

# the Stand

## south side news

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Syracuse, NY

SEPTEMBER 2016 Issue 52 FREE

Issue Sponsor

100  
BLACK MEN  
OF SYRACUSE INC.

### PHOTO ADVENTURE

Annual Photo Walk  
dances down South  
Salina into Kirk Park

Working for justice  
Meet the new administrator of police watchdog group

feeding  
needy

We Rise Above the  
Streets distributes  
meals to homeless

Community  
in action  
Increase in shootings  
brings residents together

A TINY HOME FOR TWO



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S.I. NEWHOUSE SCHOOL OF  
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS**SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH**DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,  
DEAN BEA GONZALEZ, JULIANA  
WALSH, SOUTH SIDE INNOVATION  
CENTER, STEPHEN MAHAN AND  
THE PAL PROJECT, BOB GATES,  
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(315) 882-1054  
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THE PUBLICATION'S EDITORIAL PURPOSE AND  
IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.**4 FATHERHOOD** | Musician Deyquan Bowens has two young children who learn — just like he did — by following their father's example.**6 COMMUNITY** | Mother of a former V-NOT gang member helps her son, who is in prison, to organize an anti-violence event remembering community members lost to gun violence.**10 PHOTO WALK** | Sixteen photographers explored the South Side on a summer day, dancing their way through the neighborhood, taking photos and engaging with residents.**12 FEATURES** | In its first year, We Rise Above the Streets distributes food and necessities to the homeless and works to raise money so it can expand its services.**15 SCHOOL AND YOUTH** | Summer shootings put staff at the Central Village Boys & Girls Club on alert for the safety of the students who make their way to the center each day.**16 COMMUNITY** | The new administrator for the Citizen Review Board, a civilian oversight group, says he was drawn to the job to work within the system, fighting for social justice.

■ Cover photography by Rosalie Spitzer taken during The Stand's annual Photo Walk

## CALENDAR | SEPTEMBER

**What:** The Great New York State Fair  
**When:** Continues daily through Sept. 5  
**Where:** Syracuse Fairgrounds, 581 State Fair Blvd.  
**Cost:** Regular daily admission tickets are \$10  
**More details:** The annual fair features rides, food, New York state products, agricultural displays, live music and much more  
**More Info.:** Call (800) 475-FAIR or visit nysfair.ny.gov**What:** South Side TNT Meeting  
**When:** 6 p.m. Monday, Sept. 12  
**Where:** South Side Innovation Center, 2610 S. Salina St.  
**More details:** Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today Area 3 planning council regularly meets the first Monday of each month. Due to the Labor Day holiday, the September meeting is one week later. TNT meetings are subject to change as necessary.  
**More Info.:** Call TNT Coordinator Tina Zagya at (315) 448-8178 or email TZagya@SyrGov.net**What:** Westcott Street Cultural Fair  
**When:** Noon to 6:30 p.m. Sunday, Sept. 18  
**Where:** Westcott Community Center, 826 Euclid Ave.  
**Cost:** Free admission  
**More details:** This annual fair celebrates the diversity and vibrancy of the Westcott neighborhood. It kicks off at noon with a parade down Westcott Street, followed by entertainment at six stages, including music, dance and children's performances. The fair also features local artists, food and information from local nonprofit organizations.  
**More Info.:** Visit westcottstreetfair.org**What:** PEACE, Inc. Champions of Diversity  
**When:** 6 p.m. Wednesday, Sept. 28  
**Where:** Marriott Syracuse Downtown, 100 E. Onondaga St.  
**Cost:** \$125 per person  
**More details:** A fund-raising event to honor members of the Syracuse community who are champions of diversity. This year the honorees include: Community Service Award — Evelyn Carter, director of community relations for Wegmans; Unsung Hero — Mary Beth Basha, senior consumer advocate for National Grid; and the Corporate Commitment Award — CXtec  
**More Info.:** Call Sharon Thompson at (315) 634-3719

This past summer, The Stand remained busy, filing stories online. In addition to covering community events, we worked to share the community's response to a slew of shootings, including a police-involved shooting that occurred Father's Day on the city's Near West Side.

Staff interviewed community leaders and residents to learn what concerns people have and what changes they hope to see made.

Lawrence Williams, director of Syracuse Save Our Youth, told me: "We must remember, Syracuse is not a sum total of its violence; Syracuse is a sum total of our silence." He is concerned about the increase in complaints against the police made nationally and even locally, but also disheartened by the lack of outrage residents seem to have when black-on-black shootings are reported.

We hope to continue to share the South Side's perspective through more stories addressing the effects of neighborhood violence. If you have a story to share, please get in touch.

In other news, this summer The Stand moved to a new office located at the South Side Communication Center. The center is under new management, run by Bea Gonzalez, dean of University College. In addition to The Stand moving in, new programming for students was offered this summer. Even more activities for youth and residents of all ages will be announced soon.

Our board also welcomed two new board members: Camille Coakley and Dana McKinney, both former South Side residents who recently moved back to the city. They join as our board works to gain greater funding support from the community. As an example, this issue is sponsored by 100 Black Men of Syracuse.

Ashley Kang



## AWARDS RECEIVED

**My Housing Matters**, a project published in partnership with The Stand and students in the Newhouse School's Urban Affairs Reporting and Advanced Editing courses, won three journalism awards this year.

- **First place** for Best Multimedia Story, awarded by the Syracuse Press Club.
- **First Place** in the AEJMC's Best of the Web/Digital competition for multiple class website category.
- **Second Place** in the 2016 BEA Festival of Media Arts competition.

