

# the **Stand** south side news

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Syracuse, NY

WINTER 2017-2018 Issue 63 FREE

## PEOPLE'S OFFICER

Outgoing police chief  
reflects on his roots, career  
in They Wear Blue series

## tiny homes

'Where Are They Now?'  
looks at Andrew Lunetta's  
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## Dream realized

Passion for fitness leads  
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to give back to community

## Serving their country

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## DAD URGES: GIVE BACK





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DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,  
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-  **BUSINESS** | Anna Morris found a passion for hair styling at a young age, and now her beauty salon on the South Side is celebrating 40 years in business.
-  **COMMUNITY** | Members of the Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group gathered to share their writings about veteran service and experience.
-  **FEATURES** | A local nonprofit, We Rise Above the Streets, held a fundraiser to further its goal of serving the city's homeless population.
-  **FEATURES** | Southside Fitness provides the local community an affordable and family-oriented workout space.
-  **FATHERHOOD** | Wayne Wright, a local barber, is a father of two sons ages 19 and 20, and he is also the head of a mentoring program for young men.
-  **COMMUNITY** | Meet Camille Coakley, the recipient of the Community Foundation of Central New York's 2017 Grassroots Leadership Award.
-  **THEY WEAR BLUE** | Outgoing Chief of Police Frank Fowler reflects on growing up near Ferguson, Missouri, where — years later — Michael Brown Jr. was killed.

■ Cover photography by They Wear Blue photographer Michael Santiago of Frank Fowler

## CALENDAR | WINTER

**What:** Rudolph the Red-Nosed Reindeer: The Musical  
**When:** 6:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 5  
**Where:** Landmark Theatre, 362 S. Salina St.  
**Details:** The story tells the tale of a young Rudolph who, because of the appearance of his bright, shining nose, is excluded from the Reindeer Games. He flees Christmastown and meets up with new friends Hermey the Elf and Yukon Cornelius. After finding The Island of Misfit Toys, Rudolph journeys home, where a snowstorm of epic proportions is threatening Christmas.  
**Cost:** \$20 to \$55  
**For tickets:** Visit Ticketmaster.com or in person at the Landmark Box Office

**What:** Symphoria Pop Series: Holiday Wonder  
**When:** 1:30 to 3:30 p.m., 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 16  
**Where:** The Oncenter, 421 Montgomery St.  
**Details:** This holiday spectacle will feature dancers, chorus members and special guest vocalist Julia Goodwin  
**Cost:** \$20 to \$82  
**For tickets:** Call (315) 299-5598 or visit experiencesymphoria.org

**What:** The GREAT Salt City BLUES Concert 2  
**When:** 7:30 to 9:30 p.m. Tuesday, Dec. 26  
**Where:** Palace Theatre, 2384 James St.  
**Details:** A Syracuse Blues tribute to the artists of Chess Records: Chuck Berry, Bo Diddley, Muddy Waters, Howlin' Wolf and others  
**Cost:** \$25  
**For tickets:** Visit brownpapertickets.com/event/3083722

Our winter issue profiles Chief of Police Frank Fowler as part of our They Wear Blue series. Fowler will be stepping down next year when Mayor Stephanie Miner's term ends and newly elected Mayor Ben Walsh takes the helm. Fowler graced our first cover of The Stand in 2010 shortly after he was named head of the Syracuse Police Department.

For this profile, They Wear Blue reporter Justin Mattingly and photographer Michael Santiago traveled back to Ferguson, Missouri, with Fowler to visit his hometown. Fowler grew up in Kinloch, which was once a thriving African-American community until the late 1980s. That's when the city of St. Louis began buying property for the nearby airport. This effort led to the city's decline, further increasing segregation, crime and corruption. In the piece, Fowler reflects on moments that contributed to his current role and how those experiences have helped him connect to Syracuse residents.

All the stories, photos and videos from They Wear Blue are now available at the project's web site, [TheyWearBlue.com](http://TheyWearBlue.com). In-depth reporting showcases what an officer's life is like — in and out of uniform. The stories are a result of four months of work by student journalists who rode along with officers in their police cruisers, visited with their families, sat in on officer trainings and much more. The entire series offers a look behind the uniform and the relationship Syracuse officers have with the community.

The Stand works with an Urban Affairs reporting class once each school year to coordinate such in-depth reporting projects like They Wear Blue. We're looking forward to starting new coverage in 2018 and are open to hearing any ideas on topics you would like to see covered.

It's also great to hear that many are sharing past stories from The Stand to expand on issues of importance to the community. This year the May Memorial Unitarian Universalist Society shared in its newsletter a story published in The Stand about an urban birding workshop. At Syracuse University's Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs, the Department of Geography shared an article from The Stand about mapping hunger by displaying it in its window to show how poverty in the city affects residents.

In this winter issue, we catch up with Andrew Lunetta and his work with A Tiny Home for Good on Page 6 in our new Where Are They Now? series. His nonprofit is building more tiny homes on Bellevue Avenue for homeless veterans. We also profile another group, We Rise Above the Streets, on Page 8, as it continues to feed the homeless.

If there are past profiles or stories you'd like to see us follow up on, or ideas for future stories, please contact us. Some of our best stories come directly from readers, so email me at [Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com](mailto:Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com).

Ashley Kang



## HOLIDAY ANGELS

ACR Health's Holiday Angel Program is off to a very good start this year, with 50 Angels already actively shopping for clients with emergency needs.

But volunteers are still needed because of the growing number of individuals who are being served.

ACR Health's Holiday Angel Program pairs community members (Angels) with a qualified ACR Health client and family. The Holiday Angel is given a list of the family's needs and then uses that list to make holiday purchases.

Lists usually include requests for clothing, bathroom towels, toiletries, kitchen supplies and personal items, such as shoes and coats. Holiday Angels can buy as many or as few of the items on the list as they wish.

Many community groups, churches or extended families pool their resources to sponsor an ACR Health client and members of their family. Several hundred people rely on Holiday Angels for whatever holiday gifts come their way each year.

If you would like to be a Holiday Angel, call (800) 475-2430 or email [events@ACRHealth.org](mailto:events@ACRHealth.org)

IN HER WORDS

Anna Morris, who has owned **Anna's Beauty Salon** on the South Side for the past **40 years**, describes her passion for her place:

"It's not just a beauty salon because you **develop relationships with customers**, and it's basically to me a place where you can not only come and get your hair done."

"You can also be encouraged because we all sometimes go through things, and being able to be there for a customer who might be going through something, we can **encourage** each other. It's kind of like a **family-oriented community**."

**Address:** 430 W. Colvin St.

**Phone:** (315) 476-9665

A FAMILY AFFAIR

Beauty salon owner reflects on her 40-year presence in the community

By | Connor Fogel  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

Anna's Beauty Salon has for years been a home away from home for the community

Anna Morris' passion has kept her busily styling hair in her beauty salon 40 years after she opened it on the South Side. At her station, a sign cut from an American Beauty Salon book reads, "Don't quit." Whenever Morris has felt discouraged, she looked at the sign to recall that same passion and drive she had when she first opened her salon in 1977. Anna's Beauty Salon has occupied the corner of West Colvin Street and Midland Avenue for four decades, through the owner's personal struggles and the South Side community's struggles.

"I've been in Syracuse since 1966, and I've always loved my community," Morris said. "It has given me so much just being in the community and watching the different changes we have gone through, and just being a part of making it a better place — not only for business, but to live, just being there. I feel grateful just knowing that I could call this home."

The owner said she hopes her longtime roots in the community will inspire young entrepreneurs to realize that owning a business is possible based on their dreams.

