

the **Stand** south side news

www.mysouthsidestand.com

Syracuse, NY

MARCH 2018

Issue 65

FREE

PRICE RITE POSITIVITY

New supermarket creates opportunities and inspires a hiring model for minorities

Three days in uniform

Community residents experience Civilian Police Academy

**nora
kirst**

Dedicated teacher and her family offer a safe space for children 365 days a year

**Like-minded
dreamers**
Local entrepreneurs of color work to motivate younger generations to be creative

YOUTH COME TOGETHER



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STUDENTS AT THE
S.I. NEWHOUSE SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH

DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,
BEA GONZÁLEZ, EMMA COMTOIS

CONTACT US

SOUTH SIDE NEWSPAPER PROJECT
(315) 882-1054
ASHLEY@MYSOUTHSIDESTAND.COM

THE STAND IS BASED OUT OF THE
SOUTH SIDE COMMUNICATION
CENTER 2331 SOUTH SALINA STREET
SYRACUSE , NY 13205

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PUBLICATION'S EDITORIAL PURPOSE AND IN
KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.

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■ Cover photography by Julianna Whiteway of Russell Mike

CALENDAR | MARCH

What: I-81 and the Common Good: Dismantling Racism in the I-81 Replacement Process
When: 4 to 6 p.m. Sunday, March 4
Where: May Memorial Unitarian Universalist Society, 3800 E. Genesee St.
Details: An informational forum features Yusuf Abdul Qadir, director of the Civil Liberties Union of CNY; Twiggy Billue, president of the Syracuse Chapter of the National Action Network, and Diana Ryan, Aqua Action CNY. They'll discuss the deep social and racial implications of the past and future of the Interstate 81 project for the city of Syracuse. The space is handicap accessible.
Cost: Free
More info.: Call or email May Memorial at (315) 446-8920 or info@mmuus.org. Contact ccklaver@gmail.com to request sign language interpretation.

What: Coffee & Conversation
When: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, March 29
Where: Southside Interfaith CDC, 500 W. Newell St.
Details: These informal community meetings are held on the last Thursday of each month to bring together neighbors in the McKinley community and friends from other Syracuse neighborhoods and surrounding areas. The group provides the hot coffee; attendees provide the hot topics.
Cost: Free
More info.: Email Audrey Haskell at aah1102@aol.com

This month's cover features Russell Mike, who runs Ram Construction — a local company hired to work on the Price Rite grocery store, which opened last year. A new report released by VIP Structures documents a volunteer effort to hire more minorities like Mike to work directly on job sites. The success of the effort is promising and could be used as a template for future construction — including projects such as I-81 — to ensure people of color and residents from the lower-income ZIP codes are hired. We feature this minority-hiring story on the following pages. If you'd like to read the report, visit mysouthsidestand.com.

Last month, it was great to see a local face on national TV. Alamin Muhammad, who runs Sandwich Saturdays as part of his nonprofit We Rise Above the Streets, was first profiled in The Stand in 2016. CBS featured him Feb. 8 as part of its series, "A More Perfect Union." In the segment, Muhammad is shown speaking in a packed room to his volunteers about how they are not only providing one meal, but also hope to Syracuse's homeless. The group now also distributes hygiene kits and warm clothing each Saturday. On March 19, Muhammad will be an award recipient and will give the keynote address at Syracuse University's Rubenstein Social Justice Award presentation.

Next month, Syracuse will recognize its annual Wisdom Keeper, someone who shows a continual caring for the city. The honoree, beloved Central New York columnist Sean Kirst, likely will push off praise, saying the real people to celebrate are the local residents who trusted him with their stories. During a speech he gave once in naming everyday heroes from the city, he ended with a mention of his wife, Nora, a local elementary school teacher who believes all children deserve to be nurtured so they can grow into capable young adults.

"The celebrity in our house is my wife," he declared. He next described a time when they drove by a store where "a bunch of serious players are standing on the corner." He said Nora yelled for him to stop, and she jumped out of the car to say hello to a former student. He remembers stern faces before the tension broke and someone recognized her. Next, she was receiving hugs and hearing updates on their lives.

Hearing this, I knew a story on Nora was needed, which quickly became evident after talking with her youngest son. Liam started his interview by telling me, "My mom is a story in herself."

Today when Nora sees former students, her husband can see in her eyes the little eager learners they once were. "If everyone could see these kids the way Nora sees them," Sean said in a recent interview, "everything would change."

Nora and many others who work passionately with local youth serve as silent heroes. Do you know a teacher, mentor or local volunteer who should be acknowledged? Let us know.

Finally, we also have a big announcement to share. After our trip to Grahamstown, South Africa, we have partnered with the community paper there, Grocott's Mail, for a journalistic exchange. Last month, we featured a reflection piece about the trip by our music columnist Reggie Seigler. His same piece was shared online at grocotts.co.za. In this new exchange series — Your Town, Our Town — we will share stories between publications to unify, educate and enlighten both communities. In this issue, we share a personal piece by Madoda Mkalipi, who works with an educational nonprofit in South Africa to help students prepare for college. We hope our readers will enjoy the content and gain valuable insight into another part of the world.

Ashley Kang



JOURNALISM SUMMIT

The Stand's director, **Ashley Kang**, will speak during a daylong **conference** March 27 with other **community-minded journalists** across the nation to learn from one another and brainstorm ways to better engage communities.

At the "Creating a culture of listening: Using dialogue to bridge divides" summit, Kang will discuss opportunities and challenges to pursuing community journalism through listening and dialogue. She will share research she has conducted on several projects as well as her direct work with the **South Side Newspaper Project**.

This gathering is hosted in partnership with **The Tennessean** newspaper in Nashville, Tennessee, and is the first of the American Press Institute's **2018 Thought Leader Summits**.

Following the summit, participants will create and distribute a public whitepaper, along with ideas, best practices and recommendations for **dialogue-focused journalism** that could help enrich the field and inspire more newsrooms.

API's summits are highly participatory and include only a limited number of invitees.

For more about API, visit americanpressinstitute.org

YOUTH VOICES

What: Visioning Voices Community Speaker Series and Workshop

When: 2:15 to 7:30 p.m.
Thursday, March 8

Where: Believers Chapel,
1640 South Ave.

Details: Event will discuss how play is not just for children, but how play is a lifelong activity that can bring multiple benefits to individuals and entire communities. Keynote speaker is **Joy Kuebler**, a landscape architect from the Buffalo area who has worked with numerous communities to expand the role of play in daily life.

More info.: Contact Maren King, director of the Center for Community Design Research, at mfking@esf.edu or call (315) 470-4721

YOUTH IN ACTION

Syracuse teens come together to advise the city's Common Council



> The members of the Youth Advisory Council have brought up numerous concerns they have about Syracuse, including crime, poverty, the quality of education and snow removal. | Photos by Ivana Pino

By | Ivana Pino
The Stand reporter

The Youth Advisory Council is brainstorming innovative solutions to major city problems

Back in December 2016, a couple of influential Syracuse Common Councilors put their efforts behind a new idea to help reinvigorate the city — create a forum in which a diverse group of thoughtful adolescents could learn from and talk with city officials. Since then, the Youth Advisory Council has been created, with 16 teens, ages 14 to 19, from public and private schools throughout the city.

Councilor Susan Boyle sees the benefits as running two ways, with the teens learning about the city's operations, while city officials become familiar with the hopes and fears of Syracuse's youngest generation. Boyle, councilor for District 3 and chair of the council's Education and Human Development Committee, says politicians and government officials can gain a new

understanding of how the legislature in the city can affect this demographic.

"My role is to open the doors of City Hall to the kids," Boyle said in a telephone interview. "The goal is to engage these kids about current events in our city and make sure they understand how everything works, what their role is and what their role can be."

In interviews, the current students on the advisory council spoke of concerns they have for the city.

Corcoran High School sophomore Anahja DeLee says the most pressing issue in Syracuse ultimately stems from a lack of humanity and understanding among its citizens. DeLee says this makes the life of lawmakers and local government officials more difficult.

"I say there is not enough compassion in the city," DeLee said in a phone interview. "I think the problem is really among the people, and this makes it harder on congressmen and women when people aren't willing to cooperate."

The Youth Advisory Council, which is intended to facilitate cooperation and conversation among Syra-

cuse residents, is run by Eleanor Leach, a Syracuse City School District educator in the curriculum and instruction department, and Nick Stamoulacatos, supervisor of social studies for SCSD.

“Right now, among our youth, there is a sense of hopelessness on national levels, state levels and local levels,” Stamoulacatos said. “On the local level, they seem to feel a little more informed because it seems that this new administration is communicating a little bit more with this generation.”

The Syracuse Common Council funds the advisory council. The focus on local issues includes finding ways to improve education and to create more opportunities for economic growth and development. The student members also research ways to create more positive spaces for younger Syracuse residents. The idea is to make the city an attractive and safe place to live.

Dominique Donnay, a sophomore at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, says the council is a way for Syracuse high school students to pinpoint the issues that affect them and come up with solutions.

Homicide is still a fear among many of Syracuse’s young residents even though it has declined, Donnay said.

“I know everybody has their own reason for wanting things to be different, but I think the main one is that they’d like to see Syracuse become a better city,” Donnay said. “I think they’d like to see the violence that happens decrease to where we don’t have to worry about getting injured or assaulted just by walking out the door.”

During their first three meetings, the students on the council have had the opportunity to discuss the issues that plague every sector of the city. At their last council meeting, they discussed their concerns with Mayor Ben Walsh in City Hall. Walsh welcomed their perspectives and assured the students of his support.

These students already have begun to immerse themselves in the political process with the help of their advisers. Among the issues: Syracuse city schools; parks and recreational centers; increased crime and poverty rates; and snow removal.

The Youth Advisory Council lasts the duration of the academic school year. Then the students are expected to complete a multimedia capstone project as a team by conducting research on local issues and each contributing a portion of the project.

Madison Prowak, a junior at Bishop Ludden Junior-Senior High School, is one of the 11 members and five alternates on the council. Prowak stressed the importance of the council in giving younger Syracuse residents insights into career fields and helping them learn what they can do to make a difference.