Visit the project online at:  
MyHousingMatters.com



## BLACK LIVES MATTER

Anthony Hall, an ex-professional football player and South Side resident, was a lead community organizer of the Black Lives Matter protest that marched from Clinton Square to City Hall on July 18. Hall began the Syracuse BLM Facebook page a year ago to help make the community better. He says he found "a bunch of people that were about the same cause" and decided to join them in starting an official chapter in his hometown. "I'm just one out of a lot of us that want everyone to come together," Hall told the crowd during the protest.

| Text and photo by Aline Martins



# Deyquan Bowens

*Nominated by fellow musician Reggie Seigler, band leader of Soft Spoken Band and The Stand's music columnist*

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand director*

**Q: What did it feel like when you first became a father?**

A: I felt like I suddenly had to become an adult. I wasn't just living for myself anymore. I had a responsibility to take care of another human being. It's a lot of pressure, but it's a great experience and there are many rewards.

**Q: What can you share about your children?**

A: My son is Deyquan Bowens Jr. and he's 3. He's energetic and smart — talks a lot. His favorite color is green, just like his dad. He plays the drums and likes to sing. My daughter is Ahjay and is 4 months old. She's the exact opposite of him. She's laid back and will go to anyone. They balance each other out very well. He was a little jealous at first when she arrived, but he's been helpful and caught on very quickly. My son has more of my personality. I'm ashamed to admit it, but I was a cry baby growing up, and he's the exact same. She takes after her momma — very quiet and happy all the time. She only cries when she's hungry and sleeps through the night.

**Q: What was your relationship like with your father?**

A: My father was also a musician. He had a band called The Bowens Brothers. It was his brothers Lonnie, Dan and John, my father. This was in the '60s and '70s. He worked all the time and taught by example. My brother and I watched him and learned the value of being a hard worker. It was through his example I also learned the value of being a dad. I didn't understand it when I was younger, but now that I'm older and have children, I see the value of just him being there.

**Q: Are there similarities in your parenting style with how your dad parented?**

A: I tend to lead by example. My thing is that your actions speak louder than words. I feel my son remembers more that he sees rather than what I only tell him. For example, if he sees me treating his mom with respect or giving her a hug before she goes to work, then he follows. And it's teaching him to be respectful towards women and to just be a nice and kind person all around.

**Q: Is there anything you do as a father that would surprise people?**

A: I don't think anything is surprising, but I would say I'm always nervous about what my son might say in public. That's one of the scary things right now. No one is perfect and you may slip up and say things at times you don't mean to. *(With a big laugh, Bowens looks off remembering an incident with his mother.)* In short, my son repeated a popular saying that was going around about a year ago that he heard me say jokingly with a friend. While in the car with his grandmother, he repeated it and got in trouble. And I got an earful from my mother. So, as a reminder: Watch what you say around your kids because it will come back to you.

**Q: What's your opinion about commonly held stereotypes about black fathers?**

A: The two common ones I hear are that black fathers aren't around and



**MEET FATHER Deyquan:** Bowens, 27, has two children with his wife Yajha, his high school sweetheart. He plays the piano and guitar and is owner of Kue Musik Entertainment. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

that they don't care; they are just donors. I'm around a lot of positive people of all races, and all the guys that I know, they put their families first, including myself. Everything they do is with their children in mind. The media gives black men a bad image, but there are a lot of great black role models out there.

**Q: Any advice for a new father?**

A: Stay positive and surround yourself with like-minded individuals. If you believe in God, keep him first in everything you do. And enjoy the moments. The little things matter. Spending time being there, that goes a long way.

**Q: What is one of your favorite moments with your kids?**

A: One of my favorite moments with my son actually happened this year. I play the piano at my church, the Promise Land Church, and our drummer was late one day. My son seized the opportunity and came up and got up on the drums and started playing. And he held a good beat. I was very proud that the musical example that I set for him has paid off and he's interested in music. With my daughter, for now anytime she sees me is my favorite moment. She always smiles when she sees me. She's a daddy's girl.

**Q: Final thoughts?**

A: I just thank you for this opportunity and thank The Stand for the great job they are doing showcasing fathers from around the neighborhood. It lets people see fathers that are doing something, and it's refreshing to hear good news rather than all the negative things happening locally and nationally in the news. This gives hope to other fathers and just men in general that there is positive in the community.

*“Spending time being there, that goes a long way”*

100

BLACK MEN  
OF SYRACUSE INC.



# Fathers Matter

## *A Celebration of Fatherhood*

Presented at

The 100 Black Men of Syracuse 9th Annual Banquet  
Saturday, November 19, 2016  
The Oncenter, 800 South State Street  
Syracuse, New York

**Single admission is \$85. Tables, which seat 10, are \$850 each.**  
Tickets are available online at the 100 Black Men website below.

**Keynote Speaker**  
**Torrence Boone**

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**To nominate a great father you know for recognition at this event,**

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[www.100blackmensyr.org](http://www.100blackmensyr.org)

(Deadline for Receiving Nominations is September 30)

**A fundraiser to support our youth and community programs**

## HELPING IN PRISON

Despite being incarcerated, **Habakkuk Nickens** and **Tyrone Hines** launched **Men Educating Neighborhoods** in 2014.

Nickens said he and Hines try to help reform their fellow inmates and better their lives, including setting up self-help programs, helping them with their class work, teaching them basic vocabulary skills and leading Bible studies.

Hines said raising awareness about gang and domestic violence is just one part of M.E.N. The other part is **reforming and recruiting prisoners** so that when they're released, they're able to help the community.

Hines said several prisoners from Syracuse, who at one point were members of rival gangs, now work together for M.E.N.

"A lot of guys here from Syracuse, they weren't getting along on the streets," Hines said. "They couldn't stand to be around each other. But yet, in here, they all act as one."