Even as a young girl, Morris dreamed of being a beautician. She and her sister, Deloris Perry, would do each other's hair every week for church. One Sunday, the two got into an argument, so her sister wouldn't do Morris' hair.

"I did my own hair," Morris said. "And I loved the way it came out, and my mom loved it, and I just fell in love with it then. In the end, maybe that was good that she didn't do my hair. The courage and everything came."

With family in the area, Morris' salon has been a place for her family members to spend time together. Some have also pursued careers in styling.

Ciara James, Morris' granddaughter, started working at the beauty salon last year and found her passion for hair styling in a similar way. Once she figured out how to do her own ponytail when she was 8, she wouldn't let anyone else style her hair.

James spent time after school at the beauty salon when she was younger, and she said being in the environment had a big influence on her interest in styling hair.

"A lot of people used to say about my grandma, 'Your grandma's got growing hands,' meaning with her hands, their hair's growing and healthy, and now I have a lot of people that say that about me, too, so it makes me feel good," said James.



> Anna Morris styles a customer's hair at Anna's Beauty Salon. | Connor Fogel, Staff Photo

James is Morris' second relative to work in the salon. Morris' niece worked with her in the 1990s, and she then later moved to Atlanta and opened her own beauty salon.

Morris said she always hoped her granddaughter would want to become a beautician and join her at the salon. In October, James marked a full year of working at the salon, where she learned about being professional and knowledgeable about clients' hair.

Morris said she believes James is an asset that helps maintain the business as Morris gets older and needs to take care of herself.

"I loved it so much that I never considered how many years," Morris said about her 40-year career. "I didn't put a time limit on it."

The salon's "family-oriented community" keeps Morris encouraged as the owner and as a person. Her sister said she frequently visits the salon for the community feeling.

"It's almost like a safe haven. You feel comfortable here," Perry said. "Our neighborhood has gone through a lot of challenges, it still is, but when you come here, you just feel safe. It's just the spirit of this place, the beautiful spirit."

Morris said she has stayed true to her roots since opening the salon. The constant customers and feeling of community keep her passion and enthusiasm alive.

"The future for me is to maintain and continue to grow, and who knows," Morris said. "I'm looking forward to be greater and greater in whatever I'm doing."



# IN CONVERSATION

*Local veterans share writings, poems about military experiences*

By | Jeremiah Howell  
*Community correspondent*

To celebrate Veterans Day, a local veterans writing group invited the community to listen

Beyond the public view of waving flags, women and men who served in the United States armed forces tell of their experiences. In the week leading up to Veterans Day, the Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group met at ArtRage Gallery in the Hawley-Green Historic District to share their work in a Veterans Day Reading.

Hosted by Eileen Schell, the group leader, the event brought together local veterans to relay individual perspectives on their time during and after military service. The group, founded in 2010 after the passing of Schell's uncle — a veteran himself — is a safe haven for veterans to share their experiences.

"It's important to have these conversations," she said.

The writers say putting pen to paper has spurred conversations with family, friends and others seeking insight into the things they saw, participated in and felt during and after their time in the military. The group is sponsored by the College of Arts & Sciences of Syracuse University, specifically the Writing Studies, Rhetoric, and Composition group.

On a day filled with pageantry, the writers group welcomed community members to listen; inviting us collectively as a society to take responsibility for our war making.

Veteran Donald Western highlighted a blanket phrase often used, "Thank you for your service." Western's work states that, for him, this phrase "causes a mental short circuit" that provides him "the impulse to talk about what happened in that time."

Western also questions the idea that heroism is often tied to those who have died. In his reading, he highlighted how "earning a grave" is equated to being a hero regardless of valor or status. Western conveyed that conceptually, the overused label of hero further highlights the divide between societal perception and a veteran's perception of armed conflict and veterans in general.

The group also offered poetic interpretation and personal accounts of time spent in service.

Robert Marcuson recounted in vivid detail search-and-destroy missions conducted during the Vietnam War. In his account of one mission, he painted humanity into the conflict as he discussed how he stood, grenade in hand, while children and a family pet emerged from a bunker thought to have housed enemy troops.



> Donald Western asked community members to question the nature of heroism. | Jeremiah Howell, Staff Photo

Marcuson was followed by Ginger Star Peterman, who weaved together her military experience, her childhood, and her own child's life — engaging an already captive audience.

In the latter portion of the shared writings, Robert Brewer, Ralph Willsey, Lee Savidge and Bill Cross each made their way to the front of the room to convey their experiences. Cross, reading a piece titled "Taming My Rage," aided in portraying the importance of hearing a veteran's view of service. A practicing psychotherapist and Vietnam veteran, Cross' writing began with a childhood memory of killing an animal and the shame that immediately followed this act, curving upward to the rage and immediate shame felt as a result of actions taken during combat duty in Vietnam.

Cross went on to parallel his own feelings with those of his great grandfather who had passed down his feelings of rage and great shame experienced during the Civil War. Elements of his own life and those of his family's military experience all serve to show the pain felt by veterans and what should be recognized each year on Nov. 11.

Following the readings, a question-and-answer period was opened up to the audience. Making a statement rather than posing a question, Ralph Willsey's mother spoke of her son's involvement with the writing group.

"Writing in this group has been his healing," she said. "There was a brokenness in him."

## WRITERS WELCOME

The Veterans' Writing Group welcomes **veterans, military families and the community** deeply affected by military service to join them one Saturday a month to **share** their experiences and to **participate** in a writing session.

The group meets from 10 a.m. to noon, with **meditation** led by Syracuse University Communication & Rhetorical Studies personnel before the writing session begins.

**For more information, visit:** [writing.syr.edu/syrvetwriters](http://writing.syr.edu/syrvetwriters)



## BEATING THE ODDS

Once Andrew Lunetta conceived the idea of building tiny homes for homeless veterans, he had to overcome several obstacles over the years.

**Buying property:** He first considered buying vacant property from the Greater Syracuse Land Bank. However, he experienced pushback from local residents.

**Fear of the homeless:** “There’s a lot of fear of the homeless, is what this comes down to,” said Bob Dougherty, a former city council member and board member of A Tiny Home for Good. “People came up in arms.”

**Zoning laws:** This became an issue when Lunetta tried to build two or more residential units on a plot zoned for only one. So he purchased two privately owned properties — on South Salina Street and Rose Avenue — and built three tiny homes and a two-unit home.

### SUGGEST A STORY

Is there a person you’re curious about who previously has been featured in The Stand?

To submit an idea for a future *Where Are They Now?* story, contact Ashley Kang by email at [ashley@mysouthsidestand.com](mailto:ashley@mysouthsidestand.com) or call (315) 882-1054

# WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

*Syracuse nonprofit builds new communities with ‘tiny homes’*



> Volunteer workers set the foundation for one of the first tiny homes on Bellevue Avenue. | Dominique Hildebrand, Staff Photo

By | Hanna Horvath  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

### A Tiny Home for Good advances its work constructing homes for homeless veterans

Andrew Lunetta dug his shovel into the ground, creating a small trench in the dirt. Pieces of plywood lay nearby, baking in the hot September sun. The plot of land at 208 Bellevue Ave., empty as it was, might not have looked like much. But Lunetta regarded it as a solution, a potential answer to a national problem: homelessness.

Now, just three months later, Lunetta has built four very small homes, each around 200 square feet. He, alongside a couple of dedicated volunteers, has constructed the walls and laid down the flooring for each of the new homes, fitting each one with windows and furniture. The houses, set to be completed this winter, will

provide permanent housing for the homeless, specifically homeless veterans, in Syracuse.

Lunetta, executive director of the nonprofit A Tiny Home for Good, said the root causes of homelessness are often complicated: Some homeless people hold full-time jobs, but simply cannot afford rent.