“Syracuse is in a stage of transformation,” Prowak said. “I want to know how much we can do. I think we have a lot of potential because we are the next generation, and our voices are important.”

WHY DID YOU JOIN?



Chenoa Baker: “Because I’m interested in public policy for my future career, I was interested in seeing how the city translates public opinion from youth into public policy.”



Anahja DeLee: “To get a better view of the government.”



Dominique Donnay: “Syracuse needs to change as a city, and I feel like when youth is in a position to change the city, it will help the community realize they are an important asset.”



Ebony Herring: “To make changes in the city, especially the South Side.”



Lyla Hua: “I have goals of furthering policies in Syracuse.”



Amara Clemente Johnson: “To improve our education, especially how we deal with disruptive students and provide the support needed to help those students.”



Ellie Mayberry: “To fix some of the issues I see within my community.”



Ana McGough: “To make more people want to come to Syracuse.”



Hassan Musa: “This knowledge that I have is not for me to keep. It’s for me to pass on to others.”



Cindy Nguyen: “To create professional jobs that people could create a living with.”



Madison Prowak: “Because this gives me an opportunity to voice my opinion and gives me insight as to how local government works.”

MULTIPLY YOUTH

What: Multiply Conference Syracuse

When: 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, March 24

Where: The Gathering Place, 420 S. Main St., North Syracuse

Details: Designed to energize and equip local churches to reach young people in their community, the Multiply Conference offers tracks for Student Ministry Leaders and Children’s Ministry Leaders

Cost: \$20

To sign up: Online registration closes at 11:59 p.m. March 19 and can be found by visiting [eventbrite.com](https://www.eventbrite.com) and searching for “Multiply Conference Syracuse.” To register after this, call (518) 494-6348.

ON THE SIDE

BY THE NUMBERS

The report by VIP Structures tracked the total number of minorities hired, including workers from targeted neighborhoods by ZIP code

Total minority workers on project:
142

Total workers on project:
491

Total minority workers from targeted zip codes:
96

Total workers from targeted zip codes:
142

Minorities from other zip codes:
46

Total workers from other zip codes:
339

PRICE RITE PROJECT

Minority workers were given opportunities to build supermarket



> Just past the checkout lines at Price Rite, space is available for shoppers to pack their groceries. On opening day last April, every shopper received one reusable plastic bag. | File Photo

By | Julianna Whiteway
Staff reporter

VIP Structures, others celebrate its report on hiring of minority and lower-income workers

The community had its eyes on the Price Rite project as it finally came together last year. And on the people who built it.

What did they see?

A job site like no other, says Russell Mike, whose construction company got some of the work as a sub-contractor on the new supermarket. It’s a project, he and others believe, that could be a template for the future to assure more people of color, and more of the city’s lower-income residents, get a larger share of the work on big contracts.

Mike, an African-American and owner of Ram Construction, says that people actually could see the results of a voluntary collaboration on Price Rite that resulted in unprecedented hiring of minorities, many of them from the low-income neighborhood. The job site at 611 South Ave. felt different, and it was.

“The need is tremendous,” Mike said in an interview

last month after a report was completed that detailed hiring data on the Price Rite job for minorities and for the city’s lowest-income residents in 11 targeted ZIP codes. “Just watching my presence alone,” Mike said, “a lot of bystanders walking by seeing me or seeing a couple other guys working there and for them knowing what was being built, what was coming up, and knowing that there were going to be opportunities for them also, it was good seeing all of that energy.”

A report by VIP Structures, general contractor for the work, showed the firm aimed to hire 25 to 30 percent minority and lower-income workers who were “boots on the ground” actually working on the site. That’s a much bigger commitment than government regulations that require such a percentage of minority and women-owned contractors, or bosses, not the people they employ.

The report was finished in December 2017 and hasn’t been widely circulated, but it’s being celebrated across the ranks — by the contractors, business and government groups, advocates for minorities and the lower-income, and by workers themselves who reaped the benefits from a unique hiring model.

The final tally: 29.2 percent of all workers were minorities and 28.8 percent were drawn from the low-

income ZIP codes. (Two of every three workers from the targeted ranks fit both criteria: a minority who also was from one of the ZIPs.)

David Nutting, CEO of VIP Structures, says work funded by government money, in part or in full, requires developers to hire a percentage of the contractors who are women and minorities. For the Price Rite project, the state-funded portion totaled \$600,000 and VIP Structures was required to meet a 30 percent hiring goal for what is called M/WBE contractors (minority and women).

“The project was the opportunity to support and invest in a part of our city that has not seen investment for the better part of two or three decades.”

— Rob Simpson

“Where it really falls short from my point of view is I don’t really want to hire a contractor, I want to hire people who are actually working, and regulations don’t deal with that at all,” Nutting said. “You can be a woman-owned business and hire nothing but white males. You can be a minority-owned business and hire nothing but white males.”

Nutting explained that approximately \$180,000 had to be spent on M/WBE contractors, which would be 4.5 percent of the total \$4.1 million budget. With the state-funded portion of the project being much lower than the total cost of it, the M/WBE goal had already been met in the architecture planning alone.

The voluntary goal that he agreed on with community advocates went far beyond and was endorsed by groups that can at times be at odds with businesses that must protect profits.

“The project was the opportunity to support and invest in a part of our city that has not seen investment for the better part of two or three decades,” said Rob Simpson, president and CEO of CenterState CEO.

Simpson had been talking with Walt Dixie, executive

director of Jubilee Homes, for over a decade about the need for a grocery store on the South Side. The area has been tagged as a “food desert,” where residents do not have adequate access to cheap and healthy food.

“It was really wonderful to be able to work with folks like Jubilee Homes, and neighborhood stakeholders, to work with our economic development officials here at the state and locally, as well as a major national company like Price Rite, to bring an investment, to bring a grocery store and to bring much-needed jobs to a neighborhood that, frankly, desperately needed them,” Simpson said.

The store, which opened April 2, 2017, employs around 75 now. (The government-subsidized project has not been without some negatives, primarily the closing of the nearly 100-year-old, privately owned Nojaim Brothers supermarket on the West Side, whose demise some have blamed, at least in part, on the Price Rite venture.)

That debate aside, local leaders had been looking for a project — no matter what the extent of government funding — where sometimes-competing interests could coalesce around a deeper hiring commitment to minority and lower-income workers down to the most elementary jobs and skill levels, not just M/WBE contractors. Those interests included Simpson, Reggie Seigler, who is Section 3 coordinator at the Syracuse Housing Authority, and Aggie Lane, who at the time was president of the Urban Jobs Task Force. They met regularly, focusing on finding a test case project that could be voluntary.

“First and foremost, it was about finding a partner that was open-minded and willing to try new things, willing to have a difficult conversation about race and employment,” Simpson said. “That’s not always an easy thing to do. It was a combination of those things that led us naturally to VIP Structures. They were very open to the dialogue, enthusiastic about the project, and they were a phenomenal partner.”

The group met with Nutting — who is white — to discuss how to create a more inclusive work site with bigger goals.

“The only way to make it happen is to do it with people who want to do it, and that’s the way we were able to make this happen,” Seigler said in an interview in his SHA office. “We did it in a way to create a model to show other developers. We need a guy like Dave Nutting who can say, ‘OK, we can do this, I did it, and I’ll do it again,’ and we can make this model happen without compromising our bottom line, without having to pay more for services, while at the same time getting a workforce trained that we can look at and use.”

According to the Census, in 2016 the poverty rate for Syracuse was the 13th highest of approximately 65,000 cities across the United States, deteriorating drastically from being ranked 29th nationwide the year before. The average household income for the city of Syracuse was recorded at \$33,695 in 2016 for a family of

TARGETED ZIP CODES

The Price Rite project sought workers from the following ZIP code areas:

13201 to 13208

13210

13224

13290

READ FULL REPORT

You can read the full report by VIP Structures — finished in December 2017, but not widely circulated.

It is titled “A Case Study of the Initiative to Increase Local Hire and Minority Participation in Construction of the South Ave. Syracuse Price Rite”

the **STAND** Download a copy at mysouthsidestand.com

four. The unemployment rate among blacks: 16 percent compared with 6 percent for the city overall.

Nutting said he depended heavily on Seigler and Lane, and they came through, soliciting “anybody they could find to help.” His message: “We have the jobs, we have the willingness, we want to make this happen but we really need help finding qualified minorities to work on the projects.”

Nutting and his wife moved to Syracuse in 1975, and he said they felt supported when he started his business.

“We really had people go out of their way to invite us into the community, so we owe a lot to the city,” Nutting said. “A significant portion of who we are is trying to figure out how to give back.”

Instead of sending out a formal letter and requiring his subcontractors to sign an agreement, Nutting made it voluntary, hoping to persuade them to intentionally hire local minority workers. Most subcontractors have crews that not only can get the work done at lowest cost but who are also reliable and trusted.

“The harder it is to actually do something in Syracuse, the worse it is for Syracuse, so if it can be done voluntarily, if it can become part of the norm, and if through doing it more and more there can be more people available for job sites, that’s going to be better for everybody,” Nutting said.

VIP Structures monitored and checked the hiring and site reports regularly to see if the goal of hiring minority workers, especially from impoverished ZIP

codes, was 25 percent of the workers on the site or higher. Nutting acknowledged that he did not push the contractors as much as he might have.

Most of the subcontractors were willing to commit to the minimum requirements set out for hiring workers.

“Some were great. Some were not,” Nutting said. “They were human beings but most of them were pretty darn good. We do a ton of work so we have some clout, but it’s disappointing to get to the end of the project and not have anybody on the site crew hired from the neighborhood or a minority.”

Construction began around July 6, 2016, and all workers were off site by the end of May 2017. Although the store opened in April, there were a few workers on site to perform “punch list” items, the final detail work.

At the start of the project, the number of minorities from the target ZIP codes went as high as 50 percent but as the project progressed, those numbers dwindled as the work became more technical, requiring more skills.

“We’d probably, in doing it next time, would be saying, ‘Come on, you got to do better,’ and push it along a little better,” Nutting said.

Lane is now vice president of the Urban Jobs Task Force (UJTF), which is a coalition of organizations and residents of the city of Syracuse and Onondaga County. The task force advocates for training and job opportunities for the unemployed, especially from communities of color and low-income families.

