

the **Stand** south side news

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Syracuse, NY

FEBRUARY 2018 Issue 64 **FREE**

SOUTH AFRICA TRIP

Columnist Reggie Seigler shares 'music lessons' from his visit to Grahamstown

forest learning

A mother, dissatisfied with educational norms, starts her own outdoor preschool

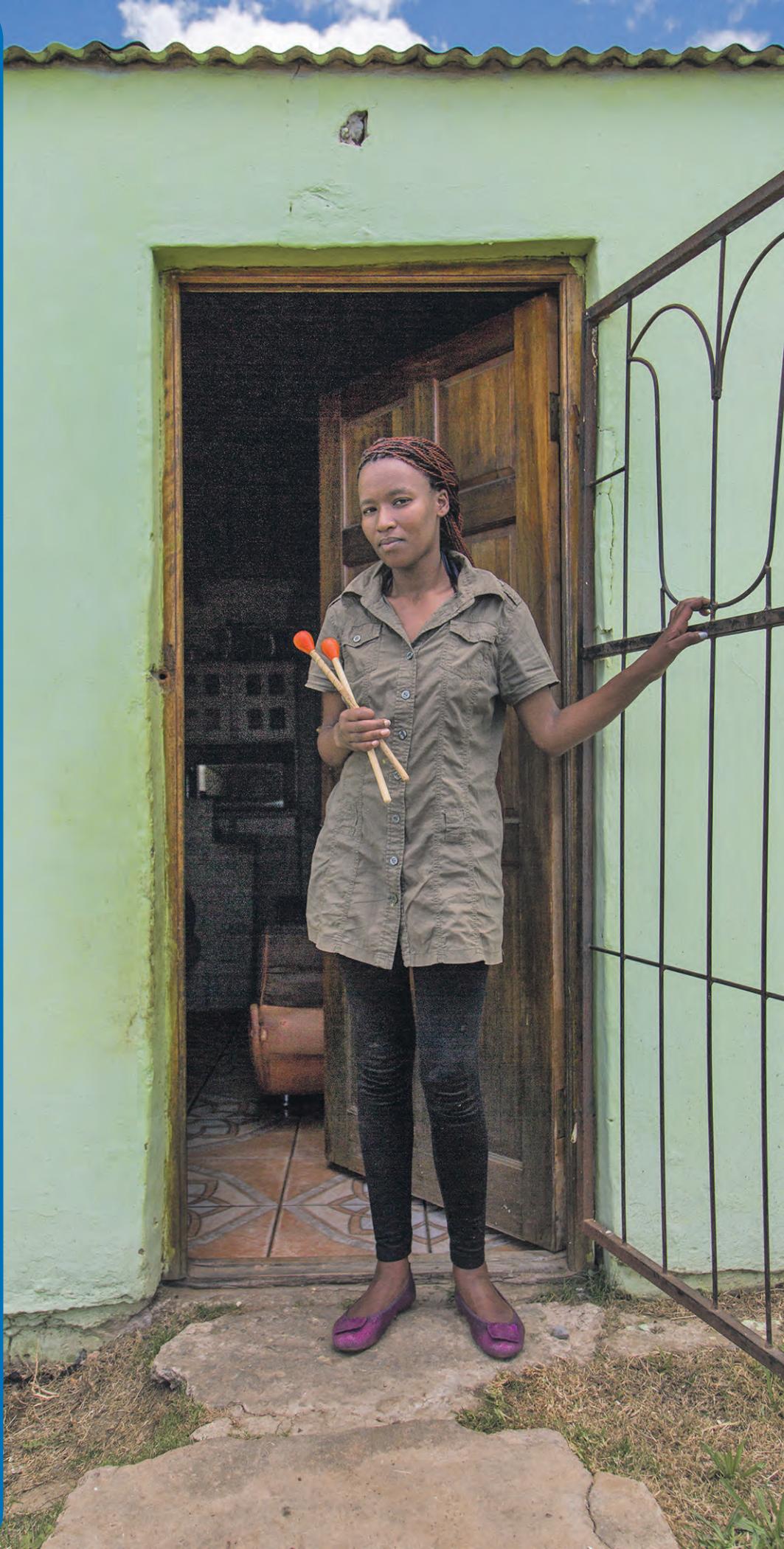
Emily Quinones' Hispanic roots play role in her position on mostly white, male force

An officer standout

LIBRARY ART EXHIBITION

Black history events

Find out what to do, where to go to celebrate this month



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Stand

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SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH

DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM, BEA
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■ Cover photography by Conner Lee of Zandile Kila, a musician in South Africa

CALENDAR | FEBRUARY

What: "A Raisin in the Sun"

When: Opens Feb. 21 and continues through March 11. Performances are: 2 p.m. Sundays (additional performance at 7 p.m. on Feb. 25 only); 7:30 p.m. Tuesday, March 6; 7:30 p.m. Wednesdays (additional performance at 2 p.m. on Feb. 28 only); 7:30 p.m. Thursdays; 8 p.m. Fridays; 3 and 8 p.m. Saturdays

Where: Syracuse Stage, 820 E. Genesee St.

Details: This play is by Lorraine Hansberry and made its debut on Broadway in 1959. It tells the story of a black family's experience living on Chicago's South Side as the members attempt to better themselves with an insurance payout after the death of the father. The title comes from the poem "Harlem" by Langston Hughes.

Cost: \$20 to \$50

More info: Visit syracusestage.org

What: The 8th annual World InterFaith Harmony Assembly

When: 6:30 to 8 p.m. Monday, Feb. 5

Where: Congregation Beth Sholom-Chevra Shas, 18 Patsy Lane, Jamesville

Details: Sponsored by InterFaith Works of Central New York and Women Transcending Boundaries, this event seeks to affirm that mutual understanding and interfaith dialogue constitute important dimensions of a culture of peace.

Cost: Free

More info: Contact World InterFaith Harmony Assembly Committee Chair Danya Wellmon at wellmond@msn.com

Sometimes you end up traveling miles to get to know someone who's been working and living just a few blocks away.

Such was the case over the recent winter break for me when I traveled with a team of students from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University to Grahamstown, South Africa, for a two-week visit. Our team of eight students and two teachers also included Reggie Seigler, a board member of The Stand who shares some of his own experiences on the trip in this issue, plus six others from the city high school system.

It's 8,341.15 miles from Syracuse to Grahamstown, according to the website Distance Between Cities. Even traveling at more than 500 miles an hour, it takes about 17 hours by air to get there. The trek from the SU campus to ITC, the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, which is home to our high school contingent on the trip? About a mile or so, or .00011989 of the distance to Grahamstown.

Let's back up.

I organized and led an SU team of student journalists that visited Grahamstown in 2010, also over winter break, to work on storytelling skills. We had such a good time, and such a productive time, that the only question was: "When will we go back?" This is a complicated endeavor to arrange, but the pieces finally came together for a return trip. We invited the Syracuse City School District to send a group of a half-dozen with us, and I was pleased when administrators said "yes." They chose Assistant Superintendent Anthony Davis, who is in charge of all the high schools; social studies teacher Kathleen Argus; and four ITC high school students with an interest in storytelling — mainly through photography.

For years, The Stand has worked off and on with ITC students in that school's media track, and the Newhouse School hosted a group for "ITC Day" two years ago. That six-hour "get to know you" visit was exceeded considerably by our two-week stay in Grahamstown, a city we chose because it is so much like Syracuse. And it has a well-known journalism school at Rhodes University that, like SU, is situated on a hill.

Much of our work in Grahamstown was in the township where the black population is concentrated (and segregated) on the side of the city opposite from Rhodes. Each of the four ITC high-schoolers was paired with a township student participating in a local nonprofit called Inkululeko ("Freedom") that was created to help township teens do better in classes.

Getting to know — and to watch — the high school group was a special treat, including a visit they made to the mud-and-metal home that one of our local guides built for himself and his girlfriend in six days. Zukisani Lamani got tired of waiting for a government-subsidized home that had been promised, so he built his own. No electricity, no running water, and no indoor plumbing of any kind. It was a home he was proud of, as he well should be.

We arranged a number of activities to bring the eight ITC-Inkululeko teens together, but it was a spontaneous round of UNO, the card game, that bridged the gap best.

There's a lesson there, too. It works, but you don't have to go halfway around the world to meet someone, and you don't have to arrange special "get to know you" events to make things happen.

This issue of The Stand includes short essays from each of the four ITC students, and portraits of them with their Inkululeko partners.

The theme of our two Grahamstown trips has been that no matter where you go — across town or around the globe — you'll find that people are more alike than different.

Seems the ITC group is on board with that, too.

Steve Davis
Founder of The Stand



FELLOWSHIP AWARDED

Ashley Kang, director of The Stand, has been chosen as one of 33 people to be a 2018 John Jay/Harry Frank Guggenheim & Quattrone Reporting Fellow.

The fellowship is aimed at encouraging and promoting top-quality journalism on criminal justice. Fellows were selected from a wide pool of applicants based on editors' recommendations and on investigative reporting projects. Kang will attend the 13th Annual Harry Frank Guggenheim Symposium on Crime in America, to be held in New York City on Feb. 15-16. Then she will report and write an in-depth story focused on the South Side.

Kang has been director of The South Side Newspaper Project since 2009. She contributes articles and coordinates student and community writers.

In 2017, the Syracuse Press Club awarded Kang second place for a News/Features series on Neighborhood Trauma. Stories included "Surviving Trauma" and "Street Addiction."

SPECIAL THANKS

Thank you to the Gifford Foundation for contributing \$5,000 toward expenses of the high-schoolers from Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central participating in our trip to Grahamstown, South Africa. The Stand also awarded a \$1,000 scholarship to each student. — Steve Davis

ON THE SIDE FEBRUARY ART EXHIBIT

Landscapes: Animated Panoramas by Derrick Maitland will be on display all month. This collection consists of captivating **oil paintings** of landscapes, waterfalls, flowers, animals, birds and nature, which together aim to unleash energy that calms the inner self. Maitland says art has always been his love right from childhood in his native Kingston, Jamaica.

IF YOU GO:

What: Artist Reception

When: 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 10

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

Details: Meet the artist, Derrick Maitland, whose work will be on display throughout February. Light refreshments will be served.

A PLACE FOR ART

Beauchamp library hosts local art exhibitions to inspire creative minds

By | Katelyn Faubel
The Stand reporter

Display of artwork described as popular, especially when artist receptions are held

Ever since philanthropist Andrew Carnegie built more than 2,500 of them a century ago, libraries — especially public libraries — have served as vital community centers, where children can go for help with schoolwork and adults can seek information to find jobs.

Beauchamp Branch Library, a South Side stalwart at 2111 S. Salina St., goes a step further, providing exhibition space for local artists — a vibrant visual counterpoint to the books, papers and personal computer screens available in the main room.

For the past 10 years, Beauchamp has run regular displays of work by Syracuse artists, giving public exposure to painters and photographers and, perhaps, inspiration to creative-minded patrons who might feel inclined to try their hand at such work themselves.

Paschal Ugoji, a Beauchamp librarian, has run the art exhibit program since he joined the library in 2008. The library, he said, focuses on spreading information and literacy in the community. “People come in and interact and get whatever they want,” Ugoji said. What they want includes space to see art.

This winter, Ugoji invited local painter Suzanne Masters to display her colorful works in Beauchamp’s main room. Ugoji said he has known Masters for several years and thought her acrylic work in eye-catching colors was impressive for a public display.

Masters, a Syracuse University alumna, said she has been an after-school art teacher and also has presented art workshops for children at Beauchamp. “It’s just whatever comes up, wherever there’s a need,” she said, referring to her work with children. “If somebody tells me about it and I can get in there, I’ll do it.”

Masters works in a style called abstract expressionism, in which bold colors and unusual shapes dominate. The Museum of Modern Art in New York, which dates the style to the 1940s, also calls it “action painting.”