“People see homelessness as someone panhandling on the side of the road, or overdosing, but it’s not really like that,” Lunetta said. “These are people who have jobs or are struggling and need a place to live.”

These homes are not Lunetta’s first: He has built three tiny homes on South Salina Street and a two-unit home on Rose Avenue.

Lunetta first came up with the idea while volunteering at Oxford Street Inn, a local homeless shelter. Once a person moved out of a shelter, he was either on his own or assigned to housing with a roommate, an arrangement that usually did not work.

Bob Dougherty, a former Common Council member





## Then & Now

and board member of A Tiny Home for Good, said shelters do very little for long-term stability.

“Guys would end up back at the shelter in a matter of weeks,” he said.

Lunetta reasoned that homeless veterans, some struggling with post-traumatic stress disorder, would be better suited in a single-room occupancy. From that insight, the small homes project was born.

*“A person owning a place to call their own allows them to have more hope and pride.”*

— Sarah Schutt

Sarah Schutt, an administrator at the Housing and Homeless Coalition of Central New York, said homelessness is an issue in the region — last year, there were 442 homeless people in shelters in Onondaga County; 17 of them were veterans.

Though these numbers are lower than other cities of the same size nationwide, Schutt said programs like A Tiny Home for Good address larger problems in the city by reducing the serious problem of people lacking shelter. Homeownership also provides a psychological boost.

“A person owning a place to call their own allows them to have more hope and pride,” she said. “And if we can give them any ounce of that, we can improve the community.”

Veterans get their own space, are able to create a small community, get opportunities to interact with one another and also have easy access to a bus line — many

don’t have a car — which gives them access to the larger community of Syracuse.

Tenants must give only 30 percent of their monthly income to rent. Lunetta said any person can be chosen to receive a small home, but the nonprofit tends to choose veterans.

Residents of the homes said they are beginning to assimilate to their new lives. One man, Ted Bauer, is a veteran who previously lived on Norman Avenue. While living there, he said local drug dealers killed his dog. He fell into a severe depression.

Now in one of the tiny homes, Bauer bikes every day and feels a lot more hopeful.

“I was angry, I was frustrated,” he said. “The tiny homes helped me regain my footing.”

Another tenant, James Hall, served at an American base in Germany before moving to the Syracuse area, where his brother lived, in 2008. He lived in a homeless shelter before moving into a tiny home last summer. He now works at the Syracuse VA Medical Center.

Though Hall wishes there was room for a large stereo system to listen to his extensive metal collection, he said he has a tiny boom-box perfect for his space.

“You can’t beat the price,” he said, smiling.

Lunetta said he has noticed residents becoming more comfortable with their new space. He recalled how one day last winter, he showed up to a property to shovel snow off walkways, only to find a resident had already done the work. He said he hopes the same kind of tiny community will form in the new properties being added on the South Side.

For him, there has been no “big” victory, but a series of small ones along the way. He said a resident who had been opposed to the plan came to the ribbon-cutting for the first tiny homes in a show of support.

“That made me feel confident in my decision to go forward with the project,” Lunetta said.

Councilor Dougherty said he agrees that though success may appear slow, progress is there.

“It’s not the answer, but it is definitely part of the answer to end homelessness,” he said.

## COST OF A TINY HOME

Each tiny home cost between **\$25,000** and **\$28,000** to build.

The money came from a combination of individual contributions, donations from the **Brady Faith Center** and proceeds from a fundraiser put on by **Operation Northern Comfort**, a nonprofit that provides free labor to those in need.

## UPCOMING EVENT

**What:** If We Eat They Eat Campaign Fundraiser

**When:** 6 p.m. Saturday, Dec. 16

**Where:** Salt City Coffee, 509 W. Onondaga St.

**Details:** The fundraiser will help We Rise Above the Streets Recovery Outreach, Inc. find a home so the organization can increase its services and have a central location to address clients' needs. The location will provide hot meals, showers, a free clothing and shoe closet, self-sufficiency classes, career development and computer courses — all for the homeless, those recently released from incarceration and veterans transitioning from military service.

**More info.:** Search “If We Eat They Eat Campaign Fundraiser” on Facebook

# RISING ABOVE

*Nonprofit holds fundraiser to help give the homeless a new opportunity*



> Members of the audience look on as Howard Jones speaks at the We Rise Above the Streets fundraiser dinner. The organization aims to end the stigma around homelessness. | Alex Archambault, Staff Photo.

By | Alex Archambault  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

## We Rise Above the Streets has been fighting homelessness since its founding three years ago

A Syracuse nonprofit, We Rise Above the Streets, held a charity fundraiser recently to spread local awareness of the good works its members are planning. The primary goal of the organization, founded three years ago, is to fight homelessness in the community. That means handing out hundreds of free meals each Saturday. Al-amin Muhammad, the group's founder, said he dreams of more.

While addressing attendees of the dinner meeting, held Saturday, Oct. 28 at Salt City Coffee at 509 W. Onondaga St., Muhammad spoke of expanding the organization. He said he envisions a restaurant with a menu that serves free food, a separate place where people could get a shower and a haircut and a place to attend Alcoholics Anonymous meetings. Muhammad wants to create safe spaces for Syracuse's homeless community.

“I am tired of hearing the word ‘problem.’ Let’s talk about homelessness,” Muhammad said. “This is about to happen, I am not just talking. This is going to happen.”

Muhammad's passion for serving the homeless community stemmed from his own experiences living on the streets after spending years in jail for drug dealing and gang violence. During the meeting, he spoke of these years and described his pivotal moment finding religion and wanting to start over.

The event also featured three other speakers affected by homelessness. One man, Joshua Williams, a middle school English teacher in the Skaneateles Central School District, warned people beforehand that he might get emotional during his story.

In 1984, when Williams was 7 years old, his dad left him to move to San Francisco, where he would soon fall victim to drug addiction and living on the streets. When Williams was 18, he decided to go to his father, as he wanted him in his life.

Williams ended up staying with his father on the streets. He said this is when he saw what it meant to be homeless. His father would use him to ask people for money, saying he needed to buy food for his son; in reality, the cash went for drugs. Williams, however, only has love for his father and others like him.

“My mom and I loved my dad despite everything. We can’t blame the homeless so easily,” Williams said. “They are human beings like all of us. My message is we



need to humanize, empathize and socialize. This is what Amin is helping to do."

Williams' father has since died, but he was able to get off the streets, acquire two jobs and curb his addiction — something Williams attributes to love, God and people who cared. This is the reason he supports We Rise Above the Streets and is hoping to help Muhammad execute his vision.

George Lynch, a motivational speaker and author, echoed Williams as he described his personal experience growing up on the streets of New York City.

"I would call myself the kid with one thousand homes and I didn't have one once," he said. "Every time I see someone helping the homeless, I think 'these kids could be the next me.'"

Heidi Baldwin, a local health coach, and Howard Jones, a life coach at Good Life Foundation in Syracuse, also spoke at the event. While all the stories differed, a universal message rang through: Homelessness is something that should be helped, not scoffed at.

The event attracted people who had heard and donated to We Rise Above the Streets before, as well as those who knew nothing about it and wanted more information.

Sarah Evans said she lives two blocks up the street from Salt City Coffee, and saw the event on Facebook. Evans is a retired postal service worker and said she tries to stay involved with the city because she "loves it and believes in it." She said she planned to make a donation to Muhammad after the event.

Just like those who attended the event, the people who volunteer for We Rise Above the Streets are diverse. Muhammad stressed this point when he spoke of all the people who come out each Saturday to help make the sandwiches that are distributed.