On this project, Lane said she realized how much



> David Nutting, CEO of VIP Structures, has a mission to hire minorities on work sites. | Julianna Whiteway, Staff Photo



> Reggie Seigler, Section 3 coordinator of the Syracuse Housing Authority, helps low-income and minority tenants find jobs. For the Price Rite project, he helped to identify workers from key ZIP code areas. | Julianna Whiteway, Staff Photo

dedication it would take to change the situation. She mentioned that people who already are getting work, such as those in the building trades, are already connected.

"Someone's family may have been in that trade, a child may have grown up with a father in the building trades, he has taught the trade, or his father was in the union," Lane said. "There are those that are very connected to that and then those who aren't." People of color, she said, "because of racism and segregation in our country," don't get opportunities. "How do you combat that?"

Lane said she believes one way is to find and recruit people like Nutting.

"There aren't many David Nuttings in the world that put that much time in it," Lane said. "I believe in goals because I don't think people will just do them since it's hard work."

At the beginning of the project, Syracuse Housing Authority, Jubilee Homes, Tradesmen International, and VIP Structures hosted a job fair at the Syracuse Chamber of Commerce. Seigler did recruiting, including everyone who could be involved to help the hiring go more smoothly, as well as the people who participated.

Seigler helps his tenants and low-income residents find employment and opportunities. He reached out to Twiggy Billue from Jubilee Homes and to others throughout the city and county to identify workers from impoverished ZIP codes.

Nutting said that was vital.

"It was everything," he said. "I don't have access to the neighborhood. We may eventually over time, but we really have to rely on folks who have access. Certainly, Reggie has a job which brings him into contact with an awful lot of contractors and people who work in the trades, so he was enormously helpful. Then he really expanded. He went to a number of other folks to help out as well so he was probably the most key to this."

UrbanJobs Task Force works with Jubilee Homes, which has a workforce development program called Build To Work, and it brought its participants to the job fair. Rickey Brown of Upstate Minority Economic Alliance was involved, helping find minority contractors to meet the Minority Business Enterprise Goal. He is bilingual and assisted Spanish-speaking residents who were present.

"About 60 people showed up to be interviewed by Tradesmen International for them to find the best candidates, catalog their skills, and put them in their database, then these contractors could hire them through Tradesmen," Lane said.

Tradesmen International also assisted workers with the process of obtaining required licenses and certifications.

For almost 20 years, Russell Mike has worked with VIP Structures, as part of his Ram Construction business, or as an independent worker when opportunities were available. He was encouraged to see so many young people from his neighborhood attend the job fair.

"A lot of these younger guys, with my color, my

LOCAL JOB TRAINING

Jubilee Homes Build to Work (B2W) runs work readiness, soft skills and life skills training sessions once a month from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Monday through Fridays for two weeks.

To sign up for a future session, visit the office, located at 119 South Ave., during office hours and complete the intake form or visit the website at jubilee-homes.org.

SEEKING A JOB?

A jobs program is being offered 10 a.m. to noon Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays in March.

This **drop-in resource for job seekers** allows participants to work independently and receive help with resumes, cover letters, references, job profiles and applications. **No appointment** is necessary.

Drop in at **Central Library's second-floor computer lab** in the downtown branch, located at 447 S. Salina St.

For more information, call (315) 435-1900



> Russell Mike, owner of Ram Construction, says bystanders noticed him while he was working at the Price Rite job site. | Julianna Whiteway, Staff Photo

culture, they don't understand how to go about working," Mike said. "They don't understand some of the language. They take a little more patience."

The Price Rite team continues to meet.

"The lesson for me, and it wasn't really surprising but it was really gratifying, is that when stakeholders sit down at the beginning of a project and identify their goals and their needs, that collaborative solutions are easy to find," Simpson said. "I think all too often, whether it's in economic development, politics, or whatever realm, we end up in situations where people don't really want to talk with each other and understand where they're coming from. They'd rather argue about things incessantly. For me, the reinforcing lesson here is that really good, honest, transparent dialogue on the front end saves a lot of time on the back end. And frankly, it leads to better outcomes in the community."

One of the contractors on the project was NaDonte Jones, who started N.J. Jones Plumbing LLC. He is the only black master plumber in Syracuse and is a Section 3 contractor. Section 3 ensures that preference for training, employment and contract opportunities provided by certain funds from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development be given to local, low-income residents — specifically those who receive federal housing assistance and businesses that employ or are owned by

them. Jones saw the need for training workers and started an apprenticeship program.

"I started the first and only minority-directed plumber apprentice program," Jones said. "We got it approved by the New York State Department of Labor in 2016."

Jones had a total of four employees on the Price Rite project, and he was on the job approximately 25 to 30 percent of the time. One employee was a journeyman plumber who has a minimum of five years experience in the field, and three were apprentice plumbers, all of whom were minority. One additional employee was white and was on the job for two to three weeks.

"Definitely from a standpoint of it not being mandated by the state or the owner of the property, or whoever is funding the project, that was one of the most diverse worksites I've been on with it not being a requirement," Jones said.

Each person involved in the planning and development of this project has looked ahead at how they can continue to work together and find other developers and community members to try this approach.

Nutting said he has worked with Seigler recently on The Post-Standard building downtown, which VIP Structures is redeveloping for its own office as well as for two or three new floors of residential units.

"We needed a couple of unskilled people starting out because we're taking down ceilings and some other stuff so Reggie found us two people who are Section 3 housing, who are great workers. Reggie is helping us source things as we come along."

Nutting said he understands workers need to get to the job site, but he recently asked his human resources department why workers are required to have a driver's license. Just getting to work is all that matters, he said. He wants Seigler and Brown to look through VIP Structures' employee manual to see if other such requirements are getting in the way of work for people from the South Side and other neighborhoods.

"If we're going to do this right, we're going to have to go to transportation," Nutting said. "How do we get people to job sites? We're going to have to eventually go to the elementary schools to get kids excited about construction jobs and architecture jobs. We're kind of picking up at the back end when people may not have skills, and we really need to push it down to the aspirational level."

Nutting said the Price Rite collaborative will need to stay together to bring in more developers.

"The good news about (Interstate) 81 is they have the ability from a governmental point of view to have requirements," Nutting said, looking ahead to the highway rebuilding project that will cost \$1.5 billion or more. "I think (Mayor) Ben Walsh and we're all trying to get ahead

of 81, and it's coming down the pike. How do we make sure there are some qualified minority workers that can work on the I-81 project? What would that be, what would that look like? What skill sets do they need? People like Reggie will be in great demand because he knows a ton of subcontractors who are out there now that will be able to do some of the work. Can they break the work into small enough pieces that enough people can work on it?"

After working on the Price Rite project, Mike continues to envision a mentorship program that he has thought about for years. It would connect workers who could use more skills and training and contractors who lack the resources with developers like VIP Structures who have the experience and opportunities.

"For a lot of us, it's a struggle," Mike said. "We get one job, then we may not get another job for another six months. By that time, you're almost out of business."

He was inspired by how VIP Structures reached out to the community, working with others not only to help build a project while mentoring workers, but also to share a model that could encourage more mentorship from other developers.

"It takes a different avenue to reach some of these guys, to bring them out, to want to work, and to let them know the nature of them building up their community, our community," Mike said. "It just takes someone from the community to try to give them that guidance and show them that this can be done."

FREE TAX HELP

Assistance with tax preparation will be available **by appointment only** on Tuesdays and Wednesdays, March 6, 7, 13, 14, 20, 21, 27 and 28. Location is the Betts Branch Library, 4862 S. Salina St.

AARP tax preparers are available to help residents prepare their tax returns for free. Bring last year's tax return, a valid picture ID, social security cards or official documentation for all people listed on the return, all W-2 and 1099 forms, and checkbook if direct deposit is desired.

Call (315) 435-1940 to schedule an appointment



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April	March 28
Summer	April 25

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ON THE SIDE

WISDOM KEEPER

F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse, a civic-minded group with the mission of Forging Our Community's United Strength, honors a local civic leader each year as a Wisdom Keeper. These individuals bring about change in Central New York by enabling citizens, organizations and government to work together to enhance citizens' quality of life.

Next month, **Sean Kirst** will be honored.

As a Wisdom Keeper, Sean joins a long list of people who have shown leadership, continual caring and an understanding of the importance of the vision for Syracuse's tomorrow.

Among previous Wisdom Keepers:

- **Bea Gonzalez**, vice president for Community Engagement at Syracuse University
- **Dr. Sharon Brangman**, director of the Center of Excellence for Alzheimer's Disease at SUNY Upstate Medical University
- **The Rev. Jim Mathews**, pastor of St. Lucy's Church
- **Oren Lyons**, Onondaga Nation Faithkeeper

A SECOND MOTHER

Nora Kirst has spent her career mentoring students in city schools



> Nora Kirst, with her husband Sean Kirst, has taught at three city elementary schools over the last 14 years. Both call Syracuse's South Side home. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

Sean Kirst will receive the Wisdom Keeper award but gives much credit to his wife

In casual conversation, Nora Kirst often has to clarify that when she's talking about "her kids" she means the students in her classroom, not her three children. Married to Syracuse's own storyteller Sean Kirst and mother to three — Sarah, Seamus and Liam — Nora's name may only be recognizable if you sat in her classroom over these past 14 years. She made teaching a second career in her 40s, becoming like a second mom to Syracuse's youngest learners in Elmwood, McKinley-Brighton and now Meachem elementary schools.

Next month, while Sean is honored as the 2018

Wisdom Keeper, bestowed each year to a citizen with a dedicated understanding for the city, Nora must be celebrated as well. "She provides a connection that helps him to do his job," explained her youngest son, Liam. "They both mutually have given a voice or power to people who sometimes don't have the ability to do it on their own."

For the upcoming event, Liam, 23, has been the local point person, coordinating details for the evening's program because Sean spends most of the week in Buffalo. Sean spent nearly 25 years as a columnist for The Post-Standard, leaving the paper in 2015. He now writes for The Buffalo News.

Sean credits his kids as one of the major factors in building connections with city residents he has interviewed over the years. Living in the city and having children enrolled in city schools, Sean says, changed the dynamic in how people interacted with him as a journal-

ist. It built the trust that so many put in him. “Nora, too, played an enormous part of that because she was teaching students in the heart of the city,” he said.