Ugoji, taking the role of art critic in a recent interview, described Masters’ work “as visually attractive, very creative.”

Ugoji said artwork at the library is popular, especially when Beauchamp holds receptions to introduce a local artist. “People bring their friends to see what’s on display,” he said.



> Artist Suzanne Masters has offered Henna workshops to youth at Beauchamp Branch Library in the past. She says she enjoys teaching that art has value. | File Photo

Emily Duke, associate professor of transmedia studies at Syracuse University, said when the work of local artists is displayed in public spaces such as coffee shops or libraries, the event is often more about community building — “not necessarily about the fame and glamour with the art world.”

Duke said schools should teach art so young people learn how to use it as a kind of “cultural capital,” which they can draw from lifelong.

“I think it’s a great thing to put art in public spaces,” Duke said.

Masters said she enjoys teaching people that all art has value. Children and adults can find satisfaction in their work, enough to say, “Yes, there’s good stuff in me,” Masters said. “We need more of that in Syracuse.”

CONTROLLING LEAD

Group seeks to ensure proper testing with new laws, education

By | Lindsey Sabado
Staff reporter

Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition attempts to hold landlords accountable to tenants

In a city where 91 percent of homes were built before lead-based paint was outlawed, community members have come together to combat a crisis that local and state government has yet to resolve.

On Jan. 8, roughly 40 people gathered for the Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition's second meeting, led by Joseph Driscoll, Uplift Syracuse founder and newly elected District 5 Common Council representative.

That evening's conversation focused on legislative reform. The lead coalition aims to update the city's rental registry ordinance, pass lead-specific legislation and find a way to add code violation fines to city taxes.

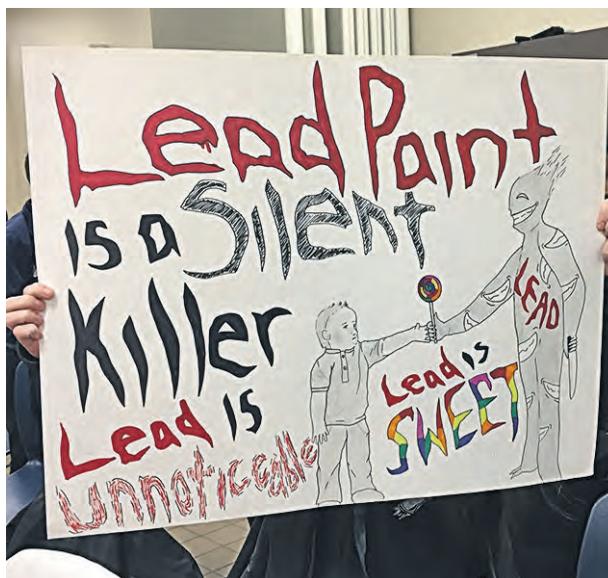
These laws would require and enforce proper lead testing for rental dwellings, and keep landlords accountable to their tenants. Driscoll compared the home rental business to owning and operating a restaurant. If health inspectors found open pots of hot mercury in a restaurant kitchen, there would be consequences, he said. The presence of lead should be met with the same urgency.

"At the end of the day, you can't poison people in their homes and use it as a business model," he said.

The current system of testing for and reporting lead violations is too slow, Driscoll said. Currently, it can take the courts a year to process a lead violation, but Driscoll said in that year, the damage is already done to babies and children during important developmental stages.

But one key decision could lead to more effective services. On Dec. 18, the Common Council passed legislation allowing for the creation of a Municipal Violations Bureau, said Stephanie Pasquale, commissioner of Syracuse's Department of Neighborhood Business and Development. The bureau can expedite the consequences for landlords by ticketing them directly for lead violations. This is important for the issue of lead poisoning, which puts babies and children at the highest risk, Driscoll said.

Yet the Municipal Violations Bureau alone cannot mitigate the city's lead-poisoning problem. Tickets will make a difference only if city inspectors have the right to conduct interior inspections, the Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition determined. First and foremost, the coalition plans to advocate for a rental registry that would allow for interior inspections of rental properties, including one- and two-family dwellings. The coalition also wants lead-



> This sign was made by student Tien Phao, who wants to create pamphlets in multiple languages to warn residents about lead poisoning. | Lindsey Sabado, Staff Photo

specific legislation, which would mandate lead inspections and remediation for homes where lead is present.

The coalition hopes that the Municipal Violations Bureau will be able to provide services to properties owned by delinquent landlords not paying violation tickets, Driscoll said. Then, unpaid fines can legally be added to their tax roll.

Legislation regarding a rental registry was previously written and denied by the Common Council. Driscoll, now a councilman, plans to bring forward the proposal once again.

In the meantime, the coalition will focus on education and advocacy. For example, the coalition plans to create a lead crisis hotline that anyone could call to learn about local services addressing lead.

"We're assessing what services are already out there, and who's working on this problem," Driscoll said. "We're trying to get them all to work more cohesively."

Katie Bronson, with the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative, attended the meeting and shared that the national nonprofit has conducted research regarding lead in Syracuse, and is currently developing an anti-lead action plan.

"The GHHI study projected that for every dollar invested in lead remediation or abatement, we get a return of anywhere between \$17 to \$200," Driscoll said.

But the long-term benefits of confronting child lead poisoning reaches far beyond financial return.

"How do you quantify a school system that doesn't have a high suspension rate?" asked Driscoll. "How do you quantify kids that don't have behavioral problems? How do you quantify losing IQ points and having a whole generation of kids struggling with that problem?"

MEETING MEMBERS

Those who participated in the Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition's second meeting:

- Syracuse's director of the Division of Code Enforcement
- Coordinator of the Onondaga County Lead Poisoning Control Program
- A Legal Services of Central New York staff member
- An employee in the District Attorney's office
- Common Council president

They chose to focus efforts on:

- Legislative reform
- Educating the public on the risks of lead poisoning

NEED TO KNOW

The Syracuse Lead Prevention Coalition's next meeting will be held at 6 p.m. Monday, Feb. 12, at the Ironworkers Local Union, 500 W. Genesee St. A representative from the Onondaga County Health Department and from the Green & Healthy Homes Initiative will share which lead-related resources each offers.

Anyone interested in getting involved can attend the next coalition meeting or contact Joseph Driscoll at joedriscoll315@gmail.com

BETTER LIVING

The following health and wellness events are also being offered in honor of Black History Month at Beauchamp Branch Library, located at 2111 S. Salina St.

- **Creating Black Healing Spaces**, 5:30 to 6:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 15

A presentation on healing techniques, guided meditation, discussion and open floor for grievances as well as success stories in operating in the current tense political and racial climate.

- **Disaster Preparedness Workshop**, 10 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 17

Learn disaster preparedness for you and your family. Participants will receive a starter disaster preparedness kit and additional resources.

- **Peaceful Fists Karate Demonstration**, open to adults and school-age children, 6 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 20

Join Master Roland Sims for a martial arts demonstration and discover how to empower yourself with time-honored, effective survival, self-defense, evasion, resistance and escape strategies.

More online: To see a full listing of events, visit mysouthsidestand.com/events

COMMUNITY EVENTS

Syracuse will honor black history through jazz performances, films



> Music instructor Joan Hillsman will visit Beauchamp Branch Library on Feb. 24 to present a program featuring gospel, African-American spiritual music, poetry and more. | File Photo

WHAT: BLACK HISTORY MONTH MURAL

WHEN: 5:30 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 6

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

DETAILS: The library will kick off its monthlong Black History Celebration by creating a children's community mural inspired by Dr. Martin Luther King. This will be an ongoing mural that can be added to all month long.

COST: Free and open to all ages

MORE INFO.: Call (315) 435-3395

WHAT: BLACK HISTORY THROUGH FILM

WHEN: 5 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 6

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

DETAILS: Screening of "The Pursuit of Happiness" starring Will Smith. This tale is inspired by the true story of Chris Gardner, a San Francisco salesman who

struggles to build a future for himself and his 5-year-old son Christopher (Jaden Smith). When his girlfriend Linda (Thandie Newton) walks out, Chris is left to raise Christopher on his own. With self-confidence and the love and trust of his son, Chris rises above his obstacles to become a Wall Street legend and millionaire.

COST: Free and open to all ages

MORE INFO.: Call (315) 435-3395

WHAT: HOLISTICSUPERNATURAL POP-UP VEGAN CAFE: DINNER AND LEARN SERIES

WHEN: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Wednesdays, Feb. 7, 21, 28 and March 7

WHERE: South Side Innovation Center, 2610 S. Salina St.

DETAILS: In honor of Black History and Heart Health Month, Holisticsupernatural will offer Wellness

Wednesdays. This four-week dinner and learn series will explore the African diet and heart disease; compare vegetarian and vegan; explain how to create a balanced, plant-based meal and how to maintain proper gut health; and discuss how to fight inflammation.

COST: \$15 per session or \$40 for all four

MORE INFO.: For tickets, visit Eventbrite and search for Holisticsupernatural

WHAT: HANDS-ON DRUMMING

WHEN: 10 to 11 a.m. Saturday, Feb. 10

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

DETAILS: Master Drummer John Heard will lead an interactive rhythm-based session to empower, focus and motivate young people of all ages.

COST: Free

MORE INFO.: Call the library at (315) 435-3395

WHAT: A COMMUNITY READING WITH THE PINKNEY FAMILY

WHEN: 2 to 3 p.m. Friday, Feb. 16

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

DETAILS: The Pinkney family is unique in African-American children's literature. How has this come about? What is there about this family that led to children's books becoming the family business? Join Marcelle Haddix, event host and professor of reading and language arts at the School of Education at Syracuse University, to find out the answers. Event is aimed at young children, mothers, homeschoolers and community members.

COST: Free

MORE INFO.: Call the library at (315) 435-3395

WHAT: JAZZ @ SITRUS

WHEN: 6 to 9 p.m. Friday, Feb. 16

WHERE: Sheraton Syracuse University, Hotel & Conference Center, 801 University Ave.

DETAILS: Hosted by Joined Artists, Musicians & Singers, Inc. (JAMS), Dr. Alphonso Sanders, director of the BB King Recording Studio and chair of the Fine Arts Department at Mississippi Valley State University, will perform with the Donna Alford JaSSBand on saxophone, trumpet and vocals. The evening will include a short awards ceremony to acknowledge active community members.

ADMISSION: Free

MORE INFO.: Visit cnyjazz.org/jazzsitrus/

WHAT: SYRACUSE BLACK EXPO'S UNITY DAY

WHEN: Noon to 5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 17

WHERE: Syracuse Community Connections, 401 South Ave.

DETAILS: Syracuse Black Expo celebrates cultural excellence by providing a venue to build a financial community to generate more businesses, create jobs and build a safe neighborhood. Event will feature shopping, including T-shirts, jewelry, art, food and more.

COST: Free entry

MORE INFO.: Call (315) 878-2763

WHAT: ADINKRA SYMBOLS

WHEN: 2 to 4 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 20

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

DETAILS: An "adinkra" is a visual symbol. This traditional African textile dates back to the 1800s. Adinkra symbols were once printed on fabric in a grid pattern using a carved gourd. Attendees will create their own version of adinkra symbols by making the stamps out of a variety of craft materials.

COST: Free

MORE INFO.: Call the library at (315) 435-3395

WHAT: LITERACY THROUGH MUSIC: READ, WRITE AND PERFORM

WHEN: 2:30 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 24

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

DETAILS: Joan Hillsman will present and perform with the Syracuse Chapter Gospel Music Workshop of America. Event will feature vocal music performance, poetry and dance, including African-American traditional music — gospel, spiritual and others.

COST: Free

MORE INFO.: Call the library at (315) 435-3395

WHAT: BLACK HISTORY MONTH WITH ERIC DARIUS & TRACY HAMLIN

WHEN: Doors open at 4 p.m. with show 5 to 8 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 25

WHERE: Marriott Syracuse Downtown, 100 E Onondaga St.