"What is amazing is that people from all walks of life come to this one room to make sandwiches on Sandwich Saturday," Muhammad said. "I went crazy when I first saw 75 people in that small room one day. How beautiful is that? The community of Syracuse."

Eyeruse Wonders is one of these volunteers. At only 16, she has been going to We Rise Above the Streets events with her mother for about a year now. Whether it is blowing up balloons for fundraisers like this or actually delivering the sandwiches, Wonders said being involved with We Rise Above the Streets helps her to feel like she is having a positive effect on someone's life.

While the advancements Muhammad dreams of will take more funding and awareness than this event alone, he said We Rise Above the Streets is making huge bounds when it comes to shedding a light on homelessness and the invisible complications of it.

"I want to tell everyone that I love you and thank you so much for coming out to hear these stories," Muhammad said at the end of his address. "If you see someone looking hungry, you don't even need to give them money or food, sometimes it's just a smile. Thank you for believing in me."

## HOLIDAY MARKET

**What:** Syracuse Black Expo Holiday Marketplace

**When:** Noon to 6 p.m.  
Saturday, Dec. 9

**Where:** Syracuse Community Connections, 401 South Ave.

**Details:** The sale will feature T-shirts, books, jewelry, art and food. Music will be provided by DJ K-Luv.

**Cost:** \$5

**More info.:** Email theblackexpo@gmail.com

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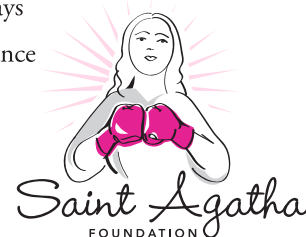
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## Do you need help with your breast cancer bills?

The Saint Agatha Foundation has established funds at area hospitals and medical providers to provide financial support for breast cancer patients in Onondaga, Cortland, Cayuga, Madison, Oneida, and Oswego Counties, New York.

### The following costs can be covered:

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**We can help you.**

[www.saintagathafoundation.org](http://www.saintagathafoundation.org) | (888) 878-7900

## ABOUT THE GYM

Southside Fitness is located at 4141 S. Salina St.

**Contact:** (315) 928-4616

**Visit:** southsidefitness315.com

**Hours:**  
6 a.m. to 10 p.m.  
Monday through Friday,  
  
7 a.m. to 7 p.m.  
Saturday and Sunday,

**Classes:**

- Yoga
- Line dancing
- Zumba

# A DREAM WORKOUT

*Tim Edwards’ passion project, an affordable South Side gym, is thriving*



> Tim Edwards instructs a gym member through an exercise at Southside Fitness. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

By | Hanna Horvath  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

### Southside Fitness hopes to provide members an affordable and community-based experience

When Tim Edwards was growing up on the South Side, he always had a passion for fitness and giving back to his community — passions he held onto his entire life. Finally, he has been able to make his dreams a reality: owning a gym, which happens to be in the same shopping plaza where he slept outside as a teenager.

Southside Fitness, a low-cost gym located at 4141 S. Salina St., has grown in popularity since opening in December 2016. On a clear Monday night, the gym is buzzing with chit-chat and the soft thud of barbells hitting the mats. Tall and muscular, Edwards bounces around the orange-and-blue painted space in a Southside Fitness T-shirt, laughing with gym members and providing a helping hand when needed.

Edwards hopes the gym will promote healthy behaviors and bring the community together socially.

“It’s something I’ve always wanted to do, to bring something positive to the neighborhood,” he said. “I felt

such a sense of community growing up and wanted to recreate that here.”

Edwards’ mother passed away when he was 11, leaving him and his five siblings on their own. After trying unsuccessfully to live with his estranged father in North Syracuse, Edwards alternated between sleeping on the street and crashing on friends’ couches.

Every morning, he would wake up early and travel 20 minutes north to arrive at Nesci Produce’s truck terminal by 4:30 a.m. There, he would unload produce. After his two-hour shift, he would take another hour-long bus to attend school at Cicero-North Syracuse High School, where he was able to attend using his father’s address. Edwards said he never missed a day of school — he was motivated to get off the streets.

“When you’re sleeping from place to place and don’t have somewhere to stay, you want to get out of that situation,” he said. “When I was younger, it was just me alone.”

As an adult, Edwards worked as a social worker at St. Joseph’s Hospital Health Center, but never let go of his dream to own his own gym. He began picking up extra minimum-wage shifts at Champions Fitness Center in Cicero to learn about the gym business.

After local banks turned down his applications for a



loan, Edwards, now 42 years old, decided he would take matters into his own hands.

“I said no matter what happens, I said I’m going to open a gym this year,” he said. “And I took all the money, everything I saved up, and I opened the gym.”

Edwards said the space he chose for the gym just happened to be available when he was looking to rent. This location was ideal, he said, because it was home — across the street from where he grew up and in the same plaza where he played and slept during his teenage years.

After he began renting the space, Edwards had just three weeks to prepare before opening the gym. He said he and his family painted the walls and assembled the equipment before the big December opening.

The result? A true “vision turned into a reality,” said Janette Edwards, Tim’s wife. “I could not be more proud of him.”

Membership to Southside Fitness costs \$25 a month and includes access to a variety of classes, such as yoga and Zumba — classes some gym members have never taken before. Edwards also offers personal training sessions. He hopes to attract those who couldn’t afford a gym membership elsewhere, or those who want to work out at a “family-oriented” gym.

“I want to recreate the community I had growing up,” Edwards said.

The atmosphere of the gym conveys that feeling. Janette Edwards sits at the front, greeting members as they enter. Edwards mills around the gym, offering encouraging words. A small area with couches and a coffee maker provides a small gathering space for people to talk and relax.

Regina Glen, a South Side gym member, has been exercising at the gym since it opened. Having grown up on the South Side and then moving to the East Side, the gym “feels like a reunion to me,” she said. Previously, she had been a member at a gym in DeWitt.

“At my old gym, I was just another number, a card to swipe,” she said. “But the atmosphere here — everyone goes above and beyond. It’s a big improvement to the South Side.”

Most members walk to Southside Fitness, Edwards said. Many have never used gym equipment. He said he wants to create a space where guests feel comfortable asking questions about exercise and feel empowered to keep coming back.

Todd Laidlaw, another gym member, didn’t know a lot about exercise before joining Southside Fitness. Now, taking personal training sessions with Edwards, he said he feels “stronger and so much better.”

“People know you here,” he said. “Going to the gym is enjoyable for me.”

In a neighborhood that has a lack of access to healthy resources, a local gym could help encourage healthy behaviors among its residents, said Evan Weiss-

man, assistant professor of food studies at Syracuse University. He said that the opening of a gym on the South Side “is a sign that people are really responding to health inequality in the area, and these efforts are picking up speed.”

Looking ahead, Edwards said he hopes to offer more classes and to continue to engage the community. He said he plans to partner with the Syracuse Department of Parks, Recreation & Youth Programs, headed by Commissioner Lazarus Sims, to teach children from local school districts about exercise and healthy behaviors.

Sims, who has known Edwards for 25 years, described Edwards as a skinny kid out on the basketball court when they first met. Sims is proud of his friend and excited to plan events to get the community involved with fitness.

“He’s a good person, very passionate about what he’s doing, and is really trying to improve our community,” Sims said. “He’s one of us.”

If Edwards has any reservations about his past and sleeping on the street, he doesn’t show it. As he surveys the gym, his smile reveals that he is living his dream, in real time.

“If you work hard enough, anything can happen,” he said. “I’m a product of that. I can see something tangible from my hard work.”