View more  
photos online at  
[mysouthsidestand.com](http://mysouthsidestand.com)

# SECOND CHANCES

Former V-NOT gang member promotes cease-fire from behind bars



> Friends and family gathered to release balloons for loved ones lost to violence during the Gone But Not Forgotten event held July 15 at Billings Park downtown. Denise Nickens, who helped organize the event for her son Habakkuk Nickens, who remains incarcerated, spoke to the crowd about ending gun violence. | Aubrey Moore, Staff Photo

By | Ari Gilberg  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

## Gone But Not Forgotten balloon release allows families to remember those lost to violence

A former Syracuse gang member is attempting to put an end to neighborhood violence — despite the fact that he is locked up in federal prison.

Habakkuk Nickens, 30, a former member of the V-NOT gang, is serving a 20-year prison sentence in Federal Correctional Institution, Ray Brook, in upstate New York. A jury convicted Nickens for a pattern of racketeering activity, which included acts of murder, drug trafficking and robbery.

While incarcerated, he worked for months to plan July's Gone But Not Forgotten event, which released balloons at Billings Park in downtown Syracuse.

This is the second year Nickens has put on this event, which was bigger than his first one, thanks to support from local groups such as O.G.'s Against Violence, Real Fathers/Real Men, Empower Incarcerated Young People and Fall Forward.

After speeches by community members and local leaders, balloons were released, each with the name of someone who died because of violence.

Helen Hudson, common councilor at-large, stood in

front of the crowd and stressed that the black community needs to love one another.

"We carry so much anger," she said, "and we don't even know why we carry it."

Through her work with Mothers Against Gun Violence, Hudson has talked to more than 200 mothers who have lost their children to what she calls senseless violence.

"We need to take care of these babies that are left behind."

Jazmin "Jazzy" Boatwright, 5, lost her father, Adon "Lil Donnie" Boatwright Jr., when she was 3. She was excited to release a balloon in memory of her father and was brought to the event by her grandmother, Vickie McCullough.

"She knows that her daddy's an angel," said McCullough, who learned about the balloon release on Facebook. She said her son and granddaughter wanted to attend because they know three people close to their family who were killed by gun violence.

"Our neighbor, cousin and her father," McCullough said. "She was so young when it happened, and her mother, my daughter, still has a hard time with the loss."

General Davis, co-founder of Real Men/Real Fathers, praised Nickens during his remarks. "He's doing more on the inside than many are doing out here," he said.

He was joined by his oldest son, General Davis Jr., who recently was released from prison and is working with his father to mentor youth. “I’ve changed my life for my pops, to be a better person,” Davis Jr. said.

Nickens’ mother, Denise Nickens, learned a bit about her son’s actions that resulted in his incarceration. Most details came out in news articles and at trial. She is thankful he is still alive and views his current incarceration as part of God’s plan. She describes herself as her son’s foot soldier. After working full days, she would spend evenings carrying out her son’s plans to ensure his event would be a success.

“While incarcerated, he and others put their heads and their hearts together to make a difference,” she said during the event.

Nickens was the driver in a fatal drive-by shooting in 2010, which resulted in the death of 19-year-old Kihary Blue, a former star football and basketball player at Henninger High School. At the July event, Nickens’ mom released a balloon with Blue’s name written on it.

“To the woman who lost her son, I made a vow to do something in my days to repay her and make her smile,” said Nickens, who has also sent a letter of apology to Blue’s mother through the judge who presided over the case. “I figured I wasn’t going to just help her, but help everybody.”

Nickens said he now considers himself a changed man. As evidence, he spoke in a phone interview from prison about how he founded the anti-gang program M.E.N. — Men Educating Neighborhoods — in November 2014. The program relies on volunteers who share his belief that gang violence must be reduced.

“I owe it to my family members, kids and my community, because I know I’m better than that,” Nickens said. “I came in here with the attitude that I’m going to change something.”

Nickens said he first decided to change his ways shortly after Blue’s death. He originally founded a community outreach program called Help Break Down the Silence, with the goal of helping at-risk youth. Although the program was short-lived, Nickens said he’s hoping to continue his community work through M.E.N.

In 2010, Nickens ran Mary Nelson’s annual backpack giveaway, his mother said. “He was always busy and gave back,” she said. “Mary let him run her event one year, and a week later he held his own backpack giveaway that Mary helped him with.”

His mother remembers Nickens as a teen holding several jobs, writing and performing plays and serving as a mentor to younger kids at the Southwest Community Center. She said it wasn’t until his 20s that she noticed any bad behaviors. She was told his small offenses were guilt by association.

“But God has a plan,” she said, adding that she gets through tough times with the help of prayer. “Prayer changes things.”

Tyrone Hines, who was sentenced to life in prison in 1995 for running a drug-trafficking ring in Syracuse, said he first met Nickens in November 2014 while in prison. Shortly after, Hines said he became one of the initial members of M.E.N. in an attempt to right his wrongs and try to end the rise of violence in Syracuse. “Even if we save one life, or two lives, it’s working,” Hines said.

Nickens concludes: “Maybe it was heaven-sent that I’m here, because if I wasn’t, then I wouldn’t be able to help all of these people.”

— Ashley Kang, *The Stand’s* director, contributed to this story



> Tabarrie “TJ” Tillie Jr. wears a dogtag with photos of his father, Tabarrie “Dooley” Tillie, who was shot and killed this past June. | Dominique Hildebrand, Staff Photo



> Denise Nickens prepares to release a balloon following speeches from community leaders and residents concerned about gun violence. | Shweta Gulati, Staff Photo



> Jazmin Boatwright, 5, attended the event with her uncle, right, and grandmother. She wanted to attend to honor her father, who was lost to gun violence in 2014. | Aubrey Moore, Staff Photo

## DEDICATED VOLUNTEERS

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# HOMES FOR VETS

How a 'tiny home' can do a lot of good for Syracuse's homeless



> Andrew Lunetta thanks the crowd during the July 22 ribbon-cutting ceremony of A Tiny Home for Good's first property, a two-unit house built on Rose Avenue. | Dominique Hildebrand, Staff Photo

By | Ari Gilbert

*Urban Affairs reporter*

### South Side volunteer finds street that welcomes tiny home residents into their neighborhood

As an obstetrician, Dr. Kris Kratzert typically cuts umbilical cords, giving life and freedom to newborns. But on a hot morning in July, she stood before a large crowd and initiated a different kind of freedom.