DETAILS: Eric Darius, of L.A., and Philadelphia's Tracy Hamlin perform contemporary jazz.

TICKETS: \$35 in advance, \$40 at the door

MORE INFO.: For tickets, visit cnyjazz.org or call (315) 479-5299

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.

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Alex Morris

Nominated by Valerie Hill, director of community services at Syracuse Community Connections



MEET FATHER ALEX: Morris, 32, works as a gas mechanic with National Grid and has one daughter, Mia, 14. The two often volunteer at Syracuse Community Connections and with their church, the Abundant Life Christian Center, during its Reach Saturdays. These are events the church conducts every other month in which members distribute food to the hungry, participate in a community cleanup or visit with the elderly. Morris got engaged to Pam Harrison on Dec. 8, 2017. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

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

A: When I first became a father, I had just turned 18, was still in high school and was terrified. I had no idea what I was doing. I was just a kid myself. I would learn that it didn't matter how old you were ... you would figure it out through trial and error. So at first I was terrified, but eventually it became something that was really easy and fun to do.

Q: *Now you have a teenager, how scary is that?*

A: It's scary in the sense that technology nowadays is so vital to these kids' upbringing. And whether you like it or not, it's there and the kid probably knows how to utilize it better than the parent. And with social media, there's so much I don't know; I don't even use social media, but my daughter does. You hear these horror stories ... so I believe it's all about communication. I try and talk to her about everything. And in the sense of me being younger, that's a plus for our communication because I think it might be a little easier to talk to each other, in the sense

that I'm not so far removed from her generation. We talk a lot and communicate as much as we can, and she gives me a lot of reason to trust her.

Q: What else can you share about your daughter?

A: Mia is definitely outgoing. She's on the honor roll every quarter and loves to read — not just books, but she will read entire series. She has an awesome imagination, which I think helps her have fun even in the most stressful of times because she is able to kind of go into another world if she needs to. She's very creative, artistic and overall a very positive person.

that's where the stereotype comes from. We can't fix everything as far as we can't make every dad take care of their kids, but I feel like as individuals we can help to change the perception of the lack of fathers in the black community. And it's not easy. Honestly, as much as it sucks, I understand sometimes why guys feel that the system is against them, that it's too hard or they have to play by someone else's rules. For example, they can only see the kid when the mom lets them. But we played a part in bringing that kid into this world, so it's not up to you to say you don't want a part of this. As black fathers, I think we have to look inside ourselves to change the system, so I've got my fingers crossed.

“You owe it to your child not to ever give up”

Q: What was your relationship like with your father?

A: My dad was one of the nicest people I knew. Just seeing how he interacted with strangers, peers at my school, other adults and family, he just set the tone for how I would handle myself in certain situations. Again he was super nice, super professional, always willing to compromise. Just always doing the right thing. And I think that's where I get it from.

Q: Did he have a saying?

A: One of the things that I remember that always stuck out was: “Celebrate success, even when it's not your own.” And it's just one of those things that when you're younger you don't really understand ... like why would I be happy for someone else ... especially if you're in a competition? But now it's absolutely something I try and tell Mia. The older I get, the more I realize he was trying to teach me the secret to happiness, the secret to success, to be happy even when it's not about you.

Q: As a father, is there anything that you do that would surprise people?

A: That I speak frankly about the realities of sex with my daughter. I think it's important that she understand the consequences, be aware of peer pressure and be prepared. This way she can make the right decision when it is the right time. It is up to you as a parent to arm them with the right knowledge. I trust her. Even though I tell her she doesn't need a boyfriend right now, I have to face the reality. So, I let her know she is her own person and can make her own decisions. We have a lot of open conversations because I want her to know she can talk to me about anything, anytime.

Q: What is your opinion about commonly held stereotypes about black fathers?

A: I think it's unfortunate that there is that stereotype that a lot of black dads aren't there. But there's a problem and

Q: Can you elaborate?

A: I have a lot of fathers in my circle. The difference is a lot of them have younger kids. Because of my upbringing and my presence in the community, I have friends who are white who are dads and I have friends who are black who are fathers, so I am able to see both sides. In my circle, I only see positive. I know dads right here in the city that would do anything for their kids, and they are there all the time. On the other hand, I see dads in the white community who are in the same situation and they don't always do the right thing. So I'm in a position where I get to see both sides.

Q: Any advice for first-time dads?

A: No matter how hard it seems — or impossible it seems — you owe it to your child not to ever give up. Even if it's one weekend a month, supervised — do it. Do what you can.

Q: What has been a favorite tradition?

A: One thing that is special for us, we do Christmas a lot different at my house. We go over the top with decorations, but on Christmas Day, we do not exchange gifts. Over the years I have realized — just within my family — how meaningless those material gifts can be. So we decided to do things for each other in the form of gifts without all the materialist stuff. On Christmas Day, together we might bring groceries to someone less fortunate. We might go shovel off someone's driveway who is a little older and has trouble doing it. The goal is to do something that is helpful for someone, something that you can't go into a store and buy. That's what we've been doing for the past few years.

Q: Final thoughts?

A: It's a goal of mine for Mia to grow up knowing that she was loved and to help the less fortunate in any way that she can.

A BRIEF HISTORY

The concept of **forest schools** originated in Europe in the 1800s.

According to the Forest School Association, the schools can be traced back to Johann Heinrich Pestalozzi, a Swiss education reformer whose philosophy was “**learning by head, hand and heart.**” Pestalozzi believed children learned best when their senses were engaged.

Over the next two centuries, the concept of **outdoor learning** evolved into the practices that are common across Scandinavia, and in recent years, the United Kingdom. In the United States, **288 nature-based preschools** have joined the North American Association for Environmental Education.

As Casey Johnson developed **Creatures in the Wild**, she researched and drew inspiration from these existing learning centers.

CONTACT INFO

Anyone interested in volunteering, enrolling their children or learning more about the forest preschool can contact Casey Johnson at caseyofcreatures@gmail.com or like the Creatures in the Wild Facebook page

A WILD EDUCATION

Local mother starts outdoor preschool to foster creativity



> *Creatures in the Wild* founder Casey Johnson and co-teacher Zach Ashbrook lead an outdoor class of preschoolers in a forest preserve in Manlius on an autumn day last year. | Lindsey Sabado, Staff Photo

By | Lindsey Sabado
Staff reporter

Casey Johnson, inspired by the 2016 election, envisions affordable environmental education

A soft rain fell over Manlius one October morning. Under the cover of cedar trees, Casey Johnson sat around the Sacred Circle shielded from the precipitation and wind. Preschool students sat on flat rocks on the forest floor, tearing through their afternoon snacks in what other schools might call “circle time.” At *Creatures in the Wild*, the Sacred Circle is a place for Johnson, the preschool’s founder, to talk with students and help them connect to the environment.

In November 2016, Johnson acted on impulse when she decided to start her own forest school. When Donald Trump won the presidential election, Johnson could not sit still knowing her 6-year-old son, Ivan, would go through the public education system under the leadership of Trump. Ivan is on the autism spectrum and gifted, Johnson said. He needs to learn constantly and through sensory experiences. Ivan had become obsessed with studying the election, and felt disappointed with its results.

The very next day after the election, Johnson vowed to bring to her community exactly what her son, and countless other students, needed, she said. Trump won the election partially because he and his supporters don’t care about the Earth, and don’t care about one another, Johnson said. She wanted to create a school that celebrated nature, and worked outside the realm of what she feels are wealthy, out-of-touch bureaucrats.

When the president announced his pick for U.S. Secretary of Education, it further inspired Johnson.

“Betsy (DeVos) pulled in with her completely unexperienced, terrifying opinions,” said Johnson, referring to her own view of how DeVos treats the education system like a business.

In the time since the election, Johnson has made her vision a reality. She now operates *Creatures in the Wild*, a completely outdoor preschool that meets three times a week in the woods of the Central New York Land Trust’s Woodchuck Hill Field and Forest Preserve in Manlius. Rain or shine or 20 degrees out, Johnson and her team take a class of about nine students into the forest for free play and nature-based learning. The school has met outdoors through this winter season, the only exception being days the public-school district canceled, and two

days so cold that the preschool decided to meet indoors at a public library.

With *Creatures in the Wild* drawing interest from parents in the community, Johnson has the long-term goal of opening a private K-12 forest school within the city of Syracuse. Johnson said she envisions the school as affordable and accessible, and said she hopes to implement a sliding tuition scale so lower-income students pay less. It would be located in a natural space within the city of Syracuse, and include at least 25 percent inner-city students.

Back in October, Johnson described these plans with an excited intensity. Her breath struggled to keep up with her words that flowed naturally with bold passion. She talked fast, and worked fast. In less than a year, Johnson's beliefs, transformed by anger and frustration with politics, grew into a fully functioning preschool. And by the way — Johnson, already a mother of two, worked at her family's dog-grooming business and was "bonkers pregnant" at the time, she said. Johnson has since given birth to a son, and is on maternity leave.

Johnson's philosophy of education strays from the typical trajectory of public school learning. The adolescent brain develops from doing things, Johnson said. Rather than listening to long lessons and completing paperwork, K-12 forest school students will focus on play-based and project-based learning, she said, and multiple school subjects will be intertwined in each task.

Unlike traditional schools, the school Johnson is proposing won't have grade levels. Teachers will group together students within roughly three years of age of one another. Since groupmates will be at different points in their educational development, a system of mentorship will naturally form, Johnson said.

In the thick of the woods, *Creatures in the Wild* students learn the same skills as students in traditional classrooms, and maybe even more, Johnson and her co-teacher, Zach Ashbrook, suggested. Ashbrook studied outdoor recreation at State University of New York at Cortland, where he concentrated in environmental and cultural interpretation.

"We're encouraging kids to be as creative as possible, and I think that Casey brings the creativity to the kids," Ashbrook said. "She's really good at coming up with ideas that kids just kind of latch on to."

When they play, the preschoolers are expected to help one another and clean up after themselves to learn responsibility and basic citizenship. When the students fight, Johnson and Ashbrook instruct them to express their feelings directly with words so they learn communication skills and conflict resolution. In the woods, students also gain what Johnson calls "risk assessment" skills. Instead of testing their limits on plastic slides, students at *Creatures in the Wild* climb over walls of stone, jump over large puddles, remove thorn branches and balance across fallen trees to learn motor skills and balance. John-

son never offers a hand to hold when the kids try new things; they are encouraged to act entirely independently to develop self-awareness and self-confidence.

Johnson herself knows a thing or two about jumping into something she has never done before. Since 2016, she went from working for a restaurant to founding and running her own school. Through social media, she has developed a committee of more than 100 people in helping with the cause. Emily Pollokoff, a homeschooling mom, found Johnson online and started working alongside her at *Creatures in the Wild*. Now Pollokoff has taken over class instruction while Johnson is home with her baby.

"Casey is a force of nature, really," Pollokoff said. "I met Casey not even a year ago and within that time there's been preschool, summer camp, after school, and home-school stuff. She's reached so many kids and developed so many programs. I don't know anyone who could do this, even when they're not pregnant."

Parents can also attest that Johnson's passion is evident in her work, and that students are benefiting from Johnson's methods.

Julie Poplaski says her 4-year-old, Ambrose, responds well to Johnson's hands-off style of teaching. In fact, she said, there has never been a day that Ambrose woke up not wanting to go to school. Her son is especially excited by what he and his friends are constructing in the woods.

"Ambrose talks about that fort. He's so enthusiastic, it lights him up," Poplaski said. "Kids need more of that sort of stuff for their brains and development. More so than memorizing ABCs and 123s — there will be time for that. Right now, I want him to just explore and use his imagination."

Johnson has her sights set on expanding the *Creatures in the Wild* preschool and founding the K-12 private school down the road. The biggest obstacle will be funding, Johnson said, but she is already applying for grants as well as brainstorming curriculum, classroom space and a vetting process to find teachers.

