piling on mulch. With time, the forest garden will become self-sufficient with leaves from the trees providing fertilizer for the soil. Community members say they hope the garden will flourish with healthy snacks as early as next summer. The event was part of Syracuse’s A-OK! Weekend.

*See full story on Page 10*



>Diavonni Goolsby and his brother, D'Shonde, supply plenty of energy to manually saw through wood that will build the raised garden beds. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo



>Muna Jeylani prepares cardboard for the bed. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo



>Lindsay Speer spreads mulch, and cardboard has been set out for the base of the garden. | Lena Budd, Staff Photo