"Today by cutting this ribbon, we give new life to men in our community," said Kratzert, who served as master of ceremonies for a ribbon-cutting event to welcome Syracuse's first tiny home for homeless veterans.

The two-unit tiny home was built by A Tiny Home for Good, a local organization on which Kratzert serves as board chair. The nonprofit aims to provide affordable, quality, dignified housing for homeless veterans.

Andrew Lunetta, the 26-year-old executive director, founded the organization two years ago with a mission to abolish homelessness in the city.

The organization's first tiny home, located at 112 Rose Ave., is now a permanent home for homeless veteran Dolphus T. Johnson and another veteran, who

requested his name not be published.

Pastor Phyllis Lee, from the Heavenly Vision Apostle Church across the street, provided the morning's blessing and said she was proud to be a neighbor to the tiny home and its inhabitants.

"We will be a spiritual light to them," she said. "We are blessed to have a tiny home as our neighbor."

Lunetta spoke next, thanking first and foremost Eloise Curry for selling him the property. For nearly two years, he worked to identify lots and secure properties to build sets of tiny home units. Due to pushback from residents, construction at several sites was delayed. But now that the Rose Avenue home is up, a second location will soon be completed at the corner of South Salina Street and East Glen Avenue, a property acquired through a donation.

Rev, who goes only by a first name, has served as the bike leader for Pedal for Possibilities for the past three years — another initiative started by Lunetta, to promote healthy living through bike rides around the community. Rev is slated to move into one of the next units and is excited to soon have a home.

"Me and Gazelle (the name he's given his bike) hope to move in before the winter," Rev said during the July ribbon-cutting ceremony.

Lunetta plans to have five houses completed and

### HOW TO HELP

To donate to A Tiny Home For Good, you can mail a tax-deductible check to A Tiny Home for Good, Inc. 189 Baldwin Ave., Syracuse, NY 13205

To volunteer, contact Andrew Lunetta at [alunetta@atinyhomeforgood.org](mailto:alunetta@atinyhomeforgood.org)

ready for rent by the end of 2016.

“It’s somewhere where someone will want to live for a long time,” Lunetta said.

Mayor Stephanie Miner said she was humbled to be present at the ceremony and noted that this is a time of tremendous soul-searching for the nation, with homelessness being a chronic issue.

“Local government can be a part of the solution to end homelessness,” she said, recognizing that Lunetta’s tiny homes provide an option for quality and affordable housing.

In terms of rent, residents who receive Social Security Income or Social Security Disability benefits will pay 30 percent of their monthly income, and those who work or have another form of income will pay \$300 a month, Lunetta said.

Each house will measure roughly 250 square feet and will include a bedroom, kitchen and bathroom. While the houses aren’t large, Lunetta said they are much nicer than most homes people move into after initially leaving shelters.

“Guys move out of the shelter and end up in just these bottom-of-the-barrel apartments,” Lunetta said. “Drug-infested, prostitution, bed bugs — you name it. And they end up back in the shelter just a couple months after leaving.”

— Ashley Kang, *The Stand* director, contributed to this story



> Dolphus Johnson, a homeless veteran, moved into the Tiny Home for Good on Rose Avenue in July. He is shown here during construction of the home, which has 250 square feet of living space. | Dominique Hildebrand, Staff Photo



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# Rhythmic steps

| TORY RUSSO



| ROSALIE SPITZER



| KEN FREHM



| BOB GATES

The Stand's seventh annual Photo Walk offered two photo lessons this year. Local photographer Bob Gates' top takeaways: Shoot with natural light, learn how to use shallow depth of field, aim to capture emotion and simplify, meaning "when in doubt, leave it out."

Kate Collins, a photo and video manager with Syracuse Media Group, provided a short lesson on best practices for taking photos with a smartphone, even sharing her favorite photography apps. Instagram and VSCOcam are some she uses most. She also explained that in recent years, her iPhone has become the primary tool she uses on assignments rather than her larger and intimidating Nikon.

Following the lesson, participants left the South Side Innovation Center, walking together down South Salina Street toward Kirk Park. One focus of many images was the colorful wall of children's handprints painted on the side of a building near the East Colvin Street intersection. Using Boomerang, an app that allows users to produce Gif-like videos, Collins put together a fun video of participants and residents dancing in front of the wall, completely edited using her iPhone.



| STEVE DAVIS

This year's participants included: Bob Gates, Kate Collins, Steven Shaw, Michael Koval, Della Branch-Bullock, Tory Russo, Michelle Mahoney, Robert Schulz, Lenora Monkemeyer, Miguel Balbuena, Rosalie Spitzer, Ken Frehm, Anthony Curtis, Isabel Lee, Rachielle Scrivens and Steve Davis, founder of The Stand.



| DELLA BRANCH-BULLOCK



| ROSALIE SPITZER



| ROSALIE SPITZER



| ISABEL LEE



| STEVEN SHAW



| KEN FREHM



| LENORA MONKEMEYER



| ROBERT SCHULZ



| ANTHONY CURTIS



| KEN FREHM



| RACHIELLE SCRIVENS



| MICHAEL KOVAL



| KATE COLLINS

## WANT TO HELP?

Donations to the homeless can be made through:

**We Rise Above the Streets** website  
Visit: [weriseabovestreet.wix.com/weriseabovestreet](http://weriseabovestreet.wix.com/weriseabovestreet)

or

**GoFundMe** page:  
[gofundme.com/helpweriseabove](http://gofundme.com/helpweriseabove)

**Phone:** (315) 491-1174  
from 9 a.m. to 6 p.m.

**After hours:**  
(315) 491-7164

**Email:**  
[weriseabovestreet@gmail.com](mailto:weriseabovestreet@gmail.com)

## MEAL HANDOUTS

Each Saturday and Sunday downtown, wherever the need exists

# FINDING PURPOSE

*We Rise Above the Streets distributes needed meals to homeless*



> Alamin Muhammad, who was once homeless, works full time now running the nonprofit he started, We Rise Above the Streets, to help meet the needs of Syracuse's homeless residents. | Photo Provided

By | Ryan Raigrodski  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

## Founder inspired by Atlanta nonprofit that took him in while he was homeless, struggling

After years of involvement in one of the most notorious gangs in Chicago, Joel Buissereth did not care to hear what he called the “religious garbage” his prison cellmate wanted to share with him.