In many instances, she has provided him with an inside look at what he’s written about.

In Sean’s column, “School as sanctuary,” written before the closing of Elmwood Elementary, many of the students interviewed were her former pupils.

The Syracuse City School District Board of Education voted to close Elmwood at the end of the 2011-2012 school year, at the recommendation of then-Superintendent Sharon Contreras. The Post-Standard reported that Contreras said Elmwood should close because the district did not have the resources to improve its chronically poor performance. Closing the school would save \$3 million.

In the column, student interviews illustrated just how important that school was, calling it a “sanctuary.” Behind those doors, students had structure, and they had Nora, a teacher who would lovingly ask when they had last eaten, would shove dollars into their hands to buy a warm meal when necessary and would consistently follow up — the next day, week and throughout the years — to ensure they were on the right path.

Nora first started working at Elmwood as a substitute teacher, later becoming a teaching assistant in Katie Sojewicz’s kindergarten classroom in 1999, the same year Liam started kindergarten at Roberts.

Sojewicz, who now serves on the school board, remembers what a positive impact Nora had on her students. “Teaching was a natural extension of what she was already doing, and I knew she could do so much more

when it was her own classroom,” she said. “While it was a challenge to return to school, she did it to increase the impact she was making on students’ lives.”

This school year, Nora works at Meachem as an AIS — Academic Intervention Services — teacher. In this role, she works one-on-one with students in kindergarten through second grade on their deficits.

Sojewicz remembers Nora as an inherent nurturer who provided students with a steadiness that they were otherwise missing.

Once in charge of her own classroom, Nora told her students: “If I ever see you standing on the street corner or doing the wrong thing, I’m getting out of my car and coming over to talk to you,” she said. Oftentimes they’d laugh. She’d reassure them: “I’m not kidding.”

While she hasn’t had to do it much, there was one time she felt compelled to pull over. “The only thing that stopped me was that my son Liam was in the car,” she said, noting the boy she recognized was about the same age as him. When she got home, she sent a message through Facebook, saying she wasn’t accusing him of anything, just that she was worried.

The boy, Raquen Morris, was featured in Sean’s Elmwood column published seven years ago.

“She was mad at him the way she would be mad at me,” Liam explained. “She wasn’t actually angry. She was disappointed and concerned. She believed in his potential and wanted to make sure he was doing well.”

To Morris, Nora was like a second mother. The entire Kirst clan was a second family. “She always treated me like one of her own,” he said.

Morris, now 25, actually wasn’t one of Nora’s students. He remembers her from playing little league with Liam and having Sean as his coach. After every baseball game, the couple would take him and others out to eat. A favorite spot: Arby’s. During lean times for his family, there were gifts.

Today, Morris has a job, a son and is getting by the right way. For the past three years, he has played for the city’s minor league football team, Syracuse Strong, which won the Glory Bowl championship Jan. 20 in New Orleans. He said that besides winning the bowl game, a crowning moment in his life was receiving his very first jersey from the Kirst family one Christmas. “Not only because it was my first jersey, but of my favorite basketball player — Carmelo Anthony when he played for SU.” Even though it no longer fits him, it remains precious. It has been handed down to his son, Rameir. At 5 years old, the preschooler can’t yet wear it, but will grow to learn its significance.

“They all accepted and loved me from Day One,” Morris said about the entire family. “Not one family member ever judged me. I was treated like family, always.”

In their youth, the three Kirst children could tell

GOING TO THE EVENT

What: Wisdom Keeper Dinner

When: 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 4,

Where: Marriott Syracuse Downtown in the Finger Lakes Ballroom, 100 E. Onondaga St.

For tickets: Contact F.O.C.U.S. Greater Syracuse at (315) 448-8732

SPECIAL PRE-EVENT

A speaking program with Sean Kirst and book signing of “The Soul of Central New York” is scheduled for 4:30 p.m. before the Wisdom Keeper Dinner.

‘Ms. Kirst, Ms. Kirst’

When Liam Kirst reached Corcoran High School, he saw the lasting impact his mother had made on her students from their elementary school days. Many would hear Liam’s last name and ask if he was related to “Ms. Kirst.”

“I can’t even remember the name of my kindergarten teacher, but everyone seems to remember her,” Liam said. “It shows how remarkable and well-loved she is.”

Sean adds that the couple cannot drive down the street without people yelling out. He laughs while saying, “It’s always Ms. and never Mrs., who knows why. From the porches, we’ll hear ‘Ms. Kirst, Ms. Kirst.’”

IN THE KNOW

Nora Kirst's first full-time position as a classroom teacher was at McKinley-Brighton Elementary in 2004. She jokes that her last name might have played a part in being hired.

She says she never boasts about being **married to Sean**, but by living in the city, someone will inevitably ask if the two are related.

"But during the interview, the vice principal asked me about **'Seamus Kirst,'**" she remembers. "Usually when people recognize the last name, they ask about Sean. But Seamus was becoming known for his oratorical competition wins, which he continued to compete in through high school."

This vice principal had been a judge when Seamus, at age 11, had competed. "So when I got home, I told him: 'It wasn't your dad this time, it was your name that helped me land this job.'"

their parents did more than most, but Seamus, now 27, said he didn't realize to what degree until he got older.

"In the classroom, my mom would hear kids say they wanted to play baseball." While he and his brother could just ask their parents to sign up, he knows it wasn't so easy for other city students. To join and play requires money and a car to get to practice and games. Seamus said while there are many who understand systemic inequalities, what was so special about his parents is that they didn't just talk about how unfair things were. "My mom saw that these kids wanted to play, but couldn't, so asked herself how can we fix that," he said.

Along with Sean — and a host of other dedicated volunteers with the then-Southside American Little League — city children were recruited directly from their classrooms. Sean would visit, tell them if they wanted to play, they could — even if their parents couldn't afford the fee. Once the kids were signed up, the couple provided rides to and from games, bought a glove if one was needed and took players out to eat. "Some days, I even dragged them out of bed," Sean added with a laugh.

Each Halloween, generations of students flock to the Kirst house — more so to say hi to Nora than to trick or treat. "I look forward to Halloween so much," Nora said. "I practically run over my family because I don't want to miss greeting anyone."

And Nora ensures the family is prepared. "We buy hundreds and hundreds of candy bars," she said. "Sean just laughs at me, but I refuse to run out."

For years, Sarah, now 28, was in charge of decorating the house with lights and spider webs, instructed by her mother to make it kid-friendly. "She never wanted it to look scary, just fun," Sarah said. While the three were still in school, the family would also host an annual party. Each year saw a mix of Sarah's and the boys' friends, every player from the little league team and children of every age from the neighborhood. "We would play tag and scary games in the yard, drink punch out of a giant skull bowl and blast 'Cha Cha Slide' by DJ Casper while we danced around the living room," Sarah recalled.

The family's open-door policy extended all 365 days of the year. Everyone was always welcome at their house growing up and still are to this day, all three children say.

"My parents were almost like everyone's parent on our little dead-end street," Sarah said. Their house, set back behind Roberts and Corcoran schools, welcomed neighborhood kids as early as 7 a.m. to grab breakfast and as late into the evening as needed. Their children remember kids seemed to always be running in and out of the house. "If we didn't know who they were," Sarah said, "we got to know them, and they became family."

In Syracuse, which many see and describe as a segregated city, Liam says he thinks his parents have both been able — in a profound way — to cross these invisible barriers.

Books by the Kirsts

Sean Kirst and Seamus Kirst have both published books recently. "I kid Sean sometimes ... is there anything about our family that people don't know, between you and Seamus," Nora Kirst said about recent writings that share her husband's and son's alcoholism. Describing herself as a very private person, she says that has changed in recent years, noting Seamus played a big role.

"When Seamus was in rehab, I didn't tell a single person at work," she recalled. Then when the book was released, she was transported back to raising an alcoholic teenager. "You always worry about your children, no matter what age they are. ... but that is just such a different worry." Today she's grateful that he is doing well and admires him for being so open.

"The Soul of Central New York: Syracuse Stories" by Sean Kirst



Published in 2016, the book is a collection of newspaper columns written between 1991 and 2015 for Syracuse's The Post-Standard

"Sh...tfaced: Musings of a Former Drunk" by Seamus Kirst



Published in 2017 with a foreword by Sean, the book is a graphic account of his alcoholism and addiction as a teenager

FAITH, HOPE, BOXING

How four men have kept kids in the ring and off the streets

By | Dale Harp
The Stand board member

Honorees Arthur Harrison and Ed Beauford use their past to build brighter future for youth

It was the year 2000. I was going to CAPS (Behavioral Health Services) for outpatient substance abuse treatment when one of the counselors asked me: “When you’re not drinking and abusing drugs, what do you like to do?”

I told her I liked drawing and weight training. She said she couldn’t help me with the drawing, but she could give me a pass to use the gym at the Rescue Mission. I accepted, and I ran into four of my friends I grew up with — Arthur “Bob” Harrison (we nicknamed him “Harry”); Ed “Bang Bang” Beauford, because of his prowess in a pro boxing career; Ron Williams, known for his bass guitar playing and weight training; and James Jackson, an amateur boxer and a sketch artist who also dabbled in the culinary arts.

At the time, they were all working on getting a building to begin a place for boxing, exercising and a place to help children do their homework.

Growing up from childhood to adulthood, we all changed our lifestyles, and we used that energy to do things that were positive. We showed our children and grandchildren that some roads are not to be traveled.

The four have established the Faith Hope Community Center, located at 1029 Montgomery St. They are doing a wonderful job keeping the youths that they encounter off the streets and away from a life of crime or an early grave. I guess this was something that the generation before us didn’t see because whenever we did something bad or wrong, they would applaud it and say that’s a bad little (profanity), which made us feel that we had to live up to a reputation.

So we would fight one time, two times and sometimes three. But as we got older, we could shake hands and laugh about the fights we once had. I cannot say that the older generation was truly misleading. It was just their way of showing us if you fall, get up and try again. The younger generation is playing for keeps, and when the time comes for them to realize that they were wrong, there will not be a time to go to the cemetery and say: “Man come on up out of the ground, we were only playing.”