At the end of the day, Johnson's goal is to educate children in a way that connects them to their community and to the land. When asked about President Trump's stance on climate change, Johnson said it's obvious how people are disrespecting the land and that it is causing environmental harm. A large aspect of forest schools is showing the next generation its responsibility to the earth by immersing young kids in nature. In spring, *Creatures in the Wild* will begin construction on an outdoor adventure playground where students will be able to garden, build and play in the mud.

As a forest schoolteacher, Johnson also embraces the natural world. Even while pregnant, Johnson ventured into the woods in the wind and rain and sat on the ground with the kids during their Sacred Circle time.

Johnson was unfazed.

"There's no such thing as bad weather," she said. "Just bad clothing."

SCHOOL MISSION

The Forest School Association website lists six "principles and criteria for good practice," which have guided Casey Johnson in establishing her main objectives.

A Forest School:

1. Is a long-term process, not a one-off visit.
2. Takes place in a natural environment to strengthen the student's relationship with nature.
3. Aims at the holistic development of all involved.
4. Presents opportunities for appropriate and safe risk-taking.
5. Is run by qualified practitioners, who maintain and develop their practice.
6. Uses learner-centered techniques to create an optimal environment for development and learning.

CITY GATE

The West Onondaga Street Alliance, or WOSA, has a **new name for the West Onondaga community** neighborhood. It currently is known as The Mission District, named after the Syracuse Rescue Mission.

The new name: **City Gate**, intended to call attention to the area's **historic mansions**, restaurants and other businesses.

The launch of the area's **re-branding** is planned for the beginning of summer.

A NEW MISSION

Revamped alliance sees big future for West Onondaga community



> Business owners in the West Onondaga neighborhood want to repaint the bridge that separates the community from Downtown Syracuse. They say they want to create a more welcoming first impression. | Connor Fogel, Staff Photo

By | Connor Fogel
The Stand reporter

West Onondaga Street Alliance members see new businesses as progress, but want more

When Kim and Paul Vinciguerra looked at the West Onondaga community as the place to move their printing business, Kim was unsure of the area, worried her customers would feel put off by the hard-bitten appearance of the neighborhood.

Now, four years later, Vinciguerra said she is proud to see how much the community has improved. Customers of her business, Upstate Printing Inc., have noticed, too, she said.

The neighborhood plans to launch a re-branding effort, complete with a new name, this summer.

Upstate Printing, a block from the intersection of Midland Avenue and West Onondaga Street, is among several businesses that have joined the West Onondaga Street Alliance, or WOSA, a merchants' association that focuses on improving the neighborhood's historical value while also combating crime.

"We really want to just give back into this neighbor-

hood. I want my customers to come back and feel safe," Vinciguerra said. "Just in the four years since we've started looking at the property to today, what a huge difference, and it's just exciting to see it grow and get better and better."

Community members initially launched the alliance back in 1990. But their good intentions eventually faded. A decade back, the organization ran aground, as members lost interest or retired from their work. Then, three years ago, Robert Bucklin and some neighbors who own local businesses stepped in to revitalize the group.

Bucklin, the current president of WOSA, and other members are working to rebrand the neighborhood, with the help of two local businesses: Eric Mower + Associates and Coley Advertising.

The group's first large project is the repainting of the bridge located between the West Onondaga community and Downtown Syracuse. Bucklin said the bridge, which now reads "Mission District," puts a negative connotation on a city full of history and life. But with the help of new businesses and its long-lasting diversity and history, Bucklin said the city and its neighbors have already noticed the changes made in the past few years.

"With all the interest of the other side of the bridge,



> The West Onondaga Street Alliance wants to clean up the neighborhood and plant flowers. | Connor Fogel, Staff Photo

the east side, they are starting to look here now because there is nowhere else to go in the city,” Bucklin said. “We want to be able to greet them and say, ‘Hey, come on in,’ and we’ve gotten a good response. They’ve looked, and they see that we’re willing to take the step into there to combat the crime, make it look nice.”

Bucklin said local businesses want to work with WOSA and have joined in the neighborhood’s improvements by participating in its smaller projects such as cleaning up on Earth Day, planting 5,000 tulips along the street and organizing a neighborhood watch program.

Upstate Printing, Salt City Coffee and McKinney Law Office are three of the community’s biggest supporters.

Jamie-Lou McKinney works as an attorney at the law office and is one of WOSA’s re-founders. McKinney will soon open a new restaurant in the neighborhood called Joe’s To Go, and she said that just like a community on the rise needs a coffee shop, it also needs a new place to eat.

“You get choices by opening the restaurant in conjunction with all the great things that are happening,” McKinney said. “I just think that it shows it is a neighborhood on the upswing.”

She added that more than 1,000 people work within a quarter-mile radius of the law office,

Tim Wentworth owns the only building coop in the neighborhood, located at 377 W. Onondaga St. Wentworth said it has 28 units filled with attorneys, a psychologist, teachers and nurses who all moved to

Syracuse from out of state.

Wentworth said one of his residents told him that he moved to the neighborhood because of the Salt City Coffee shop, located at 509 West Onondaga St., saying that when a coffee shop comes into an area, the community is on the rise.

“It’s just exciting to see it grow and get better and better.”

— Paul Vinciguerra

“I used to tell people that the streets were so bad that even the bad people left,” said Wentworth, who has lived in the area for 28 years and raised his family there.

Bucklin has lived in the West Onondaga neighborhood for 26 years, and he has gone door to door to get his neighbors involved in WOSA’s mission and motivate people who might not think it’s possible to change their community alone.

“When you look at what the six or 10 of us have done in the last two and a half years,” Bucklin said, “it’s pretty amazing just by having a little group.”

PUBLIC MEETING

Last November Nojaim Brothers grocery store on the West Side closed. Then, Dec. 31, the **Eat to Live Food Coop** closed for a second time.

At the end of last year, Eat to Live board members met with residents and members of the food coop to stress their commitment to keep something in that space.

The food coop board will hold its **next public meeting** at 6 p.m. Friday, Feb. 23, at the food coop, 2323 S. Salina St.

During the meeting, the board will:

- Review proposed business models
- Elect new officers to the board of directors
- Discuss bylaw amendments

For more: To find additional background on the closing and learn about the different ideas proposed for the food coop space, visit mysouthsidestand.com/more-news/etl/

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 to see all stories and videos in this series

FEMALE FORCE

Syracuse Police Department, West Side lean on Hispanic woman



> Officer Emily Quinones, a seven-year veteran on the force, prepares for another day of overtime on the job after having worked for the past six days straight. | Frankie Prijatel, They Wear Blue Photographer

By | Samantha Mendoza
They Wear Blue reporter

Officer Emily Quinones is a rarity twice over: coming from Puerto Rico to Pep Boys to the SPD

It was her first day on the job, and she was already fighting people. At least, that's how she would later describe the incident with a chuckle. But at the moment, she was young, and she was fearful. A 23-year-old rookie cop who had just graduated from the rigorous, six-month police academy, Officer Emily Quinones felt a rush of adrenaline when she arrived at the scene of a domestic disturbance call during her first shift with the force.

As she tried to speak calmly with the man involved in the incident, he became combative, erratic. He ran to the kitchen presumably to look for a knife, as Quinones chased after him, hand on her gun holster. She could feel the emotions, the anxiety, the uncertainty of whether she would soon have to make a life-or-death decision: Will it be him, or will it be me?

Quinones was far from her hometown of San Juan, Puerto Rico. She had never imagined that she would one day leave her sunny childhood home to become a police officer in the snowiest city in America. She had loved the heat of her native city — the beaches, the nights at dance clubs with her friends, the summers spent working at the local Mr. Pretzels as a teenager with the simple question: "What was the best thing and the worst thing that could happen to me today?"

But she also loved cop shows, with thrilling narratives of officers being positive forces of change in their communities and "badass" female characters proving that women can do just as much, if not more, than men to fight crime and seek justice. It was these fictional female role models, the Detective Bensons of the "Law & Order" TV world, that initially sparked Quinones' interest in law enforcement.

"When she was little, she couldn't stop watching movies of police and detectives," her older brother, Jesus Romon, said with a laugh. "So it came as no surprise. We weren't surprised at all that she eventually joined the force."

Still, Quinones had never anticipated that her dream would one day lead her here, to this moment where a split-second decision could cost her, or someone else, their life. As she stood in the kitchen, palms sweating, the hair on the back of her neck pricked upright, she flashed back on the challenges and decisions in her life that had led her to this point.

'A DRASTIC CHANGE'

The youngest child in a three-sibling Puerto Rican family, Quinones relocated to Syracuse in 2005 after her older brother started attending school at Syracuse University.

"It was a drastic change coming here," said Quinones, now a seven-year veteran of the SPD. "I didn't know anybody."

She didn't know very much English, either. She refers to her first few months in America adapting to the climate, customs and language as "the whole English thing." Though she had taken basic English courses during her formal education in Puerto Rico, Quinones now faced the challenge of finding a job, making friends and starting a new life while trying to expand her basic English vocabulary.

She ultimately found a job at the local Pep Boys auto shop two months after arriving in the city. In her starting position as a cashier, she would frequently walk through aisles filled with tires, brakes and batteries, carefully studying the packaging that listed names and instructions in English and Spanish and committing product names to memory. Once she began feeling confident in her language abilities, she started moving up the chain — from cashier, to sales associate, to assistant manager — and eventually started working toward a degree in physical therapy at Onondaga Community College. She had always been active, participating in basketball, volleyball, and track and field as a teen, and hoped that her degree would allow her to focus on helping athletes.

She quickly realized that this wasn't the path for her.

"Biology, anatomy, bones," Quinones said, describing her community college coursework. "It was a lot of things going on at the same time."

A RARITY ON A WHITE, MALE FORCE

She had never forgotten her dream of becoming a cop, and after working at Pep Boys for three years, Quinones sought employment with the Syracuse Police Department, though not initially as a member of the force. She got a job as a front-desk receptionist in the records department at the police department on South State Street, filing paperwork and submitting requests in the back room of a small office. After four months on the job, she was approved to start her training with the Police Academy.

"It was tough," Quinones said. "We would work out

"But when I put on my uniform, it's a different situation, a different game."

— Emily Quinones

every day, no breaks."

In addition to the already strenuous physical demands of the program, Quinones faced an additional challenge. She hurt her knee on the very first run, then had to endure the remainder of the Academy on pain medication, a knee-brace wrapped tightly around her leg. Still, she persisted. As a rare female recruit seeking to join a police staff that is 86 percent male, Quinones quickly learned how to be tough — how to establish a commanding presence that would allow her to prove that she could handle anything, just like any of the guys could.

"She did a good job of adapting," said Officer Evan Hepburn, who graduated from the Police Academy with her. "Coming from a different place, she had the same challenges as everybody else, but with the additional challenges of being in a police department where you have a majority white male officers."

Quinones reflects on these memories with fondness. She maintains that she has no regrets about her time in the Academy, not even about the injury during that tortuous first run. She was in the best shape of her life, she held her own when boxing with male recruits and when she finally put on her police uniform ... well, it was hard to explain what she felt. But it could best be described as "different."

"I can be kind of shy," Quinones said. "But when I put on my uniform, it's a different situation, a different game. I can put on my uniform and talk to anyone because that's my job. That's what I do."

And that's exactly what she was trying to do on her first night on patrol when that routine domestic disturbance call had the potential to turn deadly: Her job. Talk

TOUGH CALLS

On the job, Emily Quinones sees it all.

The incidents she responds to daily range from domestic violence disturbances to runaway teens and everything in between. The incidents that affect her the most: the ones that involve children. For Quinones, the innocence of children makes these calls "heartbreaking."

"There are some calls that just get to you," she said.

One of the incidents that will be permanently etched in her memory is a dead-on-arrival call that involved a young girl, no older than 9, who died in the hospital while her mother was at home taking care of her siblings. As the responding officer, Quinones was the one who had to inform the mother.