But, after two months of his cellmate’s prodding, Buissereth agreed to hear what he had to say. His cellmate’s words finally made Buissereth change.

“He told me one thing that had me shed tears,” said Buissereth, 44, who goes by the name Alamin Muhammad.

“He told me that if I died today, what legacy was I going to leave for my daughter. ‘What do you have to leave to your family? Is it that you was a drug dealer? That you was nothing? That you was a drug head? Does anyone have anything nice to say about you?’ And I thought about everything I did, and guess what, there was nothing nice to be said about me.”

Muhammad, who was raised Catholic, adopted the Muslim religion after his fourth prison stay. Once

released, he lived in Atlanta for five years, spending many nights sleeping under bridges, eating from garbage cans and seeking assistance.

But life has changed.

Muhammad is now in Syracuse, and for the past year — whenever he has had the resources — he has spent weekends handing out brown bag lunches and toiletries to the homeless through his organization, We Rise Above the Streets Recovery Outreach Inc. In winter, he also gave away gloves and hats.

Muhammad founded the nonprofit in June 2015, and he works there full time.

## EARLY YEARS

Born in Haiti, Muhammad moved with his parents to Chicago when he was 5. Thinking back, he said when he looked out his window, he’d watch gang members out in the street and wished he were one of them.

His opportunity to join came during a chance meeting. When he went to buy clothes for school, he saw one of the gang members outside the store in conflict with a few guys, and the gang member looked toward him.

At that time Muhammad was 13. He said he left the store, joined in the fight to help the gang member and

then ran. A few hours later, members of the Gangster Disciples, a criminal gang from the South Side of Chicago, were at his door, asking him to join.

According to the Chicago Tribune, this violent gang began in Chicago in the 1970s when the Black Disciples and the Supreme Gangsters merged. The gang is still active today. Within the past year, according to a Tribune story, 48 alleged members from nine states were indicted on charges involving coordinated criminal activity, including murder, drug trafficking, robbery, carjacking, extortion and fraud.

In the mid-1980s, Muhammad's parents had recently divorced, so his mother was living on the North Side of Chicago, and his father on the South Side. He said after joining the gang, he quickly rose to a leadership position.

Many hardships followed, such as being shot, going in and out of prison and losing close friends. Muhammad decided he needed a change.

"I started getting into gang wars," he recalled. "I saw people die in front of me. I've been to so many funerals. As I got older, I told myself that when I got out of prison in Chicago, something has to change. Because if I don't leave Chicago, I might be dead."

At the age of 29, Muhammad moved to Atlanta. But after a few months of working at a warehouse, he met a member of Gangster Disciples who was selling drugs. Muhammad began selling with this man, who turned out to be an informant. When the man told on Muhammad, the man got less time. But Muhammad faced 10 years in prison.

Muhammad later saw this stint in prison as a blessing from God because during this sentence, he met the man who converted him to the religion of Islam.

"They agreed to give me one year served and five years probation," Muhammad said. "I got on my knees. I can't even believe that, because it was for a fact I was going to get 10 years because I got caught with nearly a half of key of cocaine. They had witnesses against me. That is nothing but God. Nobody else."

### TIME HOMELESS

From 2008, when Muhammad left prison, until 2012, he bounced from shelter to shelter in Atlanta, occasionally sleeping outside and under bridges. He said he was often hungry because with a drug felony, he could not qualify for food stamps in Georgia.

Yet he stood strong to make a change — even when he had an opportunity to return to the drug game.

"One day a former dealer rolled up to me at a bus stop and asked if I wanted a key of cocaine to get back on my feet," said Muhammad, who refused the offer.

Eventually, after years of being homeless, Muhammad found his break volunteering at a Christian, socialist community called Open Door Community. After he had told his story during detox meetings at St. Jude's



> El-Java Abdul-Qadir volunteers with his son Ibrahim Abdul-Qadir to make sandwiches that We Rise Above the Streets will distribute. | Photo Provided

Recovery Center, staff members told him he would make an excellent addiction counselor.

"When he told his story, he wept," said Eduard Loring, co-founder of Open Door Community in Atlanta, where he has run the center for 40 years. As Muhammad shared his history with drugs, gangs and violence, Loring said it became clear that he wanted to use that history to become a peacemaker and to heal others.

"He wrestled with what it meant for him to have this violent past," Loring added, "but he came to see the redeeming value and how he could use that history to help others."

### THE MOVE

After a few years, Muhammad met Monique, who now goes by the name Nasirah Muhammad, on Facebook. The couple decided to meet in person. Nasirah flew from Syracuse to Atlanta, heard Muhammad's life story in an IHOP restaurant and married him the next day.

"This is where you really have to put your faith in action," she said. "We believed we were supposed to take this journey together. I didn't have any fear about it, because I really felt that Allah had brought us together."