Faith Hope teaches these young men that they don’t need violent behavior in their lives to be respected as great young men.



> Arthur Harrison and Ed Beauford are shown Jan. 28 at The Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration, where both were honored as Unsung Heroes. | Riley Bunch, Staff Photo

I have watched this center grow over the past 18 years, even documenting its successes in photos for a 2014 summerlong photo project, *From Where We Stand*, led by the South Side Newspaper Project. Support has increased as volunteers offer a helping hand to keep our youth rolling in a respectful manner.

Volunteers include “Goat,” an exercise analyst and karate expert; Ali, who helps the up-and-coming boxers; and John Johnson, a barber whose son has become a great middle-weight contender. His son, Elijah Johnson, has the right temperament that a young man should have, and if you were to meet him, you would never know how he performs in that square circle (ring).

They have succeeded through donations and sometimes money from their own pockets. They are still in need and have hope in their community.

On Jan. 28, Syracuse University honored Harrison and Beauford at The Martin Luther King Jr. Celebration at Syracuse University. This was Beauford’s second time. I truly commend these men for the wonderful job they are doing to help save our youths of all races, treating them equally.

I have even had the opportunity to go along and be the cornerman for these youth as they applied what they had learned in the gym, truly a remarkable experience. The gym is equipped for the whole family; everyone is welcome — free of charge.

Beauford and Harrison are both what I call black history historians. Beauford was a Golden Gloves Champion in 1969, in which he came in second place, making him an alternate for the Olympics. Harrison says he has learned from mistakes and wants younger men and women to take heed of obstacles he has overcome.

They want to continue to reach out to the community so that our youngsters have something to look forward to in the years ahead.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Monetary donations, computers and computer programs are welcome. Checks should be made out to Faith and Hope Foundation and can be dropped off at the center.

Faith Hope Community Center

1029 Montgomery St.

(315) 476-7942

Gym hours

The gym is open noon to 8 p.m. Monday through Friday

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 ONLINE

Visit TheyWearBlue.com to see all stories and videos in this series

TRAIN LIKE A COP

Syracuse Police Department to offer its third civilian police academy



> Brandiss Pearson, shown with son Shaun Jackson, attended the civilian police academy in January 2017 to learn how Shaun should react if approached by a police officer. You can read her personal takeaway from the sessions on Page 21. | Kathleen Flynn, They Wear Blue Photographer

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

Residents can attend training to learn how officers make life-and-death decisions

The Syracuse Police Department's three-day, 10-hour civilian police academy in January 2017 gave 40 community residents some idea of what it is like to make split-second decisions on when and how to use possibly deadly force, and provided the group some legal background, too.

The academy answered some questions for residents, and left them with others.

Chief of Police Frank Fowler told attendees that the academy is designed for residents to better understand how police are trained to respond.

"You will be exposed to the same training as our recruits ... and also (learn) how and why we do the things we do," Fowler said. "Our goal is for you to leave with a more educated eye."

At the start, officers said they feel current news coverage of police is negative and centers around use of force.

"It is improper to base on race, because race can't be part of the equation."

— Deputy Chief
Derek McGork

The media has "magnified the bad news," Fowler said. "But tonight, you will all go home and sleep safely because of these men and women."

The first night opened with lectures on the laws that govern the SPD, taught by then Sgt. Derek McGork and Detective Mark Rusin. McGork has since been promoted by Mayor Ben Walsh to deputy chief, overseeing the investigation bureau. The second and third evenings

included reality-based training exercises, from how to restrain a protester to how to handle an individual wielding a gun.

Brandiss Pearson, a nurse and mother, spoke up as a parent of a black teenager. She said she is concerned daily about her son's safety. "Having a 16-year-old black son who is 6-foot-2, 260 pounds, he fits every description," she explained.

Her greatest fear: Her son would be mistakenly identified as a suspect and targeted because of a snap judgment by an officer. As a mother of two teen boys and wife to a corrections officer, she said she has a broad perspective, but still can't shake her fear. One reason she participated was to learn what her son should do if approached by an officer. "If he's ever stopped, what do I tell him to do?" she asked.

McGork said that officers are taught that race cannot be part of the equation, explaining in legal terms that race and gender are not "articulable facts."

"So it would always be improper to ID a suspect solely on race," he said. Officers must use a more accurate description such as tattoos, scars, specific clothing — not just a black male, tall and heavy-set. Rusin later clarified that courts have determined race and gender are not reasonable factors, but descriptions like size, height and weight are.

When describing what police refer to as "investigatory stops" — which many equate with the now unconstitutional New York City stop-and-frisk tactic — McGork said the purpose is to preserve safety and minimize crime. McGork explained that the more information or suspicion an officer has, the more intrusive an officer can be (*People v. DeBour*).

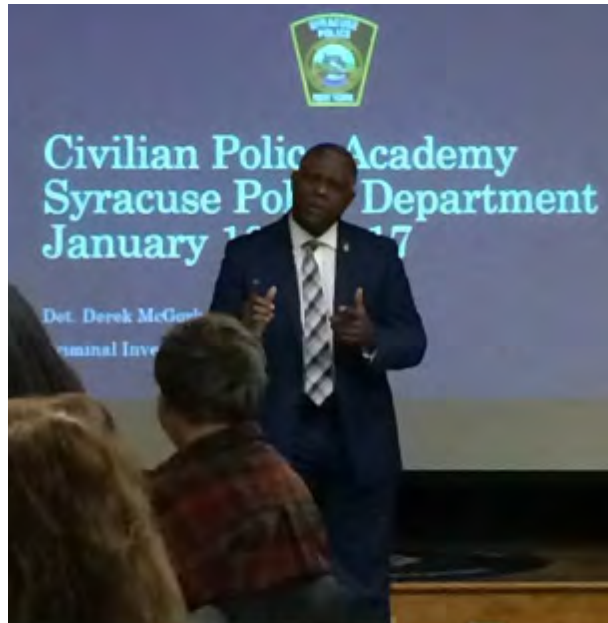
"But we're not often great communicators," he conceded of police officers. "I think many times we could do a better job at explaining why and what we are doing."

But if there is immediate concern for public safety, some details could be withheld by police and an officer's actions could become more forceful. Clifford Ryans, who is with O.G.s Against Violence and a member of the city's Citizen Review Board, told the group that once he was told he "fit the description" of a robber and was pulled over by an officer.

"Actions of officers would depend on who made the tip and how detailed the description was — is there reasonable suspicion?" McGork said. "The officer has to make that determination."

One attendee suggested that if students wore school uniforms, officers could recognize them as a non-threat. Another muttered that the logical deduction is that the teen would be stopped because of an officer's unconscious bias.

"This is something we teach," McGork said in reference to stereotyping. "It is improper to base on race, because race can't be part of the equation."



> Chief of Police Frank Fowler welcomes residents to the department's 10-hour civilian police academy. The training was last offered in 2017. | Provided Photo

McGork's closing thought: "As an officer out on patrol, I know that 139 cops were killed last year. I don't want to be number 140."

The compelling question posed by the mother, Pearson, left a division in the room. Her plea for something she could instruct her son to do, something to possibly spare his life if he were stopped by an officer, fell flat as the sergeant tried to convey how a cop approaches the same situation with an equal level of fear.

One citizen participant, pastor Antwan Chavis, concluded: "But when approached by a police officer, the kid is thinking: 'This may be my last day alive.'"

The familiar scenario was not addressed again until the second night, when Pearson posed the same question to Rusin.

Rusin said he impresses upon new recruits that they are acting as extensions of the law and must be apolitical and remove all prejudices.

"You (police) have to go into a citizen encounter knowing that someone may have this initial assumption or fear of you," Rusin said. "So our demeanor should always be professional; we stress this in our training."

Later, Rusin was asked about dealing with people with mental health issues and who have conditions such as autism. He said training is the key, again, and commented that he has two young nephews with autism who hate to be touched. He described much of policing as observing and reading cues. SPD recruits do a week of training on mental health, he said, and the issue overlaps into other portions of instruction as well. In total, training that is focused on mental health issues runs close to 80 hours, he said.

Additionally, Rusin said the state requires seven

SIGN UP TO ATTEND

The Syracuse Police Department will offer another three-day **civilian police academy** designed to put citizens in the shoes of a police officer

When: April 3, 4 and 5

Time: 4:15 to 9 p.m. each day

Cost: Free. Participants are expected to attend all three days of training

More info: Anyone interested in attending should contact Officer Dennis Burlingame at dburlingame@syracusepolice.org as soon as possible

ABOUT THE TRAINING

The January 2017 session was the second civilian training class the SPD has offered and was advertised to also include discussions of recent high-profile incidents involving deadly force, though few well-known cases were mentioned.

Instead, examples centered around undated videos showing incidents when officers had to make split-second decisions based on limited information.

One example had officers being led on a high-speed chase after a traffic stop escalated, and in another responding to a disorderly call when the subject had ingested drugs.

Out of 400 applications, the department chose 40 participants, who included local attorneys, pastors, former Army/Navy personnel, teachers and social workers, two members of the Citizen Review Board, one firefighter and local activists.



> Detective Mark Rusin, who works in the Criminal Investigations Division (CID), led the 2017 civilian academy training offered to 40 Syracuse residents. Learn more about his role as a detective at TheyWearBlue.com. | Bryan Cereijo, They Wear Blue Photographer

hours of use-of-force training for new recruits. However, because SPD sees this as vital, he says the department does closer to 70 hours of training. New recruits are also required to take implicit bias tests to measure attitudes, stereotypes and other hidden biases that can influence perception, judgment and action.

Chavis posed one more question, asking Rusin if he personally thought police brutality is happening locally.

Instead of answering, Rusin posed the question back to guests: "What might I base my answer on?"

Someone answered: "Data."

Rusin responded: "But data doesn't always meet perception."

As an example, he discussed how many people use Facebook as a news source and noted that video shot on cellphones often only shows a narrow view of an incident.

So what gives an officer the right to use force?

In New York state, it is Article 35. This statute outlines the rules and regulations referring to the use of physical force and deadly physical force based on what an officer believes necessary.

To teach recruits what is deemed necessary, Rusin says, it starts with review of laws and court cases, plus scenario trainings.