> Tim Edwards’ gym is something he has always wanted to do for the neighborhood. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photo

## BELIEVE IN SYRACUSE

**What:** Believe in Syracuse’s 5th Birthday Party

**When:** 5:30 to 9 p.m. Friday, Jan. 26

**Where:** Landmark Theatre, 362 S. Salina St.

**Details:** This fundraiser offers a taste of all the best local food and beverages of Syracuse and helps Believe in Syracuse advance its mission to do good in the community.

**Cost:** \$10

**For tickets:** Visit [believeinsyracuse.org/tickets](http://believeinsyracuse.org/tickets)

# Wayne Wright

*Nominated by Ed Perry*

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand director*

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

A: It was different. I had a lot of adjusting to do. When you're used to doing things on the fly ... all of the sudden you have to think and plan. Now you have a kid, you can't just jump up and go and do what you want to do. So, I had to learn some patience.

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

A: I have one biological son and another through marriage. Both are very laid-back boys and neither gets into trouble. Malik Wright, 20, is a sportsaholic, and Koby Rivers, 19, is a girlaholic. They both work and enjoy going out with their friends, playing video games and the typical teenage stuff. And I'm fine with that, as long as they are staying out of trouble.

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

A: It was awesome. I had both of my parents in my household. I hung out with my dad a lot, especially as a kid. A lot of the things that my dad was into, I liked, too. He was very outgoing, always fixing stuff and enjoyed fishing. So, I did those things, too. I would fix stuff and go fishing with him all the time. He passed away in February. He loved my son. I'd tell him, 'Dad, I would never get away with this or that when I was younger.' But when it was his grandson, he'd let him get away with so much. He spoiled him to death.

*Q: Is there a saying you remember hearing him say?*

A: He had one saying he'd say all the time: 'Keep on living.' It was his favorite saying, and I didn't know what it meant when I was younger, but I figured it out when I got older. Like sometimes I would say, 'Come on Dad, it's not that expensive, you can buy it for me.' And he'd respond, 'Keep on living.' Or I'd say, 'Dad, you're moving too slow.' He'd say, 'Keep on living.' I'll catch myself saying it every now and then and just start laughing.

*Q: What is your opinion about the stereotype for black fathers?*

A: It's funny you say that. I put a post on Facebook recently concerning that because there is a stereotype that black fathers are absentee dads. But being a barber, I see so many dads who do spend time with their kids — bringing them into the barbershop, but also I see them throughout the community spending time with their kids. So, that stereotype does bother me. Even growing up, the majority of guys I hung out with had both parents. I think the portrayal of such a stereotype in the media is unfair. I know some that grew up without their father, but the portrayal that only black dads are absent is unfair because I know several people that grew up that way who had Caucasian fathers, etc.

*Q: What do you do to combat this?*

A: To address this, I run a mentoring program for males 8 to 18. It's called Project 360 Impact. This is the second year I've been running



**MEET FATHER WAYNE:** Wright, 46, has worked as a barber for 24 years and currently cuts hair at E-Clipz Barbershop. He recently celebrated his 10th wedding anniversary with his wife, Chiara Wright. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

it, and it's doing quite well. We have a great group of boys, and they are having a ball. We meet every Monday at 6 p.m., and my highlight for running this program has been the response from parents. We held an open house back in September, and a couple of the parents stood up and spoke. Just hearing their testimony about how their child has grown while being in this program was the best part for me. ... We talk about everything — bullying, banking, how to tie a tie, go in for a job interview. We're big on think first — that's more so in the lines of, if you're with a couple of guys and they say something to the effect of making a plan to commit a crime, then you need to think before you go any further with them or jump into a car with them. We want the boys to consider the consequences of their actions.

*Q: Any advice for first-time dads?*

A: You have to have patience and need to be supportive. I have a saying in life: 'We are all put on this earth for a purpose.' And I believe any man that doesn't want to positively give back to society is simply not a man. It doesn't have to be monetarily, it can just be helping out.

*Q: What was the best piece of advice you gave your son?*

A: Be careful who you hang with. That has kept him out of a lot of trouble. My father never told me who I couldn't hang with, but he always told me you need to watch so-and-so and be careful around him ... maybe it's not a good idea that you be around him, but if you do it's your choice. And down the road, I'd see that he'd always be right. So, that is the same advice I pass on to my son.

*“Keep on living”*



# COAKLEY HONORED

*Work with community recognized through Grassroots Leadership Award*



> Camille Coakley addresses Syracuse University professor Ken Harper and students in March 2017. | File Photo

By | Lou Carol Franklin  
*Guest columnist*

**This prestigious award is given by the  
Community Foundation of Central New York**

Camille Coakley, born and raised in Syracuse and a former participant in The Leadership Classroom (TLC), is the recipient of the Community Foundation of Central New York's 2017 Grassroots Leadership Award.

She has provided dedication and organizational skills to various entities of service throughout our city. Coakley takes pride in her commitment and initiatives in volunteering with organizations. Her contributions include board participant with the Syracuse Model Neighborhood Corporation, board delegate of the Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today (TNT) Southside, and board member of our own newspaper, The Stand.

"The Community Foundation is pleased to welcome Camille to the select group of individuals who have won the TLC Grassroots Leader of the Year Award," said Dashiell Martinez, senior program associate of the Community Foundation of Central New York.

"She embodies everything that a grassroots leader should be by mobilizing the community and serving as a bridge between stakeholders," Martinez said. "She

empowers those around her and leads by example in her efforts to make the community a better place."

Coakley's ability to engage community resources to bring constructive change to the South Side has provided opportunities for several funding sources that have been allocated for the much-needed repairing and painting upgrades to two of our overpass bridges. Construction of artistic mural designs and signage depicting the pride, prestige, historical values and strength of our community will soon be enjoyed by all in 2018.

Through meetings with community residents, Coakley has developed working task forces addressing earmarking for change within TNT Southside. She has created a comprehensive process involving neighborhood residents, businesses and organizations to change our neighborhood through forward thinking and implementation. She has developed and designed community forums to identify, address and propose a viable five-year plan for the South Side of Syracuse.

Her love and compassion for her neighborhood is undoubtedly why she has been awarded the Community Foundation of Central New York's 2017 Grassroots Leadership Award.

TNT congratulates Camille Coakley.

*Lou Carol Franklin is with TNT Southside's  
communications/media/special events task force*

## HOW TO BE INVOLVED

Camille Coakley invites and encourages all to assess their interest and participate in one or more of the following TNT task forces:

- Beautification
- Crime and safety
- Communications/media/special events
- Economic development
- Grant writing and fund raising
- Health and wellness
- Housing and neighborhood management
- Youth and education
- Voter registration/education

ON THE SIDE

ABOUT THE SERIES

Many people think of the police force as one unit, like a tribe with a single identity. But beyond the blue of the uniform, each police officer is unique. This project takes you inside the lives of the chief and several officers in Syracuse, showing that the force is truly a collection of individuals. Given the country's major news events involving the police over the past few years, and because this is a city where the minority population has very nearly become the majority, we pay special attention to minority officers in this project. They account for just one in every 10 officers, though Syracuse is 45 percent minority. Our project is not intended to be either "positive" or "negative," but rather an honest and powerful look at this complex issue — all with the hope that it improves police and community relations.

Yet while race matters, it is not everything. As the new chief in Ferguson, Missouri, told a reporter on our team, when citizens see police, they don't see individuals or race, "They see you as blue."