## MAKE A DONATION

### CURRENT ITEMS NEEDED

- Deodorant
- Feminine hygiene products
- Razors
- Wash cloths
- Lotion
- Toothbrushes
- Toothpaste
- Combs
- Chips
- Drink pouches or bottles of water
- Granola bars
- Honey buns
- Wheat bread
- Turkey meat
- Cheese
- Clothes for men, women and children

### HOW TO DONATE ITEMS

Drop off donations from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Monday through Friday at 404 Oak St., Suite 111

## FOOD MATTERS

**Alamin Muhammad** works daily to raise donations for his campaign, "If We Eat They Eat."

Saturdays and Sundays, whenever resources are available, he gives away meals to the homeless through **We Rise Above the Streets**.

According to Feeding America, 13.2 percent of Onondaga County residents are food insecure, meaning they lack reliable access to affordable, nutritious food.

The two even spent their honeymoon serving the poor at the Open Door Community.

Because she was working for the Navy, she could not move, which meant after establishing all of those connections in Georgia, Muhammad would have to try to do the same in Syracuse.

Muhammad told Loring that his example of running the Open Door Community inspired him to launch his own outreach.

"The fulfillment I feel in hearing that," Loring responded, "makes my efforts over the years feel so much more meaningful."

It's been just over a year since Muhammad launched his nonprofit in Syracuse.

His wife attests to his work ethic. "One of the things that he neglects to tell you is he has a mouthpiece. He can talk people into anything. He's hard to forget because he's very aggressive in a good way about what he's doing."

Hassan Rasiq, a Syracuse community member, met Muhammad at a local mosque where Rasiq is opening a food pantry. He said he was immediately impressed by

Muhammad's passion to help others.

"It was very cold out one day, and he was out giving coats and scarfs," Rasiq said. "It really made me pay a little bit more attention because of that passion."

Lisa Prentiss, a Syracuse community member who goes by the name Jannah, said she saw Muhammad's organization on Facebook and decided to volunteer.

"I think it's very important because there aren't many organizations like that. I think that it gives the homeless a sense of belonging," Prentiss said. "And it's not junk meals. (The lunches are) food I myself would give my kids."

Muhammad's outreach is limited; he is able to make meals and provide other amenities only as money and supplies are donated.

"I know that he is struggling financially now, but that is the struggle many of us have when we start this work," said Loring of the Open Door Community. "His mission is strong, and I think the focus on homeless African-American men is greatly needed."

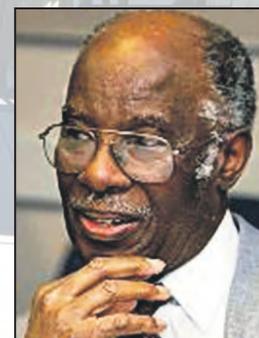
— Ashley Kang, *The Stand's* director, contributed to this story

# Winston Gaskin Community Walk for Wellness & Stroke Prevention

Join us for our 1st-ever trek along Onondaga Creekwalk

**Saturday, September 17, 2016**

**Participants complete 5.4 mile-route beginning and ending at the creekwalk's Armory Square Trailhead, across from the MOST downtown**



**Registration fee \$15**

Sign-up from 8:30 to 9 a.m. day of walk or in advance online at <http://bit.do/cc4Xs>

100

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100 Black Men of Syracuse Health & Wellness Chair,  
at [charlesanderson5@mac.com](mailto:charlesanderson5@mac.com) or (315) 200-7847

# CONCERN FOR YOUTH

*Boys & Girls Club prioritizes students' safety after daytime shootings*



> Youth at the Central Village Boys & Girls Club held a car wash fundraiser each Friday this summer in addition to other fundraisers. The center's director, Jeff Eysaman, said the youth felt pride in helping raise money. | Marianne Barthelemy, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand* director

Director wants to buy a van or bus to transport students attending center's after-school program

Jamar Bachus, who was shot on the evening of Monday, July 25, visited the Central Village Boys & Girls Club earlier that same day.

He wanted to see how much the center had changed since his time there as a boy.

Nina Mattison, who has worked at the center for the past three years, also worked there in her teens. Back then, she said, she served as Bachus' group leader.

"I was joking with him about the time he jumped in the water at Wilson Park and didn't know how to swim," she said. "He told me not to make him look bad in front of the kids.

"I can't understand why he is gone," she added.

Just four hours before the shots that took Bachus' life and just moments after final pickup from the center, located at 212 Van Buren St., a separate shooting had occurred. Police reported a teen was shot in the stomach at 3:05 p.m. at the intersection of Midland Avenue and Martin Luther King Boulevard.

Every time the center's director, Jeff Eysaman, hears about a shooting in the community, his first thought is: "I

hope it's not one of my kids."

Each weekday this summer, 65 students ages 5 to 12 visited the center for activities and outings. Now around 50 students make their way to the center after school each day until 6 p.m. for the Boys & Girls Club after-school program.

"For me, I hear fireworks and I'm ready to pull all the kids inside. But my staff knows the difference — instantly — between shots and fireworks," he said. "My number one priority is the safety of my kids here."

This summer the center held various fundraisers, including a carwash every Friday from noon to 3 p.m., to improve on the center's offerings and raise money to purchase a van or bus to safely transport more students.

"I don't want them out on the street or stopping into corner stores alone," he said in regard to how students make their way to and from the center. "With shootings happening as early as 3 o'clock, I don't think an 8-year-old should be walking around the South Side."

The current bus can hold 12 to 15 students. Many who currently need rides to and from school are being serviced, but now that school is in session, Eysaman said that students from Dr. King and Delaware also utilize the center.

"A larger bus — it doesn't even have to be new — just something that can hold more children is needed to ensure they are not wandering around on the streets and are making it directly to and from the center safely."

## PARENTS' CONCERNS

Parents say their fears are longstanding.

"It's sad that they don't get to experience that much freedom," said **Ishmiel Mantooth-el**, who says her children aren't allowed to ride their bikes around the neighborhood because she believes it's too dangerous for them to be out.

**Korey Williams**, who has an 8-year-old son and 7-year-old daughter at Central Village, drives her children to and from the center because of the distance to their home, but says even if she lived closer, she would not allow them to walk.