In the final two days of the civilian police academy, participants could volunteer to try different practical

exercises — fighting off someone with a knife, responding to disorderly calls with unknown outcomes, even working in a team in an active-shooter scenario where participants maneuvered through a portion of the jail.

Critical decision-making was required to determine if the citizen-now-cop needed to simply calm someone down with talk, hold someone off until backup could arrive or draw a gun, using deadly force. For some, it was shocking to see the quick reaction time required to complete the simulation correctly.

Officers explained that they might have several minutes to hold off an attacker before backup could arrive. Most simulations at the academy lasted only 60 seconds, showing the physical exhaustion that can set in after a short time.

Participants were also reminded to observe their surroundings, never knowing if someone might have a cellphone pointed at them or if an additional attacker could be lurking out of sight.

One officer said: "There's many people angry at the uniform right now."

The new norm, Rusin said, is training, including understanding different cultures. He noted that Syracuse has many refugees.

"Train, train, train," he said. "Train on how to interact and work with cultural differences. Training is the fluid movement of the police department."

WHAT WE LEARNED

Residents reflect on training, share what motivated them to attend

By | Jasmine Gomez
They Wear Blue reporter

Five participants share largely positive takeaways from the three-day January session

TIM BOEHLERT

“I think what we’ve seen in the national media has been very disheartening because I respect law enforcement, and I think it’s an extremely hard job. Knowing what I know now after putting in almost nine years of doing some of what they are expected to do, I’m a lot more empathetic to them. I think a lot of what I’ve seen, the way I’ve interpreted it has just been bad journalism, wrong journalism, and journalism for the sake of creating a revenue in some way.”

Why he went

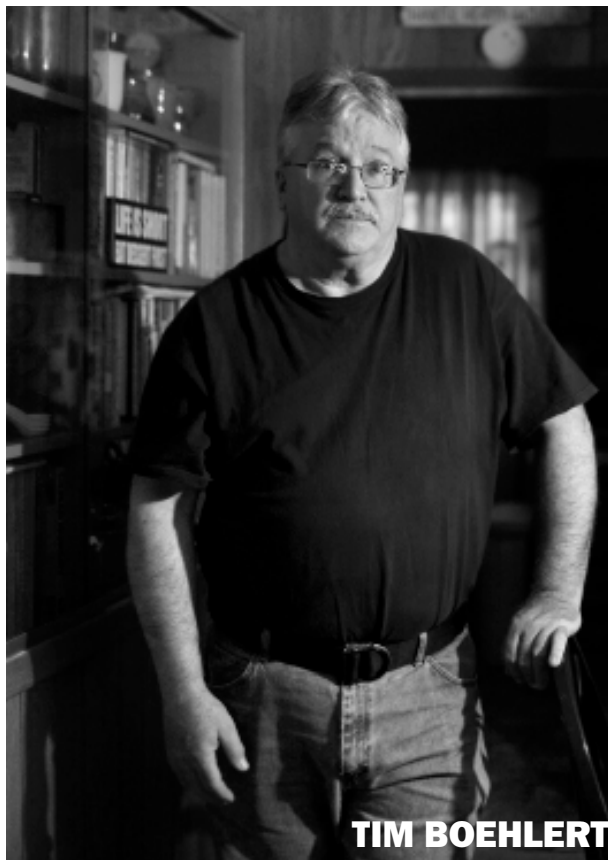
As a security officer at a hospital, Boehlert spent almost nine years encountering some of the same people police run into in their work. During his detail, Boehlert often dealt with people “on the edge” as a result of mental health issues, recreational drugs, or other events that resulted in their trip to the psychiatric department in the hospital where Boehlert worked.

Boehlert has been kicked, punched, spit on and stabbed, but he said he was never equipped with the tools necessary to deal with uncontrollable people or dangerous situations — tools that all police officers acquire in their own training. He attended the academy to learn how police deal with those types of situations and handle the immediacy of a threat. Boehlert feels police officers often get a bad rap in the media; he said he wanted to learn enough to correct some of the nonsense he sees about cops as a result of “bad journalism.”

What he gained

Boehlert saw the Civilian Academy as a great attempt by the police department to reach out to the community. He says police are often misunderstood because people don’t know the laws governing what cops do or appreciate the pressure they’re under making split-second decisions. “To me, going to the academy was eye-opening in many aspects because I had no idea what the laws were, what the rules are that they follow. As a civilian you don’t necessarily act or think on those premises, and they do.”

Boehlert feels the event provided an opportunity for police officers to show that they have more in common



TIM BOEHLERT

> Retired Security Officer Tim Boehlert attended to learn how officers are trained to handle individuals with mental health issues, in a drug-induced psychosis or in crisis. | Kathleen Flynn, They Wear Blue Photographer

with the community than some may think.

“They have families, they are people, they are not robots and they have standards that they are held to,” Boehlert said. Boehlert thought the event helped alleviate some community members’ hostility through discussions and insights into the difficulty of the job. “They (cops) don’t have the choice that you and I do to walk away and say, ‘Well, maybe the police will show up,’ ‘Maybe somebody will stop it.’”

The civilian academy moved Boehlert to write a 40-page reflection discussing his experiences from the event and some of the case law governing how police operate.

What was missing?

Boehlert wishes the academy was more in-depth, but he understands the time and financial constraints involved. And he said more opportunities for group work would have allowed more discussion and insight into differing points of views.

IN THEIR OWN VOICE

Some participants described the event as eye-opening, building the empathy police had hoped for in the shared experience. Others said questions remain unanswered.

To hear individual **audio interviews** with each featured participant, visit theywearblue.com/civilian-academy/

SIMULATED SCENARIOS

In addition to classroom training on the laws that govern officers, participants also put on police gear and went through some of the stress-inducing scenarios officers can face patrolling the streets

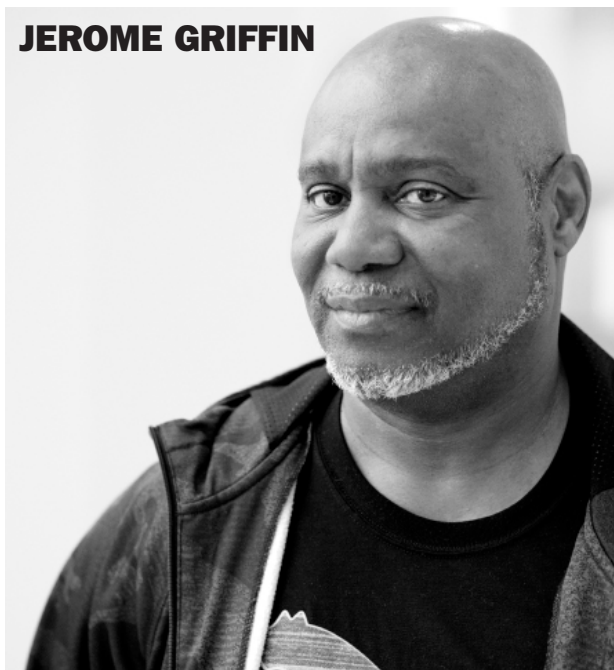
DISORDERLY

The first encounter placed participants in pairs on a disorderly conduct call. They wore a police duty belt with a “simunition weapon,” a nonlethal training gun. Before entering the scenario, all they know is the individual is agitated. When they enter, the 6-foot-9 male is shouting in a Slavic language and using exaggerated body gestures. He reaches into his back pockets. Participants had to decide how to appropriately respond — pull their gun or try to calm the individual.

TENSE STANDOFF

On this call, the pairs were told they were being sent to a residence where an individual has pulled a gun. This scenario tested individuals’ critical thinking skills. Before entering, participants were not informed if anyone else was in the home. When they first entered, many tried to talk him down, encouraging him to put down the gun or kick it toward the officers. As time elapsed and tension grew, the “sim” gun was pointed at the individual’s head and then directly at the officers to test their reaction.

JEROME GRIFFIN



> Martial arts enthusiast and neighborhood activist Jerome Griffin attended out of curiosity. | Kathleen Flynn, They Wear Blue Photographer

JEROME GRIFFIN

“If I was stopped by a cop, my first image was, ‘I’m in trouble. I’m black, I’m older, I’m not going to get a fair shake,’ and I didn’t get that image from these guys (SPD). I saw people. I saw guys with families. I saw guys who put their pants on one leg at a time as I did. It’s just they have a job to do.”

Why he went

Griffin went to school in the Bronx in the 1970s, when he said tensions between police and the community were even worse than they are now. “You couldn’t distinguish between the cops and the criminals, really,” he said. Griffin’s opinions of police changed when he moved.

“Coming to Syracuse, the police wasn’t just beating on you just to beat you. When you called 911, someone did respond. A public servant wasn’t someone you had to pay to help you.”

He attended out of pure curiosity about how the SPD operates.

What he gained

For Griffin, the academy helped to humanize the cops, since he saw the officers there as people, not just guys in blue suits.

“I saw very courageous people who did not only their job, but they have to go home at night. They punch a clock and I never really had that image before.”

The academy also gave him confidence to know people are out there protecting the streets where his grandchildren and family members walk every day. He knows his family can count on an SPD officer, Griffin

said. For him, the academy shows that the SPD is extending an olive branch to the community. “They’re trying to work with people, and that’s a big thing.”

What was missing

For Griffin, the only thing missing is follow-up from the event from both sides, to keep closing the gap, to keep building on what was presented. He said he suspects that would build trust and help officers do their job a lot better.

NICOLINA TRIFUNOVSKI

“You have the police and then you have the community. Both sides want the other side to see where they’re coming from, but it’s almost like this: It’s like everybody’s saying, ‘Let’s have a conversation,’ but ... you basically fall in line with where I stand.”

Why she went

Trifunovski wants to be a part of the group that brings the conversation between police and community to the table.

“I can’t seem to get people who are very hard-lined on one side or the other to understand the other side so it’s basically you’re either ‘A’ or you’re ‘B.’ Nobody wants to see that there’s another option and that we can all come together and find common ground.”

Trifunovski has tried to empathize with both the police force and the local community. While she respects the job of a police officer, Trifunovski said there are conflicts that haven’t been resolved.