VIEW SERIES

Visit [TheyWearBlue.com](http://TheyWearBlue.com) to see all stories and videos in this series

COMMUNITY INTEREST

Chief Fowler made it out of the city where Michael Brown Jr. died



> Frank Fowler was born in Kinloch, Missouri, a city that borders Ferguson. That’s where Michael Brown Jr. was shot and killed by a Ferguson police officer. Today Fowler credits his upbringing there for shaping his career in law enforcement. “I believe that effective change has to start from within,” he said. “Whether it’s within a person or whether it’s within an institution, in order to have effective change, it has to start from within. Because it’s only from within that you have influence.” | Michael Santiago, They Wear Blue Photographer

By | Justin Mattingly  
*They Wear Blue reporter*

In his youth, Syracuse’s police chief accepted that cops might shoot him — and one day they almost did

**K**INLOCH, Mo. — A 19-year-old Frank Fowler woke up on a summer morning in his small room in his family’s small apartment and approached a big dresser with a big mirror.

He’d been living day-by-day, facing the challenges of growing up in an urban city that’s a 20-minute drive from downtown St. Louis.

“The minute you walk out that door in the summertime and the sun hits your face, it’s like ‘What’s next? What’s around the corner?’” Fowler says now. “And it keeps coming and coming and coming and then at night, if you’re fortunate enough to lay down at night to get some sleep, you know that tomorrow you start it all over again.”

As he approached the mirror on this morning, he saw a short black teenager with long hair and bold brown eyes. He looked into those eyes and asked himself a

simple question: “What was the best thing and the worst thing that could happen to me today?”

The answer to both was the same: Die.

“I wasn’t suicidal. I didn’t have a death wish,” Fowler says now. “I didn’t want to die. But if I did die, it was over. I wouldn’t have to carry this anymore.”

Thirty-five years later, Fowler has traded the burden of urban street life for a different challenge as Syracuse’s police chief. Fowler, who is set to retire at the end of 2017, still holds those memories and experiences close to him. They’ve shaped the way he patrolled the streets of Syracuse as an officer and now in his role as the top man of a police force tasked with protecting more than 144,000 people.

“He looks at the whole community. He can relate to the people in the community,” said New York state Assemblywoman Pamela Hunter. “He’s the ‘People’s Police Officer.’”

‘SIR, I’M A KID’

Six years before Fowler had reflected that the best thing that could happen to him was to die, he thought that



indeed might happen at the hands of St. Louis police.

Fowler and some of his friends were playing stick-ball in the narrow parking lot of what is now the Martin Luther King Community Center in the central west end of St. Louis when “Clarence,” a teenager roughly Fowler’s age, “had to get touched” for snitching on Fowler.

The rules of the street required it, Fowler said, and so the 13-year-old punched the bigger Clarence as pay-back. A short time later, Clarence appeared again. This time with backup: the police.

On a visit back home this spring, Fowler said he still remembers exactly how the situation played out. He pointed out where the key players stood that very day.

A white police officer got out of the patrol car with Clarence and walked across the street to confront the group of boys, Fowler included, who remained in the parking lot. A fence separating them, the officer pointed at each boy and said “You come here.” They all played the ignorance card but when the officer got to him, Fowler knew that wouldn’t work.

Young Fowler approached the fence before the officer grabbed him by the shirt with his left hand and drew his gun with his right.

“Anything you think you shouldn’t say to a kid, he says it,” Fowler recalls.

He’d seen people die and realized that the rules of the street, the same ones that governed his retaliation when Clarence snitched, said that if you pull a gun you better use it.

Fowler’s life was before his eyes. The only words he could muster came out: “Sir, I’m a kid.” He repeated the phrase over and over again until the officer released him.

“I don’t know what he saw in me. The only thing I know is that when he pulled that gun on me, I was like ‘holy s---, I’m about to die,’” Fowler said. “There have

only been a few times in my life when I thought death was imminent and that was one of them.”

Growing up in St. Louis county — most of it in the city itself — there was a negative connotation when it came to police, Fowler said. As he reluctantly turned around, fearing his friends had heard his helpless plea that day, he realized that they “were just as shook as I was.”

Fowler is able to laugh about the moment now — he’s always had the “gift of gab” — standing in the exact space where he thought he’d die. Given that a near-death experience was his first true memory of police, Fowler is still amazed that he ended up in law enforcement.

## ‘THERE’S NOTHING HERE’

Fowler, dressed in a gray suit with a purple tie, is driving around his gutted hometown of Kinloch when he gets a call from one of his eight older sisters.

“I’m riding around through depressing Kinloch,” he tells her. “There’s nothing here. Nothing.”

The city used to be a residential area with working-class apartments for labor workers like Fowler’s father. It’s now a ghost town in shambles with a population of a mere 299 people after losing more than 80 percent of its population between 1990 and 2000 because of an FAA noise-abatement program for the St. Louis airport.

Along a side street, wheels, brush and glass litter the middle of the road. A few churches still call Kinloch home but local business is all but gone.

“I knew it was bad but this is even worse than I thought it was,” Fowler said while driving. “This is like a foreign place to me.”

Fowler takes a right hand turn and smiles as he sees the most sacred area of his childhood: Kinloch Park.

The park is one of the few areas of the deserted city that remains the same as when Fowler used to frequent

## PEOPLE’S OFFICER

Frank Fowler stands behind a barrier near the Carrier Dome floor. He’s not in a police uniform or suit and tie, his two most frequent outfits. Instead he has donned a Syracuse hat and jeans — a father in the Dome one October day last year to support his daughter, a backup on the women’s basketball team.

SU Chief Facilities Officer Pete Sala walks by. The two shake hands. Fowler returns to his secluded spot before SU women’s basketball head coach Quentin Hillsman walks by. The two hug.

As players are introduced to a cheering Dome crowd at Orange Madness, Fowler wanders over near a raised stage where he knows his daughter, Brandi, will be. Her name is announced and Fowler captures his youngest child, who wants to be an FBI agent, dancing on video.

The scrimmage finishes and Fowler walks into the backcourt to leave. He doesn’t get far, though, before stopping to pose for a picture.

The chief is always willing to engage with the community.



> “I don’t know what he saw in me. The only thing I know is that when he pulled that gun on me, I was like ‘holy s---, I’m about to die.’ There have only been a few times in my life when I thought death was imminent and that was one of them,” Fowler recalls at the location where, in his youth, a cop pointed a gun at him. | Michael Santiago, They Wear Blue Photographer

ON THE SIDE

SYRACUSE  
CRIME STATS

BURGLARIES

- 2016: 1,030
- 2015: 1,222
- 2014: 1,458
- 2013: 1,809
- 2012: 1,810
- 2011: 1,656
- 2010: 2,102
- 2009: 1,903

ROBBERIES

- 2016: 339
- 2015: 376
- 2014: 408
- 2013: 400
- 2012: 454
- 2011: 388
- 2010: 378
- 2009: 407

the basketball courts and baseball field. Standing at center court of the “good players” court, Fowler recounts the festivals, intense pickup games and old men gambling up in the gazebo. He tells stories of his cousin, who was shot and killed in St. Louis in a dispute over a girl, playing on the court.

When he was 16 years old, Fowler was walking to the court when a homeless man on one of the park’s two picnic tables stopped him. His question: Why did the teenagers consistently call each other n----- when they played?

“Do you think that’s a bad word?” the homeless man asked. Fowler said, “No.”

“Well what if a white person called you that?” Fowler insisted the man didn’t know what he was talking about and walked away. He got about halfway to the court when, he said, he realized the homeless man was right.

“From that day on I’ve never used that word. It hasn’t crossed my lips since that day,” Fowler said.

Much of the swearing came on the court during the pickup games. Fowler, an amateur boxer growing up, came up with a solution to defuse tensions: When players were getting into it during a game, they’d stop play to form a circle at the blue-colored center court. The trash-talking players would box in the circle.

“If you couldn’t box, you kept your mouth shut,” Fowler jokes. “You couldn’t run. You were going to catch some leather.”