**Shermel Jackson**, who regularly picks up five young family members, agrees. He said the youth who live in nearby Syracuse Housing aren't allowed to play outside unsupervised because of concern for their safety.

"They know it's dangerous, so don't go out," Jackson said. "But we don't concern them with details from news stories. That's grown folk talk, and they don't need to be worrying about that."

### JOIN THE CENTER

To learn about enrollment options, call the center at (315) 579-5400.

Enrollment requires a \$15 membership fee

## ABOUT THE CRB

**Office:** 201 E. Washington St., Suite 705

**Phone:** (315) 448-8750

**Email:** CRB@SyrGov.net

**Website:** www.syracuse.ny.us/crb.aspx

## BOARD MEMBERS

- Mallory Livingston, vice chair
- David Barrette
- Peter Christiana
- Caleb Duncan
- Hatisha Holmes
- Diane Turner
- Carole J. Horan
- Ruth Kutz
- Louis Levine

Board members attend monthly board meetings, help with outreach efforts, serve on committees, attend trainings and preside at hearings

Hearings average about 45 minutes, but some have gone as long as three to four hours

## ABOUT CRB LAWSUIT

An ongoing lawsuit, which was decided in favor of the CRB in August, had been filed over Chief of Police Frank Fowler's failure to respond to the CRB's disciplinary recommendations, sent to him after each hearing, that took the CRB more than 60 days to complete.

# CITIZEN OVERSIGHT

*Administrator David Chaplin II joins Syracuse's Citizen Review Board*



> Peter Christiana listens as David Chaplin II, the newly appointed Citizen Review Board administrator, addresses other board members during the July 7 CRB meeting inside the Common Council Chambers at City Hall. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand* director

**David Chaplin II took on new job to work within the system, fight for social justice**

**H**is elevator pitch to Syracuse residents reads like a script for a radio commercial:

*Are you concerned about police misconduct?*

*Have you heard about the Citizen Review Board?*

*Have you had an experience with an officer that you feel is unjust?*

*Have you heard about the Citizen Review Board?*

The new CRB administrator concludes: “The Citizen Review Board investigates allegations of police misconduct or police overreach. To contact us ....”

David Chaplin II, who previously worked as an attorney with the city focusing on labor issues, was hired for the civilian oversight group amid an ongoing lawsuit with the police department. That lawsuit was decided in favor of the CRB in August. By his second week, he was faced with the chaos of June's police-involved Father's Day shooting.

A chaotic melee on Syracuse's Near West Side on June 19 resulted in the death of Gary Porter. His preg-

nant fiancé was shot in the leg, and a 15-year-old girl was injured. Police say at least four guns were fired, including one by officer Kelsey Francemone. Video footage shows a chaotic scene, with Francemone running against the fleeing crowd. She soon goes off frame, toward the direction where Porter was shot. More than a month after the incident, Onondaga County District Attorney William Fitzpatrick said that a drive-by shooting that appears to be gang-related started the disorder. On Aug. 5, Francemone was cleared by a grand jury of any wrongdoing.

While Chaplin was content in his former position, he says he didn't find it particularly fulfilling. He said the CRB opening came on the heels of two high-profile police-involved shootings. In 2014, Michael Brown was shot and killed by police officer Darren Wilson in Ferguson, Missouri. The 18-year-old black male was shot at least six times, twice in the head, by Wilson, who is white. His body was then left uncovered — in public view of family and neighbors. Also in 2014, Tamir Rice, a 12-year-old black boy, was shot and killed by police in Cleveland when officers mistook a toy gun the preteen was holding as a threat. Both incidents, among several others, received national and international attention.

“It's my own community that is hearkened with the issue of police misconduct,” he said, noting this job allows him to not only work on social injustice but also to provide greater access to justice — for all groups.

“I think he’s been inspired by what’s been happening across the country with the increase in concern over police misconduct and the negative and sometimes tragic outcomes that have occurred when citizens and police interact,” said Mallory Livingston, vice chair of the CRB.

Livingston, who is also a local attorney and co-founder of the Transgender Alliance and who helped pass Syracuse’s transgender civil rights law in 2012, joined to serve as a voice for the transgendered community.

“Being transgendered, I’m a member of a marginalized group,” she said. “A group that certainly on occasion has had negative interactions with police.”

Chaplin replaced Joseph Lipari, who served as CRB administrator since 2012. During Lipari’s nearly three and a half years with the CRB, a highlight was seeing a decline in excessive force complaints. In a special report released in May 2016, the CRB said the number of force after fleeing cases fell from 23 in 2013 to four in 2015.

The CRB report also shows the following, based on data collected from 2012 to 2015: Of the 44 separate complaints that involved 45 individual complainants, 37 complainants were black, six were white and two were Latino; in all but five incidents, the officers were white; 12 officers were each involved in two complaints of excessive force after fleeing, and four other officers were involved in three such complaints.

Lipari moved with his family to New York City this summer. He is a senior policy manager for the New York Police Department’s Office of the Inspector General.

### CHAPLIN’S GOALS

In addition to handling complaints in a timely manner and meeting the requirements in the CRB’s charter, Chaplin wants the CRB to become a commonly known municipal service. Through community outreach at public events, social media and through a soon-to-launch eNews-letter, he hopes to keep the CRB on the public’s radar.

He also sees great strength in drafting special reports that can highlight local trends before they become another news headline.

“We don’t want to wait to have CNN or Fox News at our doorstep before we address these issues,” he said.

At the July 7 board meeting, Common Councilor At-Large Jean Kessner stood up during the public comment period and said she would help promote the CRB. “I’m troubled by what I see in the news; it makes me feel in peril,” she said, stressing she wants all city residents to know about the CRB. “I’ll call a press conference for you, just tell me what I can do.”