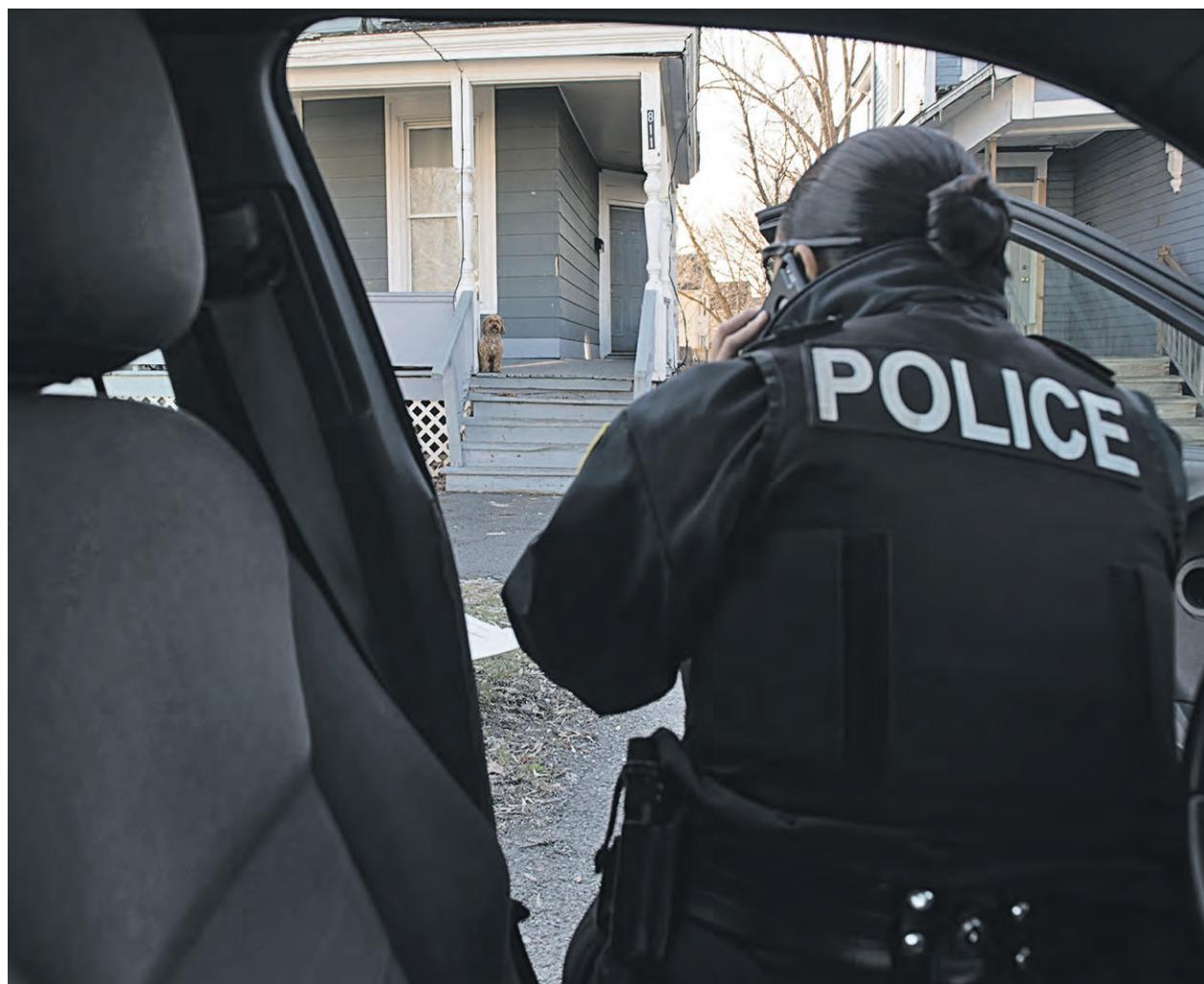
"There's no easy way to say these things to people," Quinones said. "I'm just a stranger who's coming into your life who has to tell you the worst news you've ever heard."

ALL TOO COMMON

Unfortunately for Emily Quinones, incidents that involve kids being abused and neglected are not entirely uncommon.

At these times, she sees herself as more than just a cop: a therapist, a social worker and a counselor all rolled into one. This can take a toll. Sometimes, she has to walk out to take a breather. It's the only thing that can keep her from crying.

"Anything that has to do with kids is rough. Anything else I'm OK with handling."



> Emily Quinones, who mainly patrols Syracuse's West Side neighborhood, grew up in Puerto Rico speaking only Spanish. | Frankie Prijatel, They Wear Blue Photographer

to someone, try to calm him down. But there she was, in an unfamiliar kitchen as that "scary feeling" sunk in and the hairs on the back of her neck told her that something was not quite right. She placed her hand on the holster of her gun — and ultimately, as she approached the man cautiously, beads of perspiration forming on her forehead, she saw that he was not reaching for a weapon. She put her gun back in the holster.

STRATHMORE: A PART OF HER LIFE

Now, seven years later, she views that experience as a reminder of the challenges she and other officers must face every day in the line of duty, and the split-second choices they must make under pressure.

"There's always going to be those times," Quinones said. "You don't have much time to think. You just go with your training and ... go. Most everyday people will never be in that situation."

Yet for Quinones, this situation is just part of the job. She works the morning shift on the West Side of Syracuse, mostly spending time in the Strathmore neighborhood where there is a sizeable Hispanic community. It's an area that has what Quinones describes as "a little bit

of everything" — kids throwing rocks at cars and carrying BB guns, teens running away from home and break-ins and domestic violence reports.

For Quinones, the people in the Strathmore area have become a part of her life, and she a part of theirs. As one of the few full-Hispanic females on the force (the SPD is only 2.5 percent Hispanic, according to the department's 2016 annual report), and the only Spanish-speaker on the morning shift, Quinones has established close bonds with community members in the area. As she patrols the Strathmore area on any given morning, she is often approached by community members who affectionately call her "Pocahontas" (though she's not entirely sure why they've chosen this nickname for her).

"They know who I am here. I've worked this area for over six years consistently, and if I'm parked, someone will flag me down and let me know about incidents," Quinones said. "They know me."

Her demeanor on the force can best be described as that of a negotiator: a calming presence that hopes to reason with suspects and others to de-escalate potentially dangerous situations. One February morning, after Quinones and a colleague confronted a man who had left

his car running outside of a convenience store, the man became irate, shouting “F--- the police” and saying that the cops were harassing him while he was on his way to get medicine for his 5-year-old son (who was with him at the time) simply because he was black.

“Let me ask you something,” Quinones said. “You think I’m white?”

This got the man’s attention, and Quinones began to reason with him.

“You say you need medicine for your son. If your car had been stolen because you left it running outside, what would happen to him? How would he get medicine?”

It was a question that “turned everything around,” as Quinones would later describe it. The man apologized, and resolved not to repeat his mistake.

‘PEOPLE YOU CAN COUNT ON’

Quinones’ colleagues have described her as being an important asset to the team, not just for her frequent assistance in translating for cops around the city when dealing with Hispanic community members, but for her willingness to help in just about any situation she happens to be pulled into.

“She’s one of those people that, if you ask her to do something, she’ll do it for you,” Hepburn said.

This willingness to help often leads her to unexpected places, from across the streets of the near West Side to the deli section of the nearest Wegmans Food Market store. It’s not uncommon for Quinones to assist a colleague with a missing person’s report, knocking on doors and tiptoeing through alleyways in Strathmore to search for a runaway 15-year-old, before heading straight to the grocery store to pick up a cake, two large pizzas, and a box of chicken wings to cram into the backseat of her patrol car to bring to the baby shower of a colleague at noon.

Outside of her daily work, she volunteers as much time as possible to interacting with community members to bridge the gap between the police and civilians. Twice a semester, she volunteers with the after-school program of the Spanish Action League, a non-profit organization that hosts a variety of programs for non-native English speakers.

“She tries to tell the kids that any kind of person can be a police officer,” said her brother Romon, who is the organization’s assistant director. “She wants to show them that the police are people you can count on. She wants to be accessible to community members. It makes them feel more connected.”

All of these everyday tasks and responsibilities have reminded Quinones, now a veteran on the force, that being a police officer is much different than what is portrayed in television shows. For starters, there’s much more paperwork, she jokes. But there’s also a much greater

“She wants to show (kids) that the police are people you can count on.”

— Jesus Romon

opportunity to create change on an interpersonal level, to interact with community members in a meaningful way and help both youth and adults grow from every interaction with law enforcement.

“It’s like you’re a little bit of everything,” Quinones said. “You’re a therapist, you’re a cop, you’re a social worker. You do it all, because in a lot of things people are dealing with, you have to be the voice of reason.”

GOOFY, SHY, CONFIDENT

Quinones has come a long way from her hometown in Puerto Rico, from her weekday strolls through autopart aisles reciting Spanish-to-English translations under her breath and from that decisive moment her first day on the job that brought her face-to-face with the indescribable challenges of being a cop.

But these challenges have made her the officer she is today. She’s still shy, hesitant to open up to others when not in uniform. Many friends who have never seen her on duty jokingly say that they could never picture her as a cop. She’s “goofy,” according to her brother, always joking around and giving him a hard time — especially about making the family move to Syracuse when she still dreams of the heat of her native city.

But in uniform, she’s confident and serious — the kind of person who has an ability to balance a presence that is both commanding and understanding. The kind of person who has built relationships with the Hispanic community members in her area. The kind of person who has a capacity to hold her own as one of the few female officers in a male-dominated profession.

But still, she knows, there’s always going to be those times.

CHIEF UPDATE

Newly appointed **Mayor Ben Walsh** announced Dec. 27 that his administration will undertake a national search to select a new police chief for the city.

Syracuse **Chief of Police Frank Fowler** has agreed to remain with the department for one year in his current position until a new chief is sworn in.

Walsh said the search process will be open and transparent.

In addition to providing stability throughout the transition, Fowler says he is committed to continuing his efforts to increase diversity in the department in an ongoing effort to comply with the 1980 federal consent decree that sets goals for minority representation by rank and recruiting class. Walsh also plans to bring on a new class of recruits this year.

The mayor also announced the appointment of three new deputy chiefs:

- **Capt. Rich Shoff** to Community Policing
- **Capt. Lynette DeFavero** to Uniform Bureau
- **Sgt. Derek McGork** to Investigations Bureau

— Source:
Walsh administration
press release

ON THE SIDE

GAINING EXPOSURE



My column, **A Friendly Five**, acts as a lantern to give light to

musicians and singers — mainly African Americans — who, like me, sometimes don't get enough exposure from the larger mainstream publications.

Getting exposure is critical for local artists because it is oftentimes through the media that consumers of the arts form their opinions about an artist's value and worth. It also ties in directly with how often the phone rings, what the opportunities are on the other end and the amount of pay an artist will receive.

Over the past six years, through this column, I have helped to give exposure to many talented musicians who I feel have been worthy of recognition and the small number of opportunities some may have obtained because of it.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

Get to know the three South African musicians whom Reggie Seigler met during his travels in South Africa, as they introduce themselves on the following pages.

RECOGNIZING TALENT

Black musicians on two continents share strikingly similar experiences



> South African musician Richard Nzwana, who is blind, performs with his 10-year-old daughter, Iminathi. | Conner Lee, Staff Photo

By | Reggie Seigler
A Friendly Five columnist

The Stand's music columnist discovers that musicians near and far need work, exposure

As a longtime local musician and appreciator of live music, I have recognized that there is a large disparity between the presentation of local artists of color and white artists at many of the live music events hosted in the city of Syracuse. This statement might be a surprise for some, especially if they haven't looked, but for many others, it will seem to be just a rehash of old news.