“The issue is that the good cops are good, but they’re also standing up for or protecting bad ones,” Trifunovski said. She has had experiences where law enforcement officers have been disrespectful to her. On the other side, though, Trifunovski feels there is also no budging from the community and it is often difficult to even talk to some community groups that are unapproachable.



NICOLINA TRIFUNOVSKI

> Employee at National Grid Nicolina Trifunovski attended to be a part of the conversation. | Kathleen Flynn, They Wear Blue Photographer

What she gained

The academy allowed her to get a deeper understanding of the difficulty level of the job and how complicated the discussion about police and community relations actually is. Trifunovski also felt the civilian academy was a beginning to chip away at an iceberg.

What was missing

Trifunovski left the class with many unanswered questions and said the conversation about why people of one demographic are dying at the hands of police at a greater rate than other demographics was not addressed.

AMALIA SKANDALIS

“You need to empathize and see why your community is feeling this way. They’re not feeling this way because of justified moves ... when there’s someone with an open-carry permit getting shot in his car in front of his kids, when there’s a guy that was choked to death — with a guy on his neck — saying, ‘I can’t breathe.’ There’s certain things that have happened that have caused a lot of anger in the community.”

Why she went

Skandalis is a local activist who has participated in Black Lives Matter events and has advocated for the local school district. She said the police department has been working to engage more with the community, and she attended for an inside look at being an officer.

What was gained

Skandalis said the event was an educational experience; she learned about the laws ruling police use of force, something she said others need to know. She got a better understanding of the need for more legislation.

What was missing

Skandalis feels that the SPD did not really engage about current events and the role of race in police-community interactions. There was no back-and-forth dialogue, and her concerns remain about unjustified deaths due to police brutality.

“That level of the conversation didn’t really get engaged. We didn’t look at the different ones like Alton Sterling or Philando Castile and those types of death.”

BRANDISS PEARSON

“My son is not an at-risk youth. He has a job, he goes to school every day, but my fear for him is that he will encounter a police officer for something unwarranted and not know how to navigate that situation.”

Why she went

Pearson, pictured on page 16, is married to a cor-



> Arts teacher and local activist Amalia Skandalis, with her children Teah, 7, left, and Niko, 9, attended to gain a wider perspective. | Kathleen Flynn, They Wear Blue Photographer

rections officer, with a 16-year-old son who she said bears a resemblance to Michael Brown, the teen who was slain by a police officer in Ferguson, Missouri. Her husband and son have differing views toward the police.

“I just wanted to be able to go and get an unbiased look at what law enforcement actually has to deal with so I could take it back and help bridge the gap between my son and my husband,” Pearson said. While her husband is supportive of police, her son is intimidated by them.

Pearson has had many positive interactions with her local police force. Her uncle is a retiree of the SPD, and officers have often positively engaged with her other teenage son, who has Down syndrome.

What she gained

Pearson found the event eye-opening regarding the stress police officers undergo. “They put us in scenarios that were actually rather benign but in real-life could be life-threatening for a police officer,” Pearson said. “It gave us an opportunity to really see how difficult it is for officers to make decisions in the blink of an eye.”

What was missing

Pearson said she wishes the event would have been open to her then 16-year-old son, but SPD said it was for adults only. And she said her anxiety still lingers. Though she wants her son to be able to rely on the police, she fears for him because he is a big man already (6-2, 260) and fits the description of many of the men in high-profile police shootings.

“How do I teach my son who is afraid of his own shadow, still sleeps with his prayer bear he got when he was a baby, how do I teach this kid how to navigate walking to school and fitting the description?”

SIMULATED SCENARIOS**LIPSTICK KNIFE**

In an effort to make this scenario as life-like as possible, participants put on a clean white T-shirt and then tried to fend off an attacker who had a knife smeared with red lipstick. For the next 60 seconds, the citizen participant was instructed to use a police baton to hold back the attacker. The instructors noted that it could take backup up to four to six minutes to arrive, so performing the exercise for only 60 seconds showed how quickly an officer could become exhausted. When time was up, participants could also see how many cuts or slashes they would have potentially received, judging by the lipstick marks.

ACTIVE SHOOTER

Participants worked in teams of four, in full tactical gear. The room was dark and the team had to navigate down a corridor. In some scenarios, someone would jump out, forcing the team leader to determine if the person posed a threat: Is it the shooter or a bystander trying to escape? Participants found the exercise disorienting and said it was difficult to see and maneuver because of the gear and because of darkness in the building.

Lazarus Sims

Nominated by Anthony Pitts, newly appointed coordinator of Healthy Start’s Fatherhood Program



MEET FATHER LAZARUS: Sims, who turns 46 this month, is the commissioner of the Department of Parks and Recreation for the city of Syracuse. He has five children and has been married to Daphne Sims for over a decade. Sims played basketball at Syracuse University from 1992-96. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

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

A: It's an amazing experience. Something you are never ready for. You can't go off of someone else's experience to become prepared because kids are all different, the process is always different. But it was amazing and scary ... a 'what the heck just happened' moment. I was fine during the delivery. As long as there are no needles, I am fine.

Q: What can you share about your children?

A: My oldest Da'Joura is 21. She likes fashion now. She grew up tomboyish, went to princess mode and then got to junior high and wanted to be a lady. She's here local and working. She went to school for a year but took this year off; we are trying to get her back. We push all kids to earn a college degree because it helps provide unlimited opportunities. My second is named after me, Lazarus Jr. He's 13 and a big boy ... tall. All my kids are big — were always in the 95th percentile on the growth chart. He is quiet until he gets to know you, kind of like me. Next is LJ, who will be 11 on our birthday. He was born on my birthday, March 28. He was a special birthday gift. He's a sensitive, loving kid. Always concerned about others' feelings. My 6-year-old, Da'Zya, is the

call me, they know dad is coming, that consistently dad will be there.

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

A: All my friends that I know who have kids are with their kids. I don't know one that doesn't spend time with their kids, even when they are not living with the child's mom. The stereotype is disheartening because I think we have more black fathers that are with their kids than are not, to be honest. So you get the deadbeat dads, and the notoriety of that more so than the dads that are doing good. It's sad because in our society it seems that more is publicized on what is bad rather than what's good.

Q: Can you elaborate?

A: You see it in our community and the city in general. I had events all summer in the community parks and they hadn't been mentioned at all on TV because we hadn't had an incident. When the events go great, you hear nothing. You'll hear that Liverpool held this event today or such and such But nothing about Parks and Rec that just held a concert in the park and it was wonderful; packed. But if there was an incident, then you would hear about it ... South Side had a shooting today during the ... just negativity seems to make the news.

“Do it from the heart”

diva princess, singer and now ice skater. She plays all sports and is taking figure skating lessons. We call her Cookie, which is her middle name. Then my youngest Lobell is 4. He's the hugger. I pick him up from pre-k and he's hugging all his classmates, teachers, anyone that walks by. He loves sports and watches with me anytime I have a game on.

Q: What was your relationship like with your father?

A: It was strained for a while, probably from junior high into high school. My parents were separated and there was not too much communication with him. Late in my junior/senior year, it got better. He passed away going into my senior year of college, which was rough because we were working on our relationship. But it wasn't as bad as it would have been if we hadn't been working on our relationship and communicating.

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

A: I put the kids to sleep and get them ready for school. The youngest ones still fall asleep on me every night. After they fall asleep, then I carry them to their beds. That's what they grew up knowing. My two oldest, when I would have to go off to play (professional basketball), my wife would call saying she couldn't get them to sleep because since birth, I would have them on my chest and let them fall asleep. It's gotten to the point even if I leave to go to the store, they may wake up. I'll get a call, 'When you coming home? He woke up.' With my now 13-year-old, I was traveling a lot with the Globetrotters, but when I did have a chance to be home and he would cry, I would take him outside, lay him on my shoulder and let him look up at the stars. When I would leave, my wife would tell me she's not doing all that. It's too late to go walking outside.

Q: What is special about the father's role?

A: Stability is important, that they know every day they are going to see dad. When they are sick or something happens at school and they

Q: Any advice for first-time dads?

A: You've got to do it your way and you've got to do it from the heart. I can't give them a blueprint because each kid is going to give you something different every day. It could be the same incident that happened with my kid, but it's going to be a completely different situation with their kid. I play basketball with an over-40 league, and we all have kids, and we all talk about it a lot. One will bring up an incident, and another will add that their kid did the very same thing, but it's always a different scenario. So we find ourselves saying that it's not just me.

Q: What has been a favorite tradition?

A: We don't travel as much as we should to let the kids see different things. I met my wife in Seattle while playing ball with the SuperSonics, so when we travel to the West Coast, we all drive. Many people tell me they could never do a drive like that with their kids, but when we do that two-day drive, there's no issues. No one gets on each other's nerves; it's actually enjoyable.

Q: Final thoughts?

A: There needs to be more unity with fathers. Last year, I organized a Father/Daughter dance at McChesney. It was great to see fathers interacting. Also stability is key. You have to be there for your responsibility. No matter how far you try to run from it, they're there. You brought them into this world. Eventually you're going to have to face it. I don't think there's such a thing as a deadbeat dad, just some people aren't ready yet. There's a difference between a father and a dad. A dad takes care and loves, dads are consistent. Fathers are the ones that make a baby. That's easy; any one can make one. A 13-year-old can make a baby. But the dad is there when you're sick, they pick you up when you fall. And you'll know that you did it right ... the kids may not always show that they love you, but when they get in a tough spot and they call you, you know that you did something right.

BUSINESS SPOTLIGHT

Local entrepreneur Indaria Jones turned her **side hustle** into a **full-time job** launching Thelikeminded.

Her company offers public relations and marketing consulting for individuals and businesses needing **an extra boost**.

Jones said she knows local business owners have **a lot on their plates**.

She can help **turn up the volume**, working with business owners to increase their social media reach to grow their client base and **increase profits**.

To learn more: Visit thelikeminded.net

INSPIRING DREAMERS

Business owners share the entrepreneurial spirit with a new generation



> Indaria Jones, owner and founder of Thelikeminded, consults with millennials on building their own businesses and brands. | Zach Krahmer, Staff Photo

By | Bianca Moorman
Staff reporter

Black entrepreneurs train and inspire young city residents to start businesses of their own

When Indaria Jones was growing up, she already had the entrepreneurial spirit percolating within her. She still does — with a mission now to instill it in others.