*“There are victims on the outside of the crime tape, too.”*

— Frank Fowler

One of the first acts of community policing Fowler saw was in that man-made boxing circle.

Two police officers, one white and one black, walked by the court. Police officers weren’t friendly with him when he was growing up, Fowler said.

“I grew up being black. I understood fully what that meant from an urban cultural perspective,” he said. “I’m honest with myself. I’m not going to bulls--- myself. I know what all that means.”

The white officer started talking back to the players on the court when one of Fowler’s friends offered up: “If you didn’t have the badge and the gun ....” to which the

officer responded, “Well this badge and the gun come off.”

The neighborhood boys formed their routine circle in which the white officer, who turned out to be a former boxer for a local club, won the fight against one of the teens. The circle-creators went crazy in excitement.

### ‘HAS TO START FROM WITHIN’

Becoming a police officer wasn’t exactly the plan for Fowler — it was more an accident.

Shortly after looking himself in the mirror in the family apartment on what is now Rev. Dr. Earl Miller Street, Fowler realized he needed to leave his dead-end job at a rental company that rented out party supplies and hospice equipment. He was driving home from work one day when he saw an Army recruitment sign.

Fowler stopped at the local recruitment center and passed the exams, inspired after the recruiter told him he’d fail as a tactic to spur him on. Fowler saw in Army-distributed material that members of the transportation unit of the Army often ended up in Hawaii, so he joined the military. He’s still never been.

Instead, the Army took him to Europe, the Middle East and Panama, with domestic stations at Fort Dix in New Jersey and Fort Drum, an hour’s drive north from Syracuse and where he’d eventually exit the military.

He was watching television one night when he saw a non-fatal stabbing on the Syracuse news. That stabbing would have been so inconsequential it wouldn’t have made the news back home, Fowler said, so he thought the city would be a safe place to live for him and his wife, whom he met at Fort Drum.

While working in Syracuse, Fowler saw a recruitment pitch for the police department. He went to a police recruiter and filled out the form to apply as a joke for when he returned home on a visit to St. Louis, given his past experiences with cops.

But his competitive instincts took over. He got a call saying he’d passed the test — and he saw an opportunity to have an impact.

“I believe that effective change has to start from within,” Fowler said. “Whether it’s within a person or whether it’s within an institution, in order to have effective change, it has to start from within because it’s only from within that you have influence.”

On a sunny March day working as a counselor at the Elmcrest Children’s Center, he got the notification that he had been accepted into the police academy.

“A person like me becoming a police officer? How does that happen?” Fowler asked.

That same feeling came over Fowler 20 years later in 2009 when he received a phone call from Syracuse Mayor-elect Stephanie Miner. He had reapplied for his position as deputy chief of the police department’s Community Services Bureau, but the call was for a different position: chief of police.





> Chief of Police Frank Fowler, who is the youngest of 11 children, is photographed with various sisters and cousins, along with his oldest living aunt. | Michael Santiago, They Wear Blue Photographer

“You messing with me?” he asked her on the phone. “I never envisioned myself being the chief of police, but sure. I can do the job.”

He jokes that he’s still surprised she chose him. Miner’s press secretary did not respond to multiple requests for an interview for this story.

### ‘... DO SOMETHING DIFFERENT’

Suburban Avenue, a two-lane road with little traffic, connects the city of Kinloch to the city of Ferguson. Kinloch had always been the more residential area before its population dissolved, while Ferguson was the more developed town with businesses and a larger population.

As Fowler drives around Ferguson on the recent visit, he relates locations and businesses back to the shooting of Michael Brown Jr. three years ago.

Brown — an 18-year-old, unarmed black teenager — was shot six times and killed by a white police officer Aug. 9, 2014. Brown’s body remained in the street for four hours after the shooting, which took place shortly after Brown had taken cigarillos from a convenience store and assaulted a store clerk.

After the Brown shooting, thousands of community members — some from Ferguson, others from outside — crowded the streets to protest. The story made international news when the protests turned violent. Protesters threw Molotov cocktails at police, who fired tear gas and rubber bullets and brought in military-style vehicles.

A jury decided not to charge Officer Darren Wilson, the officer who shot Brown, in November 2014. Protests following the jury’s decision spread from Ferguson across the U.S.

Fowler, driving on Canfield Drive, the road where Brown was killed, recalls going into Syracuse Deputy

Police Chief Shawn Broton’s office to tell him that things were going to “get crazy” after police officials in Ferguson revealed what they said were the facts of the case, portraying the police as innocent while still assuring an investigation into the shooting.

“I had no idea it was going to turn out like it turned out,” Fowler said.

When a Syracuse police officer shot and killed a citizen on Father’s Day in 2016, Fowler knew he’d have to react differently than the way his police peers in Ferguson had handled the Brown shooting and subsequent riots.

On Sunday, June 19, 2016, a group of more than 300 people were partying in the James Geddes housing complex when gunfire and fighting erupted. SPD officer Kelsey Francemone responded to the chaotic scene and said she saw Gary Porter, 41, fire a handgun. Francemone shot and killed Porter, and in turn was attacked by people in the crowd. An investigation did confirm Porter was armed, after many in the crowd said he was not, and tensions simmered. Francemone was cleared of wrongdoing by a grand jury in August 2016.

After the shooting, the question hung over Syracuse: Would it be “another Ferguson?”

Fowler reacts to police shooting videos with a “here we go again” mentality. Everyone wants to have a video go viral, he said.

“If you only introduce the sensational part and leave the rest for interpretation, that’s when there’s going to be a lot of discussion generated,” he said.

Fowler tried to encourage patience until all the details of the shooting were released and waited a few days before releasing surveillance footage showing the chaotic shooting scene. He limited police presence at protests and rallies to avoid generating even more anger.

## MORE CRIME STATS

### VALUE OF NARCOTICS SEIZED

- 2016: \$698,468
- 2015: \$713,689
- 2014: \$885,211
- 2013: \$1,128,785
- 2012: \$476,025
- 2011: \$1,865,050
- 2010: \$1,177,537
- 2009: \$312,715

### HOMICIDES

- 2016: 31
- 2015: 23
- 2014: 22
- 2013: 21
- 2012: 14
- 2011: 13
- 2010: 17
- 2009: 20

ON THE SIDE

DIVERSITY  
OF SPD

A **mission** of the Syracuse Police Department under Chief of Police Frank Fowler has been to “**increase minority hiring and retention** in order to more accurately reflect the diversity of the city and to **recruit candidates** that represented a variety of ethnic, cultural and racial populations.”



> Ferguson police Chief Delrish Moss and Syracuse’s Chief of Police Frank Fowler meet for the first time and speak about Moss’ first year as Ferguson’s chief. | Michael Santiago, They Wear Blue Photographer

Instead he had officers ready to be dispatched from headquarters if they were needed. All the protests regarding the shooting ended peacefully.

“I know how the crowd thinks. I have the luxury of thinking like the crowd and I have the luxury of thinking like the police. I know that pain. I’m very familiar with displaced anger. I know you look for the biggest target you can attack,” Fowler said. “Ferguson, Baltimore, they provided a blueprint for how you behave during these riots and it wasn’t healthy. In order for you to avoid that, you had to do something different.”

THE CHALLENGES

There have been challenging cases throughout Fowler’s eight years as chief and 28 with the police department. The father of three considers the case of Maddox Lawrence, a 21-month-old baby who was killed by her father in 2016, one of the toughest during his time as chief, along with the drive-by shooting that killed 20-month-old Rashaad Walker Jr. in 2010.

The challenges, though, extend beyond the cases. There are diversity problems, budget issues and high crime rates that linger.