Our beloved Syracuse has been identified as a city where poverty and disparity exist in high numbers and has been well studied and documented. In 2016, the United States Census Bureau reported that Syracuse was the 13th poorest city in the U.S. The ranking surpasses even cities like Detroit and Buffalo. An even more depressing statistic pulled from a recent study done by Paul Jargowsky of Rutgers University reveals that Syracuse is the No. 1 city in America for "concentrated poverty" among blacks and Hispanics. Obviously, these are

not statistics we are proud of, but we can't ignore them.

The population of Syracuse is about 145,000 people. Of those, about 64,000 residents consider themselves non-white, (approximately 44 percent). So, this beast of concentrated poverty that we are speaking about negatively affects a lot of people, and it is continually growing as it is being well fed on a steady diet of neglect for people of color, which includes the disregard for opportunities for creative artists of color as well.

After the holidays, I traveled to Grahamstown, with a school group, which was a repeat endeavor for professor Steve Davis of Newhouse. He took a group there before in 2010-11. On that mission, they pursued dialogue with students and professors from Rhodes University and the people of the Grahamstown community. That effort centered on the idea that people are more similar than dissimilar, regardless of where they live.

The professor's mission for this trip was essentially the same as it had been before: to show how people are the same everywhere. This time it carried a sub-theme related to music and art. Being one who has an interest in the equitable distribution of economic opportunities in Syracuse, I used the opportunity to learn if opportunities were equitably shared with black artists in Grahamstown.

I wanted to know if things would be the same as they are here, as I suspected, or would I find them to be different? I also wanted to know what was being done to change things.

Grahamstown provided a good backdrop to make the observation. Like Syracuse, its largest employer is a wealthy university sitting high on a hillside overlooking a population made up of about 89 percent blacks and other people of color and has a poverty rate estimated at about 40 percent. Unemployment for blacks there is high, and although some are working, most are likely to be employed in low-paying retail or service-industry jobs. Some others work independently but earn as little as 100 rand a day, about \$8 to \$10 in U.S. currency.

Grahamstown has a few nice restaurants and bars, which are mostly situated around the Rhodes campus. They could provide nice venues for musicians and other performing artists to play. However, the establishments cater largely to the white middle class and the faculty and students of the university. That dictates any entertainment they might present, which doesn't include many artists of color.

The city is also the home of the National Arts Festival. The NAF runs for 11 days annually in late June into July and is the largest festival of any kind on the African continent. It boasts about 600 performances and transforms all of Grahamstown's auditoriums, bars, clubs, restaurants and open spaces into makeshift performance venues throughout its run. The number of people drawn to the NAF nearly doubles the population of Grahamstown, bringing in people from all over the world. Every available hotel and dormitory room in the area is filled with media, entertainers and festivalgoers.

There is an educational program in Grahamstown called Inkululeko. It is a nonprofit organization dedicated to helping Xhosa children become higher achievers in school. It was founded by Jason Torreano, who attended Rhodes University during an exchange program and now runs the nonprofit half-time from America and half-time in Grahamstown. Jason is very well-connected in the area and was able to put us in touch with the people we needed to connect with to tell our stories. Madoda Mkalipi works for Jason at Inkululeko and acted as one of our guides during our stay. He spoke with me briefly about the festival and the few opportunities it presented for musicians in Grahamstown.

"All of the black musicians in Grahamstown want to play at the National Arts Festival," Madoda said. "Sometimes they can get an opportunity to play, but it's not every year and it's mostly at locations and times where the exposure is minimal." Madoda graduated from Rhodes University. He is not a musician himself, but he knew and introduced us to Zandile Kila (pronounced Zon-de-lah Keelah) and Richard Nzwana, who were.

Zandile has a formal music education and teaches kids to play the piano. She plays the tenor instrument in a marimba ensemble called Laphumilanga, which means the sun comes out or sunrise. The group was founded by Richard Nzwana in 2010. They can perform as a small group of four pieces or as a large group of up to 13 musicians. Five of their musicians are blind, including Richard himself. Zandile is sighted.

I asked Zandile about the festival and the gigs that they get and whether she thought that they got as many

ABOUT THIS TRIP

The Stand's Reggie Seigler joined a group of students and faculty from Syracuse University's S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, along with staff and students from the Syracuse City School District, on this cultural exchange from Dec. 26 to Jan. 6.

In addition to reporting on the similarities of people from both continents, a sub-theme of this trip was **music**.

Because Seigler regularly writes on local music for The Stand, he became an ideal community participant to unite both cultures during this trip and report back on the music scene there.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

BY | NOMBASA MAKOQO



> Nombasa Makoqo | Reggie Seigler, Staff Photo

My name is Nombasa Makoqo. I am 29 years old, and I attend Rhodes University in Grahamstown, South Africa. I like to write songs and am always writing new ones and workshopping old ones. I hope to one day be able to travel around the world singing my songs.

I've always been into music for as long as I can remember. My late grandmother is the one who I think really sparked the passion in me. I think most African children grow up singing. I happen to fall into that huge chunk of people, but with an intention to make it a profession.

I am currently doing a bachelor's of music in African ensemble. This fuels my passion toward things like expressing myself through music as an African.

I have a lot of musical influences. Some of them are Miriam Makeba, Zonke Dikana, Jill Scott and India Arie. I also like Baka music.

My future goals include performing around the world, lecturing and possibly being a part-time music commentator and journalist. I absolutely love talking about music, history, culture and its revolution. Hence one of my subjects in school is ethnomusicology.

I anticipate receiving my honors from Rhodes in 2020. I welcome American musicians to reach out to me to do collaborations via Facebook or other social media.

PAST TRIP

Syracuse University students reported from a trip to South Africa back in 2010. If you'd like to read stories from that first trip to Grahamstown, visit worldjournalism.syr.edu

ON THE SIDE

PEOPLE THERE

Grahamstown is in the Makana District of the Eastern Cape.

The population is made up predominately of Xhosa people (amaXhosa is proper when referring to the people).

Xhosa people are black, and the vast majority are very poor.

as some of the white groups in the area.

“There are opportunities for us, namely from Rhodes,” she began, “but there aren’t as many as we would like. We could go from two gigs a month to nothing for four months then one or two. We are lucky we get called from the Department of Arts and Culture for performances and referred by the department for other performances. The difference between groups with a more predominately white presence than ours is there are more venues actively booking them.” She said that her group was more likely to be only a “feature in those venues,” occasionally. Zandile had a couple of opportunities to perform at the NAF, once in 2011 with the University of Fort Hare’s marimba ensemble, and again in 2017 with Laphumilanga.

Zandile also builds marimbas and calabash instruments that she sells to earn extra money.

I also met Gareth Walwyn and Shiloh Marsh, who live in Grahamstown. They were a couple who had met through a mutual friend at Rhodes University. Shiloh was a classical singer and teacher who was born there and had been on a tour of foreign places when Gareth began hearing about her.

“She had a reputation,” he said, as they both then chuckled and shared a look — for her as if she’d heard this little joke one too many times; for him as if he knew the time were drawing near for it to be retired for good.

The two of them have a couple of compelling common interests: music and teaching. They said that those interests had been driving their lives and shap-

ing their purpose for a long time. Seven years ago, they decided to use their synergy to form an NGO (non-governmental organization) through which they could fulfill their purpose together.

The organization is called Access Music Project (AMP). They use AMP to teach music to Xhosa children. The project is housed at the Joza Youth Hub in a place called “The Location,” or “Elokishini” (pronounced El-o-ka-sheen), by the Xhosa people who live there. It is situated in the township, which is just outside of Grahamstown’s city proper. To get a feel for The Location, you must first understand how it was created and how the people who live there are oppressed.

South Africa is just 26 years beyond the fall of the devastating system of oppression, segregation and corruption known as apartheid. The system of government closely resembled “Jim Crow” in America. It held a discriminatory system of laws that prohibited blacks in South Africa, many of whom were Xhosa, from participating in the political process. And through its laws of segregation, it relegated their living spaces to the most undesirable areas with undeveloped infrastructure and little to no services, such as fire and police protection, trash collection, etc. The discriminating laws also limited their employment opportunities and funding for schools and other services. There were even laws making it ‘unconstitutional’ for people of black and white races to date or marry.

Apartheid in South Africa was not by happenstance. It was deliberately designed to pre-empt the black majority from building power over the white minority, and also



> South African musician Richard Nzwana performs regularly with Laphumilanga Marimba Band, which includes four additional musicians who are blind. | Conner Lee, Staff Photo

to ensure continued white existence and rule in the country. The laws have now been changed, but many musicians, such as Francois Mentoor, say things still seem the same today. Political corruption, misuse and inequitable sharing of government resources still severely devastate and oppress the people.

“Elokishini,” Francois said, “is one of those places that black people were allowed to live during apartheid.” Many are still there now living in overcrowded corrugated tin shanties with interior walls formed from a mixture of mud and donkey poop. Most do not have running water because the government has not fully extended the infrastructure, so they rely on water that is brought in and stored in tanks that are propped up beside their houses. Homes like this number in the thousands and are strewn about over square miles and miles of government lands.

‘ABHORRENCE OF APARTHEID’

Gareth is white and, as he puts it, “was born into privilege” in Johannesburg, South Africa, at a time when the system of apartheid was still constitutional. He recognizes the disparities in Grahamstown and wants to do something about it. He is a fascinatingly intelligent man who likes to share his deep-seated political views.

Gareth is the type of person who can speak very knowledgably about “black consciousness” and “responsible whiteness” and then move on to speak equally as intelligently about directing music for television or mechanical engineering — and, it seems, most any other subject. “My political views were shaped mainly because of my family’s abhorrence of apartheid,” he said.

The AMP caters to musical kids ages 14 to 18. Our group was given a tour of the program and was able to meet some of the students. The kids were being taught to play a variety of instruments, including cello, violin, marimba, saxophone, bass and piano. They all seemed a little shy but were very attentive as I spoke with them. “We teach the kids what it takes to become the best at what they are involved in,” Gareth said. “This is not a program to harness kids just to keep them off the streets, although they seem to be less involved in those activities when they are in the AMP. If they are in this program, they will be expected to work hard. There is homework involved and a lot of practice.”

Gareth believes the work ethic AMP demands will stay with the students regardless of what path they should choose. “So, even if they don’t grow up to be musicians, they will have learned what it takes to participate in whatever part of the ‘creative economy’ they choose,” he said. Gareth believes that this is the way they are going to be able to compete and command opportunity.

“Everyone has the right to access,” Shiloh said. “The schools don’t have music programs in them so creatively talented individuals don’t have a way to explore their instincts.” Through donations from the government,

private corporations and individuals, the AMP provides the space, training, instruments and other equipment necessary for the kids to develop their talents.

Gareth went on. “I don’t do this out of a sense of guilt or obligation, but I do feel that we’ve inherited advantage and continue to perpetuate unfairness. At what point is wealth enough?” he asked. “I do this out of a sense of investment in their musical futures. It’s an economic concept. I want the students to have forward perspective and leave the project having learned to be self-sufficient.”

Shiloh immediately tapped in again by saying: “There is an inequality in the schools, and we want to give our students a fair chance. There is a value placed upon students reaching an elevated level in their studies, and we want to see that growth. We are both teachers, and I personally get a fulfillment out of seeing students grow into accomplished adults.”

The AMP is like Dr. Dick Ford’s program here in Syracuse called Signature Music. Dick recognized the need for poor kids in our city to receive personal attention in their musical education, so he created the program to address it. Through Signature, he was able to provide them with instruments and inexpensive private lessons. He also gave them opportunities to do limited live paid performances and helped them with preparations for college auditions.

“Education is the key,” Dick said. He believes that a career as a music educator is a fine choice. His program has worked to develop a handful of much-needed music educators, which has moved the needle some. But to date, if at all, it has worked only slightly to move the needle on the number of paid performance opportunities granted to people of color here. But we all know it takes time for a tree to yield good fruit, so time will tell.

I could see that just like Dick in Syracuse, Gareth and Shiloh were trying to fertilize the ground so opportunities would grow for these same artists in the Grahamstown area. They saw a need to level the playing field and stepped up to do something about it.