Outreach was Chaplin’s first endeavor. He attended public events, such as the Juneteenth Celebration, met with local groups, and held meetings with top officials.

“He’s been especially good at working to increase community contact,” Livingston said. “He’s been active in telling residents we are one of those pieces to the puzzle to solve this problem everyone is concerned about.”

He also has met with Chief of Police Frank Fowler and said they are on good terms.

“He has been happy to work together to find effective solutions to problems,” Chaplin said.

To help address systemic injustice, Chaplin says he must bridge the previous gaps between the police and the citizens they are sworn to protect. His approach: view it like a marriage — where divorce is not an option.

“Police can’t divorce the community and the community can’t divorce the police, so then the question is: What are we doing to work together and to find common resolutions?” he said. “If you are married, then you must be patient, you must both understand the long-term goal, and you can’t ignore the problem. I think those personal principles of marriage and relationship must translate with how the community and the police should look forward to engaging.”

One step in that direction is the relaunch of the

## COMPLAINT PROCESS

According to **David Chaplin**, you don’t have to fill out a form to initiate the process.

By reaching out to Chaplin or a board member, the **conversation starts**.

Then Chaplin can help complete a **complaint form**. Next he will develop a case summary for that complaint.

The **case summary** includes: what records the police have, interviews from police on their side of what happened, interviews from witnesses.

Then the **board reviews**.

The board will decide if there is sufficient cause to call a hearing.

If a hearing is set, more investigation may be needed.

Then at the hearing, CRB will review the case, hear from complainant and/or officer and make a determination.

**One of three outcomes:**

- **Exonerate the officer:** means the CRB did not find sufficient evidence
- **Unfounded:** means the CRB could not decide one way or the other
- **Sustain:** means the investigation found that the act did occur and constitutes misconduct on the part of the officer

If the outcome is to sustain, the CRB makes a recommendation on what type of corrective action the chief of police should take.

> Board members listen as Henninger High School student Alexander Veranes, 16, speaks during the public comment period July 7. Veranes noted that the CRB needs to work with schools to help educate students on how to safely engage with police. Veranes is the leader of a newly formed student group, Syracuse Students United, working to address issues students face citywide. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo



## SERVING SYRACUSE

David Chaplin is on the board of A Tiny Home for Good, on the Advisory Council for the Make a Wish Foundation, the Volunteer Lawyers Project and a member of Fellowship AME Church.

“The pastor there has a real drive for doing something about generational poverty,” he said. “That made me want to be a part of their congregation.”

This past year, the church’s “Operation 12 B.O.W.S.,” which stands for “Blessing Others With Surplus,” gave away more than 7,000 pounds of surplus produce from local farmers.

### UPCOMING CONFERENCE

David Chaplin will attend The National Association for Civilian Oversight of Law Enforcement conference on **Confronting Systemic Injustice** on Sept. 29 in Albuquerque, New Mexico. It brings together agencies working to establish or improve oversight of police officers.

Police Liaison Committee. “This shows a good-faith effort by the police to work on and rebuild this relationship,” Chaplin said, noting the first issue to address is having them respond to the CRB’s policy on use of force.

Currently the SPD has no set policy in place serving as a guideline on use of force by an officer. The CRB board drafted a policy and hopes the next step is to have the Police Liaison Committee review it and start a conversation to create a set of written guidelines that the SPD can adopt. Other efforts of this committee are to have open conversations and allow each group to pose questions and openly discuss current issues.

“The CRB not only hears complaints against the police, but we have the capacity to look into issues and draft policy to work with the police department to make policing in this community better for residents and officers,” Chaplin said.

He says the process is slow and requires long-term thinking, but that he is committed to stay the course and finds reassurance from Lipari in frequent phone calls.

“You can’t get frustrated in the face of resistance,” Lipari said he told Chaplin. “I tell Chaplin to have patience and to be persistent.”

Being African-American does not make Chaplin any better suited for this work than Lipari, who is white, Chaplin said. But he agreed it helps initially.

“Oh, CRB’s a brother,” Chaplin said he has heard when he walks out of his office.

“That relatability, my personal experiences and being a part of that community helps,” he said. “Personally, I’ve been lucky. My worst experience is driving while black.”

During stops in his lifetime, he said he felt the officer was rude initially, but he would be let go with a warning or minor traffic ticket after the officer reviewed his information and found he had no record.

“When the officer came back, they were fine and no

longer rude,” he said, recalling one incident. “But I know my experience is unique.”

### MAKING A DIFFERENCE

Chaplin grew up in poverty outside Chicago in an environment, he said, brimming with mistrust in the police. Shuffling back and forth between his father’s home in Peoria and his mother in the South, he eventually conceded to his parents’ concerns and completed high school in Georgia.

“When I went back home to Illinois, the problem of gang violence and drugs became a concern,” Chaplin said. “My dad didn’t want me falling into that.”

After friends were shot outside of school, he returned to Georgia in 10th grade. “You got to keep your head on a swivel,” he said, describing the alertness required to walk home at night after sports practice. Moving back with his mother and brother, he said, made a difference.

“She was a supermom,” he said. “She did not want me or my brother being a part of the trap that poverty has on people.”

Chaplin graduated from the University of Alabama, went to law school through the Legal Education Opportunity (LEO) Program, and graduated from Syracuse University’s law and public diplomacy schools in 2013.

“I’ve wrestled since college about being the only person in my family to really advance,” he said. “I put a burden on myself to look after my cousins and make sure they don’t fall through the cracks but to also show them there’s other ways of doing things than the common street life.”

With that in mind, he asked himself when posed with this job: “What are you doing today to make a difference?”

His reaction: “It wasn’t easy to answer that question as a labor attorney.”

Now he says he is energized and eager to go to work each day — and nearly every weekend — to push within the system for justice.



> Common Councilor At-Large Jean Kessner speaks to the board to show her support for their work. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

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