When Fowler started as chief, he inherited a force that was 94 percent white. In SPD’s 2011 report, the department called its “greatest deficiency” its inability to recruit black officers.

“If you have a police department that’s reflective of the people they serve, the community is going to say that department truly represents them,” Fowler said.

The number of white officers today is just barely under 90 percent, according to SPD’s 2016 report, with the count of black officers at 7.1 percent.

“When you’ve lived in a neighborhood or have connections to a neighborhood, people know that. It makes a big difference to people,” Fowler said. “That doesn’t mean that you can’t do the job if you live somewhere else, I think that because you live in the community, it makes your ability to do the job that much better.”

SPD is in good shape with talent, Fowler said, but not with numbers, down 31 police officers overall. The police department’s budget has been a point of contention during city budget talks, with the Common Council approving a budget that cut \$1 million from SPD’s overtime budget.

Miner and Fowler quickly came out against the approved budget, which Miner vetoed. Council wanted to have a new class of 31 recruits to fill the empty spots on the police roster. The department added 25 in 2016 after 36 officers retired.

“The thought of having a class of new recruits is very attractive. However, to do so at the expense of cutting our overtime budget would have a crippling effect on our current operations,” Fowler said. “Each year, the calls and the demand for police services increases. Our only way of meeting these high demands is through the use of overtime.”

Of the high crime rates in Syracuse, the one that gains the most notoriety is the number of homicides. In 2016, 31 homicides were reported in the city, up from



23 the year before. Also getting public attention: Fowler's son, Frank Fowler Jr., 25, has been arrested multiple times, including July 2016 on felony drug charges. The charges were later reduced to misdemeanor charges.

## COMMUNITY INTEREST AT HEART

When Fowler first started as a police officer in 1989, he'd get out of his patrol car and people would talk about how he didn't know what it was like to live there. He'd laugh in their face.

"What are you laughing at?" they'd ask.

He'd look them square in the eye — "You think I don't know what it's like to live down here?"

They wouldn't respond, realizing the "hood card" couldn't be played on him.

"When I look at people in the toughest of situations, I always look at them and I think about the Bible verse that says, 'There by the grace of God go I.' I can easily see myself in those people's shoes," said Fowler, who lives in the city. "As a police officer, and even more so as the chief, to me those are the people that get special attention from me."

He took the empathy he'd developed directly to the streets doing undercover work for eight and a half years. Those years were the best of his police career, he said.

"It was just like being back out on the streets again," he said, but without the baggage.

"Some people say life being hard in the hood is an exaggeration. They don't know what they're talking about. It's exhausting to navigate the hood each and every day and all the different dynamics that are associated with it."

Before climbing the ladder to chief, he was promoted to sergeant and to deputy chief of the Community Services Bureau. There, he oversaw the police force's relationship with the community.

"Every step that he's taken with Syracuse police, right up to the rank of chief of police, he's never forgotten that connection with the community," said Syracuse University Chief Law Enforcement Officer Tony Callisto, who took over as the university chief of public safety when Fowler was with the Community Services Bureau. "He was ahead of his time when it comes to understanding the needs of the community and community policing, and he's the real deal. The focus on the community is and always has been what makes Frank Fowler an outstanding police officer and police chief."

He still carries those communication skills, frequently talking to community members who want his ear. Before boarding his flight to St. Louis for the trip home this spring, Fowler took a minute to talk to a man who recognized him. Outside one of his childhood apartments in Kinloch, he chatted up two women who worked at a church across the street. Fowler has addressed concerned SU parents, too.

Said Steve Thompson, a former police chief who now chairs the public safety committee on the Common Council: "He's got the community interest at heart."

## VICTIMS ON THE OUTSIDE

Fowler still remembers responding to the scene of a shooting as a deputy chief, shocked to see what was happening. A woman lay on the sidewalk, weeping. No one paid attention, stepping over her to continue their work.

"There are victims on the outside of the crime tape, too," Fowler says now.

Fowler helped create the Trauma Response Team, a group of people dispatched to scenes of violent crimes, specifically shootings, to help people who aren't direct victims of the incidents. For Fowler, seeing people grieve at the scene of a shooting hits home.

He got out of school in St. Louis one day and walked out with some friends, including "Toby," one of his best friends with a large afro. Fowler forgot something in his locker so he ran back inside the school. He got back to the top of the steps when he heard screaming coming from the street corner and saw people standing in a circle.

"That afro was missing," he said. "My heart just went into my throat."

Fowler could tell, he said, that the loudest scream was coming from Toby's sister. He pushed through the circle of teenagers to see his best friend dead on the ground "with half his face missing," shot at point-blank with a shotgun.

"That's St. Louis," Fowler said.

The killing remains unsolved.

## BLUE BLOODS

In a petite brick home in St. Louis, a large group of Fowler's extended family gathered to welcome the chief home. Children played and danced in the backyard while inside, surrounded by family pictures, the adults caught up.

Just before supper, Fowler's oldest brother, Willie Knox, gathered everyone inside to pray.

"We thank you for blessing the police and those who sacrifice for us and allowing them to go home and spend time with their family, Lord," Knox said.

Pictures of Fowler hang in his brother's house, with Fowler's swearing-in ceremony as chief and a visit to the White House prominent among them.

"We're all so proud of him," Knox said.

Fowler will have more time to spend with his family after he retires at the end of the year, the end to a long career in law enforcement. He'll have more time to watch his favorite TV show, "Blue Bloods," a CBS show on a family of police officers. His nighttime reading — on an iPad rather than hard copy — will be more peaceful. A trip to Hawaii, something he never got with the Army, is on his retirement bucket list.

## FERGUSON CHIEF

"To be a black and be a police officer is to live inside and outside of two worlds," said Ferguson police Chief Delrish Moss. "Black people don't see you all the time as black because you're a police officer. They see you as blue."

In 2015, Ferguson was looking for a police chief, and when a major casualty asked a group of Miami cops who would apply, those in the room laughed. Nobody wanted to go into a situation where police-community relations were on thin ice after the dramatic police shooting of Michael Brown sparked riots and heavy media coverage.

Two days later, Moss, who was born and raised in Miami, filled out an application for the top position. Next, he found himself among the finalists for the job even though he'd never served as a police chief — his highest rank being major. Then one morning he woke up to a deluge of phone calls and text messages. Reporters called from as far away as England seeking confirmation from the new chief. The one problem: He hadn't been told yet that he got the job ...

**Read the full story**  
on how Moss became the Ferguson chief at  
[TheyWearBlue.com](http://TheyWearBlue.com)

# AFRICAN AMERICANS AND STROKE RISK



**The National Stroke Association** reports that African Americans are twice as likely to die from stroke as Caucasians. The statistics are staggering — African Americans are affected by stroke more often than any other group. **Know your risk.**

## STROKE RISK FACTORS

- **HIGH BLOOD PRESSURE:** It's the #1 cause of stroke. Regularly monitor your blood pressure and always take prescribed medication.
- **DIABETES:** Control your diabetes with proper diet, exercise and medication.
- **OBESITY:** Being just 20 pounds overweight significantly increases your risk of a stroke or heart disease.
- **SMOKING:** Smoking increases your risk of stroke by two to three times.
- **MINI-STROKES (TIAS OR TRANSIENT ISCHEMIC ATTACKS):** When stroke symptoms such as confusion, slurred speech or loss of balance appear and disappear, call 9-1-1. You may be able to prevent a major stroke.

**A STROKE IS A BRAIN EMERGENCY.**  
**IF YOU SUSPECT A STROKE,**  
**CALL 911 AND**  
**ASK FOR UPSTATE.**



**UPSTATE**  
COMPREHENSIVE STROKE CENTER