CONFIDENT IN HER OWN SKIN

I thought their efforts were noble, but I also needed to hear something from the artists of color themselves, so I asked Gareth and Shiloh if they could share a few names with me. They gave me the phone numbers of a few, including Nombasa and Francois.

Nombasa Makoqo was very professional in her approach to me and seemed to be confident in her own skin. She’s a very talented 29-year-old Xhosa woman and an aspiring singer-songwriter. She’s also a Grahamstown native who is currently attending Rhodes University working on a bachelor of music degree. She had begun her college career at a traditional age but has just recently returned after having left early to pursue musical opportunities on her own. Like Dick Ford, she said, “I understand that education is the key.”

MAKING NOISE

Access Music Project (AMP) connects young people with their creative identities and opportunities in the creative economy, in partnership with local schools.

AMP was established in response to the problem of young potential musicians not having access to music studies. In many schools in the Eastern Cape, music is not an option.

For AMP to be successful, human and physical resources are pooled to serve learners from under-resourced schools, enabling the creation of a well-equipped, diverse and high quality music program.

For more on AMP, visit accessmusic.org.za

ON THE SIDE

SIGNATURE MUSIC

Locally, Dick Ford knows what it takes to make differences in the lives of kids he works with, so he stands up and makes it happen.

In addition to free music lessons and instruments, his program also provides paid gig opportunities, summer camps, help with acquiring tuxedos and gowns for gigs, and rides to and from gigs.

His program, Signature Music, also provides mentoring and college-planning workshops for students and their families, and occasionally college visits.

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

BY | RICHARD NZWANA



> Richard Nzwana | Conner Lee, Staff Photo

When I spoke to her about live performance opportunities in the area, she said that the opportunities to perform live were slim. Francois agreed. “Grahamstown is small,” she said. “And most of the instrumentalists are students who hardly play live. Our music department at the ‘varsity’ is also small and mostly composed of classical music students.”

She spoke about a New Year’s Eve party that had been planned. “That would have been a place to see live music, but it was canceled by the cops” before it ever happened.

Many of the best musicians in Grahamstown, such as her former bassist and pianist, leave to go to bigger cities like Cape Town and Johannesburg for opportunities, she said. Nombasa hopes to go to East London next year to gather a band to record her original music.

GETTING GIGS

Francois Mentoor is 45 years old. He has had his band, The Survivals, for more than 20 years. They play a typical “American Mix” of party songs like ’70s, ’80s, pop, and rhythm and blues in addition to some reggae covers and traditional African party favorites. To accommodate the varied tastes of their audiences, they have learned to flip the rhythms of the American songs to have a reggae feel. It has worked for them on a lot of gigs. “When the audience begins to feel a little more like dancing,” he began, “we don’t have to change the material, just the presentation.”

Back in the ’90s, the Survivals had a fortunate opportunity to do a tour of 18 dates on the West Coast in the U.S. It was set up by a relative in Connecticut. After the tour ended, the band went back home and became reliant on bookings from parties and weddings. “We don’t get many bookings from the clubs in the area,” Francois said, noting that the clubs are mostly white owned. “When we do, they don’t pay a lot. The most we can make at a club is about R1,500.” One U.S. dollar equals about 12 rand, so R1,500 is about \$125 in U.S. dollars.

They did have one occasion, though, when they

I am Richard Nzwana. I am the founder of Laphumilanga Marimba Band. The name means “The sun comes out or sunrise.” We perform at all types of events and would love to come to America to perform for the people there.

I am blind. I suffered blindness at the age of 12 from a condition called glaucoma. There are four other blind musicians in our group. The rest have sight. We can perform as a four-piece ensemble or up to a group of 13 people. I have been teaching my children to play the marimbas. My daughter is 10 years old and my son is 4 years old.

I learned to read braille at the Grahamstown Area Distress Relief Organization school, and I work to help other blind people in Grahamstown to read.

were paid well, Francois said. It was for a private gig. “We got about R15,000,” he said. “They paid us that much because they had booked us to play for only an hour. But after the time was up and the people were feeling good, they kept asking us to play more and more. We ended up playing about 6 or 7 hours straight.”

Francois spends some of his time teaching kids in the area about music. He wanted to give them an outlet. He began teaching them at his home using his own equipment, which is very old and outdated, and much of it busted. His space was also limited as he has a family at home, so he reached out to the AMP for some assistance. Francois said that he had agreed to help them teach kids down at the Youth Hub in exchange for their helping him to get funding and equipment for his own music center. He said they pay him for teaching, but it’s only a couple of hours a week for which he gets paid about R200 (about \$16). He doesn’t think it is enough.

Since the help with funding and equipment for his own music center has not materialized, he reached out to the AMP to see if they would loan him some of their equipment. It didn’t happen. That caused him to feel that, although the AMP is supposed to be set up for the benefit of the Xhosa children, the people who are benefiting the most might be the people running it.

He is a bit of a cynic, but that train of thought does not come from just anywhere. Francois’ perception of these types of programs have been jaded by the whole ordeal of living life as a black male in South Africa. He was nearly a grown man when apartheid fell, and Nelson Mandela was elected president of the country. Before that, black South Africans didn’t have the rights that even animals have here in the U.S. He told me about times during apartheid when unthinkable atrocities were performed upon him and others by whites. Like the time during a police interrogation when he was 13 years old that they forcibly slammed his male-member into a desk

drawer for an offense he knew nothing about, and of the times when whites would speak to blacks in any way they pleased, which was usually with high disregard for their dignity. Francois experienced a lot of unfair treatment and prejudice during the apartheid years, he said, and still finds it hard to trust a white man. Even today, he said, “I take a witness with me anytime I’m going to speak with one.”

MOVING FORWARD

Francois’ jaded feelings may never change, but they could begin to mellow with more time. But I think the changes that Gareth and Shiloh and others like Jason at Inkululeko are working for will have to begin to produce bigger results first. As with Dick Ford’s program in Syracuse, those results are slow moving and sometimes only show up in “onesies and twosies.”

In Syracuse, there are various organizations, some grassroots and some more formal, that have been working diligently to create better channels to success for those who have been without it here. The school district, for example, has its Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, and its Building Men, STEM and Career Technical Education programs. There are grassroots organizations like the Urban Jobs Task Force that are continuously prodding the political system so it doesn’t lose sight of the need for these programs. And there’s Joined Artists Musicians and Singers (JAMS).

JAMS has been receiving legal advice from the law department at Syracuse University and has been working from the ground up to keep visible the fact that diverse artists in our city need to eat, too.

Rhodes University has the biggest footprint in Grahamstown and the power to assist people of color there with pushing forward their own agenda. Thankfully they are working with people like Gareth and Shiloh who do understand that changes must be made and who are willing to invest their life’s careers trying to make a difference. But then there are the people of the world like Francois. He might not have the organizational skills needed to run the AMP or Inkululeko, but he feels that he needs to be taken seriously. If not, he and others like will him go on thinking that they’re really hearing the same old music and that the only thing that has changed is the approach.

Zandile knows Francois and can understand where he is coming from, but she also has the skills necessary to build change from the ground up, which can meet Rhodes’ top-down approach. She is considering starting a JAMS chapter in Grahamstown and has begun reaching out to some point people at Rhodes for legal assistance. Hopefully she will be able to manage Francois’ desires and couple them with Nombasa’s vision to create an organization that works for the people who need it most.

The people of Grahamstown are ready to dance now, so if Zandile’s JAMS is successful, Francois and his band will be able to play all new tunes.

To use a line from Francois’ way of doing things: The people feel like dancing. Has the material changed, or is it just the presentation?

Have A Friendly Five suggestion? Contact Reggie at reggie@softspokenband.com or (315) 479-9620

IN THEIR OWN WORDS

BY | ZANDILE KILA



> Zandile Kila | Conner Lee, Staff Photo

My name is Zandile Kila. I live in the Eastern Cape of South Africa in an old part of the city of Grahamstown, which is called Tanty. It is a neighborhood lined with churches. In fact, there is even a street with churches only. It is one of those neighborhoods where everyone knows each other, and nobody

is afraid to ask for a cup of sugar from next door.

I perform with a marimba band called Imphum’ Ilanga. The group was started in 2010 by Richard Nzwana, and I joined in 2016. I studied music formally throughout high school and at the University of Fort Hare in the Eastern Cape of South Africa.

Our music is hardly ever notated but, like our history, it is usually orally passed down from generation to generation. We perform as often as possible and teach our children as much as we can to continue the tradition.

We fuse music from all around the world in our traditional Xhosa method using a hexatonic system to play, meaning only six notes. We perform music in Chichewa from Malawi and songs in Shona from Zimbabwe. We can even do American songs like, “In the Mood” by Glenn Miller.

We would love for people from around the world, including America, to explore our culture. I believe we are a welcoming people and would be more than happy to show people around and introduce them to our music and ways.

JOINED ARTISTS

Joined Artists Musicians and Singers (JAMS) is a local nonprofit designed to enhance Central New York’s “life/arts” experiences by increasing its exposure and access to a culturally diverse collection of musicians and artists.

JAMS provides a forum for diverse artists, musicians and singers to be involved and act upon the exchange of ideas and information related to the improved health and sustainability of CNY’s life/arts.

In the future, this cultural exchange may even reach as far as the country of South Africa.

For more on JAMS, visit syracusejams.com

ON THE SIDE

MEET THE TRAVELERS

When students from the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central's media communications program visited South Africa, they were paired with high school students from Grahamstown.

The ITC students share their reflections on the following pages. Here are the pairs of teens:

- Abe Clute with Sinoxolo (Sino)
- Katy Fermin with Asisipho
- Ana McGough with Asemahle (Nicholas)
- Saviere Williams with Khusta

CULTURAL EXCHANGE

Syracuse city school students travel to South Africa over winter break



> The entire group — including four pairs of teens, Assistant Superintendent Anthony Davis, founder of Inkululeko Jason Torreano and ITC teacher Kathleen Argus — spent two weeks overseas. | Photos by Dominique Hildebrand

ITC media students overcome travel fears, find out teens in South Africa are like themselves

Four students from the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central's media communications program visited South Africa from Dec. 26 through Jan. 6 as part of a special cultural and journalism exchange.

To make the most of their experience, each was paired with a South African teenager involved with Inkululeko, a nonprofit that works with high school youth in Grahamstown, South Africa, to enhance skills for a college career.

Inkululeko, which means freedom, provides a space for youth from previously disadvantaged backgrounds to individually, and collectively, improve on areas of academic deficiency.

BY | ABE CLUTE WITH SINOXOLO (SINO)



My thoughts leading into the trip were all over the place. Initially, I was really excited just to travel, but eventually it hit me that I was going to a completely different part of the world, and I could not believe it. After a few weeks of talking to everyone and starting to prepare for the actual trip, it hit me that it was really happening, and I started to become nervous and scared. I was both nervous and scared mainly because

I didn't believe that the people of South Africa would accept me because of the color of my skin. I was also scared because of the extremely long flight — more than 14 hours. Leaving home and being that far was something even now I am not completely comfortable with, and I don't see myself ever being comfortable with it, so that was one of the biggest problems I had.

In South Africa, I had two simple and basic jobs. The first job was to simply take photos and capture the “behind the scenes” of everything. My second job was to interact with the four Inkululeko students to see how their everyday lives are both in and out of school.

My first job took me to a few places around Grahamstown. I usually went with a few group members to meet people in the town, or we went to capture photos of certain landmarks. My second job, which was really my main job, took me quite a few places. Interacting with the students brought us to the township where they lived. The kids brought us to their extensions, or neighborhoods, and we did a lot there. We also stayed in the town a lot and went to Rhodes University to eat and hang out with the students in order to get to know them more.

My typical day consisted of meeting with the other students, chatting and discussing how the day would go and usually playing a few games of UNO before heading out. All of us went to where our task required us to go, and we worked together with the students to complete it. As the time went on, it was easier to work together because friendships began to form.

In South Africa, I was partnered up with a girl name Sino; she attends Mary Waters High School and is headed to grade nine. Sino is a very laidback person who tends to relax at home and eat snacks while watching movies and television. Sino and I discussed a lot of what we liked to do in our free time, and she really seemed to stick to herself. She said she doesn't have many friends. Sino asked me a lot about myself since, according to her, she wasn't all that interesting. She asked me about music, television, sports and friends. After asking Sino many questions, I found out that she likes to sing, especially Meghan Trainor songs, but she also really enjoys Migos. Since Migos are my favorite rap group as well, she and I seemed to be more comfortable after having something in common.

While we were in South Africa, we went to the Pumba Private Game Reserve and Safari Lodge. Words simply can't describe how incredible the safari was, from the birds to the gigantic elephants. This was the most fun activity that I did on the trip. From the beginning, the experience was amazing. We were greeted by such a nice woman who told us many funny stories, while we were given homemade lemonade and muffins. On the safari, we saw gorgeous animals, like white lions, giraffes, zebras, impalas, elephants, hippos and many others.

Unfortunately, we did not see a rhino, which was

the animal I was looking the most forward to, but the elephants sure made up for that.

Eventually we finished the safari, and we were greeted by a beautiful lunch in a great outdoor village. On our way back to leave the safari, we found ourselves surrounded by huge African elephants; there were even babies. After a fight between two males broke out for about 10 minutes, they separated and one of them walked so close to the safari truck that he was literally in reaching distance; you could feel the truck vibrating.

My favorite part of the trip was the friendships I formed with three Inkululeko students. Khusta, Nicholas and Asisipho became some of my really good friends over just a few days. Having guys my age around helped me a lot after dealing with only girls for days. My favorite memory will be teaching them all how to play UNO and having them actually win the first round, even though we were trying to win. They will always be some of my good friends even though I've known them for such a short time. We all will continue to keep in touch, and I hope one day I can come back and see how well they are doing.

“My view of the world has changed a lot.”

— Abe Clute

After traveling to the other side of the world, to a completely unknown place, I will always tell people that we are not very different from others at all. Looking around town, I see so much that is similar to home: the buildings, the stores, the churches, the cars and people. I want my peers to know that Grahamstown and its people are just like Syracuse and its people. There are very few differences that I see comparing Grahamstown and Syracuse; the people's homes are full of color and made of stone rather than dull colors and wood or brick. Most of the homes do not have second stories, either. After coming to Grahamstown, my view of the world, especially Africa, has changed a lot. When someone thinks of Africa, someone probably thinks of the sad commercials of kids starving — even I did — and yes, there are some bad parts of Grahamstown, but there is everywhere, including Syracuse. I did not see any children starving over the past 10 days, even after going to the poor parts of town. After this trip, I realize that even though America is very modern, it does not mean everyone else is still in the Stone Age.

TRIP'S MISSION

Kathleen Argus, a social studies teacher at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, and a chaperone on the trip, describes the true mission of this **educational adventure overseas** as engaging with teenagers from the Inkululeko program — a nonprofit founded by **Jason Torreano**.

ABOUT INKULULEKO

This nonprofit works with South African township youth. During an afterschool program, staff members help students with the skills, support and guidance necessary to apply, attend and succeed at a university.

Learn more: Visit inkululeko.org

'SECRET RECIPE'

Teacher Kathleen Argus says it took some time for students to open up, but **true bonding** occurred the day the South African teens were allowed to spend lunch money at Checkers (a local grocery) for junk food, rather than have a sit-down meal.

Argus explains: "Although the students' connections were awkward the first couple of days, the introduction of **UNO cards and junk food** was the secret recipe for sparking friendships I think will continue for a long time."

BY | ANA MCGOUGH WITH ASEMAHLE (NICHOLAS)



Leading up to this trip, I was very excited but nervous about losing my luggage. Before I went to Grahamstown, I thought it would be just like Syracuse, and it really is because everyone is super nice. I was excited to get to meet the Inkululeko high school kids and go on a safari.

Our job while we were in South Africa was to make a story about

the similarities and differences between Syracuse and Grahamstown while also getting to know the Inkululeko kids. This job took me on a very cool journey to see the township, which is the area in Grahamstown where the Inkululeko students live. A typical day was to wake up early and eat breakfast, go on a photography shoot, and hang out with the Inkululeko students. We would come back in the evening and update the Inkululeko organization's social media pages.

The student I was partnered up with was Nicholas. Some things that we talked about were sports, school, Grahamstown and Syracuse. He is a really cool guy and fun to hang out with, and he is very funny. Something that was surprising was that he could do backflips in the air. I thought that was very cool because not many people can do that.

We also got to make some traditional jewelry. We went to a soccer game, which was a lot of fun. We also had a chance to see some wild animals on a safari that you wouldn't usually see in Syracuse. They were just wandering around. We got to see zebras, impalas, elephants, a white lion and warthogs. It was so cool to see these animals and photograph them. I also had a chance to try some new foods that were really good.

My most favorite part of the trip was going on a safari because the last time I went on one, I was a very little kid. It was my favorite part about the trip because an elephant walked right past the truck, and it was so close that I could have reached my hand out and touched it.

Something that I learned on this trip was that when a couple wants to get married, they have to get money through deals involving cows, and they must talk to the uncles — not the parents — of the bride. Grahamstown is such a fun and welcoming community, and it is such a cool place. One thing I want people to know is to appreciate what you have because some people in the world don't have modern conveniences such as electricity.

BY | KATY FERMIN WITH ASISIPHO



As we were preparing for the trip to Grahamstown, South Africa, I was thinking of all of the bad things that could go wrong, like getting sick or getting a sunburn, so that I would be a hundred percent ready for any situation. You could say that I was paranoid, in a way, because I was going to another country that I had never been to and didn't know much about.

I was also expecting things to be really outdated in a way, and for the music to be really different. From all of the commercials that I've seen on television, I was expecting to see sick and hungry children everywhere.

Because we're still in high school, our teachers and Jason Torreano, who works with the students from Grahamstown, wanted us to spend time with the high school students from South Africa so that we could learn about our differences and the similarities that we share. At first when we all started to hang out together, it felt really awkward, and we all stood with our groups that we came with. We would talk to our partners but we wouldn't all mix together as a group to hang out and talk to each other.

On our third day in Grahamstown, we made beaded bracelets on the campus of Rhodes University, and after we all gave up on the beading, we decided to pull out the UNO cards. We asked the South African students if they knew how to play, or if they wanted to learn. All of the Syracuse City School District students lost the game to the South African students, but this game really helped us connect with each other and feel more comfortable talking. Every day, we would go as a group and try to stay with our partners. We would go to different places and experience the culture in Grahamstown.

My partner was Asisipho, and we talked a lot about ourselves; it made me realize that we have a lot of similarities. When we were first sent off to talk to our partners, I told him about a movie that I watched called "Okja" and how it impacted me emotionally. I told him that I'm an emotional and sentimental person, and he told me that he is, too, at times. I let him use my camera for a little bit because he seemed to be interested in the way that it worked. While he was using it, he told me that he wants to get a camera one day so he can take pictures for fun. After that, we talked about the things that we wanted to study after high school, and I was really surprised that he wanted to study science when he goes to university. He also told me that he would like to travel

to different places in the world.

On New Year's Eve, we got to go to a local soccer game and, surprisingly, I liked it. I say surprisingly because I'm not a sports fan and don't really enjoy watching sports. There was something about that game that made me like it. I even got to take some cool pictures of the game.

Some of our teachers donated money to us for this trip, and we were able to use that money to go to Pumba Private Game Reserve and Safari Lodge. They had a lot of different animals like giraffes and elephants, and the food was good, too. I was also really excited to try and get some shots while the vehicle was moving.

My favorite moment from the trip was when we were on the safari and our driver was showing us some elephants; we were able to get really close to them. We were so close to them that one of the elephants stopped and was walking toward our car. It was kind of scary but exciting because it almost looked as if he was going to walk right into us. Luckily, he moved and was walking right next to our car instead of through it.

While spending my time in South Africa, I learned that things aren't as bad as they seem on television; still, nothing is truly perfect. The homes in the township reminded me of when I went to the Dominican Republic because they were very bright in color and were made of mostly stone.

I want my friends and family back home to know that South Africa is not like a whole other world; it is very similar to the United States. This trip made me want to see other places so that I can learn more about other cultures.

BY | SAVIERE WILLIAMS WITH KHUSTA



Before the trip, I was excited yet terrified. I was thinking, "I'm going to another country!" It was exciting because I had never left the country, and this would be my first chance. Part of me was also scared because I've never left the country nor been on a plane. I thought I would see South Africans living in huts, that they wouldn't have a lot of technology — things

that are stereotypical when one thinks about Africa.

My job going to South Africa was to tell a story. I came here with my team to create a story about the people of Grahamstown, South Africa, and the place itself.

While in South Africa, we worked with the high schoolers from Inkululeko, a local program that helps

students go to college. Most of the time I was partnered with Khusta. We didn't talk much for the first few days. We went to Checkers, the local grocery store, and then we clicked. We both are food lovers, so we went around and picked foods we liked, and he even gave me great suggestions. After that, we talked about our daily lives. I learned a few things about him. He loves to play rugby — it's one of his favorite sports — and occasionally he works out at the gym for two or three hours. After school, he goes home. He watches his shows, eats, washes up, plays video games and, of course, sleeps. The similarities to an American teenager's life are what surprised me most. Africa is seen as a place of poverty, but Khusta has a normal life just like I do.

"This trip taught me ... the world isn't so different."

— Saviere Williams

There is so much to do in Africa. We strolled around town looking at local shops and stores, we made beautiful traditional jewelry, and we ate food and tried local restaurants like Steeler, Spur and Mugg & Bean. I even had traditional foods like braai (South African barbecue), and a home-cooked South African meal made by the amazing Zukisani, one of the workers from Inkululeko. We got a little wild one day and went to the Pumba Private Game Reserve and Safari Lodge. We saw beautiful animals like impalas, lions, antelope, monkeys and, my favorite, elephants. It was an amazing experience even though the elephants got too close for comfort.

I had many great moments, but my favorite was when the Inkululeko students and my group, the Syracuse City School District students, hung out for the day. We hung out every day since the first day, but this time, we were alone, only teenagers. It was my favorite day because I saw that teens from two different worlds weren't as different as I thought. I saw that no matter what their problems were in South Africa, they still live normal lives.

This trip taught me a few things. The world isn't so different, and everyone wants the same things as everyone else. I see America as a place where we have everything. I went to a small town in South Africa, and they have things we have: phones, video games and restaurants. South African teenagers are just like us. This trip taught me to never judge a book by its cover.

WHAT'S NEXT

The Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central students are now in post-production on a piece that will spotlight **Inkululeko staffer Madoda Mkalipi**, who works as the social enterprise coordinator for the nonprofit.

IT'S ALL CONNECTED



KNOW THE SIGNS OF A HEART ATTACK.

- ♦ Chest discomfort: pressure, squeezing, fullness or pain in the center of the chest that lasts more than a few minutes, or that goes away and comes back.
- ♦ Discomfort in other areas of the upper body: one or both arms, the back, neck, jaw or stomach.
- ♦ Shortness of breath: with or without chest discomfort.
- ♦ Other signs: breaking out in a cold sweat, nausea or light-headedness.

KNOW THE SIGNS OF A STROKE. THINK FAST.

- F** ♦ Face droops on one side
- A** ♦ Arm drift downward
- S** ♦ Speech sounds slurred
- T** ♦ Time to call 911.

IF YOU SUSPECT A HEART ATTACK OR STROKE,
CALL **911** AND **ASK FOR THE EXPERTS. ASK FOR UPSTATE.**

UPSTATE
UNIVERSITY HOSPITAL

ASK FOR THE EXPERTS.
ASK FOR UPSTATE.