“I would have a lemonade stand, I would sell my mom’s old clothes,” recalled Jones, owner and founder of Thelikeminded, her consulting firm that focuses on helping millennials, many of them black, to build their own businesses and brands, just as she did.

Jones is one of the local black business owners who is a driving force behind an informal initiative that’s been building in Syracuse to support young black people by offering workshops, “pop-up” events, mentorship and — often — simply inspiration. As her business name implies, she and others, such as Tommi Billingsley and Victoria Coit, are part of an informal initiative reaching out to like-minded dreamers.

Syracuse Black Expo’s event last month is another

indicator of the renewed entrepreneurial energy among Syracuse’s residents of color. It is one of many happening around the country, not just in cities like Syracuse but also in major markets like New York, Atlanta and Los Angeles, said Sean Herring, who founded the local event in 1999. It sputtered after a couple of years before resurfacing in 2017 and again this year.

Herring said the expo is vital for young entrepreneurs.

“We started to hear from the different entrepreneurs in Syracuse and the different microbusinesses that they needed something so they could promote their products and merchandise,” Herring said.

This year’s event, sponsored by Jerk Hut Restaurant, drew more than 20 participants, including churches and community nonprofits, he said.

Jones said she wants to be a motivator and mentor to others, whether they are a business client or not.

“We are born with gifts and talents, to have our own business for a full-time career,” she said. “Some people are discouraged, and some don’t realize that.”

Jones describes her own enterprise as having two sides: community and business. To do that, she connects with her clients first to make sure they are comfortable. It means getting personal.

“I am from here, I know the community and the journey, I know the organizations and the media outlets besides syracuse.com, to help plug people (in) with their talents,” she said.

Data suggests it’s a substantial network:

— Syracuse is home to 3,047 minority-owned businesses, 30 percent of the city’s 10,201 businesses, according to 2012 numbers from the Census Bureau, the most recent available statistics.

— Forty-five percent of Syracuse’s 144,350 residents were minorities in 2016, the Census Bureau estimates, including 47,136 blacks.

— In a 16-county region that includes Syracuse and Rochester, there are about 224,509 black residents, according to Ricky Brown, executive director of the Upstate Minority Economic Alliance.

— About 300 people a year receive training through the Entrepreneurial Assistance Program from the South Side Innovation Center, the center’s Samantha Brennan said. Seventy percent of those who enter the program are minorities. Some go on to rent space at the center’s business incubator, and 81 percent of those budding entrepreneurs are minorities, she said.

— Nationwide, blacks owned 2.6 million businesses in 2012, according to the most recent numbers from U.S. Department of Commerce and the Census Bureau. That is up 38 percent in the five years since the last survey on the topic in 2007.

Jones, who has a background in health care, slowly began her own business two years ago, as a side project, and

built it into something more, focusing on marketing and branding.

Coit, owner and founder of Cuse Culture Magazine, said a lot of black businesses begin that same way.

“We are no stranger to someone having a side hustle,” Coit said.

In an interview last month, Jones noted how inspiration matters to these new entrepreneurs.

“I just met someone today, and she decided to launch her business,” Jones said. “She posted it on Facebook. I am cheering her on.”

A “Pop-up Shop” event at the Southwest Community Center in late January was one way for black business owners to come together and promote themselves, said Travis Robinson, owner and founder of Tru Soundz Entertainment, a graphic design company that, like Jones’ business, focuses on branding.

Robinson said he had the idea to start his own business when he was 13. After working in retail for a while and finding out that it was not for him, he jumped in to work for himself at 28. Now 32, he says he’s glad he made that choice.

Jones said it was a networking event like the “pop-up” that helped inspire her. She recalled that she was approached by Billingsley, who is CEO and founder of Flygirlshhh, an urban clothing line. Billingsley encouraged her to speak up.

“I don’t know what made her come up to me,” Jones said, citing it as a small thing that made a big difference.

Ruthnie Angrand is another black business owner

RISING TIDE

“By 2044, the nation’s prosperity **will rely even more on minorities**, the fastest growing segment of the population.

“Entrepreneurship is a sure pathway to wealth creation and a thriving national economy. Today, U.S. minority business enterprises represent 29 percent of all firms but only 11 percent have paid employees. If MBEs were to obtain entrepreneurial parity, the U.S. economy would realize **13 million more jobs.”**

— Source:
Minority Business
Development Agency



> These are some of the items for sale at a recent pop-up shop event. | Bianca Moorman, Staff Photo

ON THE SIDE

VIDEO PROJECT

If you could have dinner with any female gender-identified figure from the past or present, who would it be, and why? When and how did you first find out about this person?

Stop by the MakerSpace at the downtown Central Library, 447 S. Salina St., during the entire month of March and **share your story on video**. Open to ages 12 and up.

The videos will be on display in the library.

For more information: Stop by the MakerSpace, call (315) 435-1813 or email ddrobnjak@onlib.org



> Eddie Mitchell Jr. is the founder and director of Team A.N.G.E.L. | Bianca Moorman, Staff Photo

who’s now moved into the administration of Syracuse Mayor Ben Walsh. Angrand began thinking about starting her business when she was 23 years old and attending graduate school at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. After experiencing several hardships that included losing a job, she decided that she wanted to do something about it. Angrand, whose business was another focusing on marketing and consulting, now is director of communications and marketing for Walsh.

Angrand said people should do what they are good at and follow their passions. She hopes to nurture an entrepreneurial mindset in others and generate even more community support, building on the informal initiative now gaining steam.

There’s agreement that young entrepreneurs are especially important.

Eddie Mitchell Jr., founder and director of Team A.N.G.E.L., said he found a lot to do at the Southwest Community Center when he was growing up. Mitchell is a motivational speaker who visits local schools. He said there are not a lot of opportunities for kids these days.

He talks about reaching average kids.

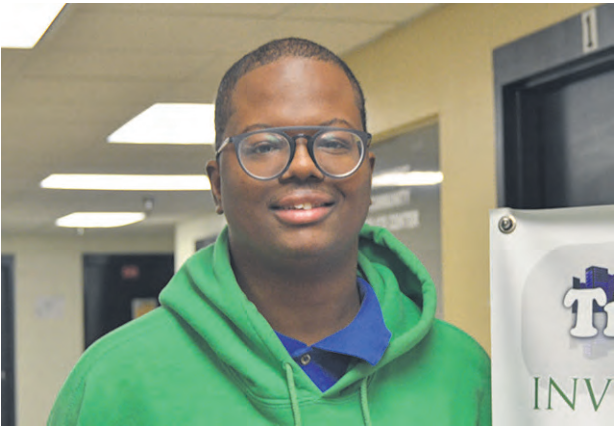
“Kids that need support, trying to inspire and motivate them, tell them my downfalls and my ups and downs, the good and bad,” Mitchell said. “(I) try to motivate them to be positive. Avoid negative things and enjoy life, that is my motto.”

Team A.N.G.E.L., which stands for Avoid Negative Garbage Enjoy Life, is designed to build skills and to create social- and self-awareness in a safe and inviting community for youth in Syracuse.

Team A.N.G.E.L. has run a learning program for children during summers and also oversees an alternative-to-suspension program at several area high schools, plus a daily after-school program at the Southwest Community Center.

Mitchell and Robinson said they had mentors along the way to help them. Robinson said he knew people in the community, such as his business partner, who ran businesses of their own.

“I been shot, I lost friends in the street to gangs,”



> Travis Robinson is the owner and founder of Tru Soundz Entertainment. | Bianca Moorman, Staff Photo

Mitchell said. “I grew up in the Southwest (Community Center) mentor program but know they don’t have that many programs for them (now) and I want to give back. Push the movement.”

Looking ahead, Jones said that she will put on events in April and September. She said while her focus is on young blacks, everyone is welcome, and no one is excluded.

Brown, of the Upstate Minority Economic Alliance, said New York state blacks and Latinos have an estimated \$170 billion in buying power. That, says Coit, makes the current climate for business in Syracuse “phenomenal.”

Jones agreed and said Barack Obama’s presidency was an inspiration that also built momentum in the black business world that must be maintained — especially locally.

“If you push to take your talents and your experiences in everything you learn and then move it to another city without trying to benefit your own city that you’re from ... that is how communities stay in poverty,” Jones said.

Businesses owned by black women have been especially noteworthy for their growth. They blossomed by two-thirds between 2007 and 2012, and they account for 60 percent of all enterprises with black ownership, according to government data.

Jones described the time when she went to New York City for an internship with Kingpin Entertainment Group and had the opportunity to work with some celebrities. But she said while she was there, she kept thinking about returning to Syracuse to use her talent to help people here.

Jones stressed that she has been blessed. She said that her journey has not been that hard because she always tried to stay positive. In the fall, she will transfer from Cayuga Community College to the Martin J. Whitman School of Management at Syracuse University to get a bachelor’s degree.

While she pushes herself at school, she will continue to work to make Syracuse a better place through her consulting firm.

“Likeminded is not about me,” Jones said of her business, “but about our community.”

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CLOTHES MATTER

As part of a paper titled **“The Relationship Between Clothing Preference, Self-Concepts and Self-Esteem”** for DBS School of Arts in Dublin, Ireland, Karla Keogan wrote about “enclothed cognition” and how research has shown that the way we look matters.

An **excerpt from the paper** explains the concept:

“Enclothed cognition captures the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer’s psychological processes. It is part of a larger field of research that examines how humans think with both their brains and their bodies, an area of study known as embodied cognition. ... Research found that whilst wearing a lab coat to perform certain tasks, participants made significantly less errors than those who wore their own clothes. They also found that, in relation to the symbolic meaning of the clothing, those who wore the lab coat believed to be a doctor’s coat performed better on a task than those who wore the coat but believed it was a painter’s coat. They believe that clothing holds symbolic meaning.”

FASHION CYCLE

A clothing exchange among friends now extends to the community



> Timi Komonibo looks through clothing racks at 3fifteen inside Marshall Square Mall. | Taylor Pastrick, Staff Photo

By | Taylor Pastrick
Staff reporter

Style Lottery hopes to ease expenses for area teenage girls in prom season and beyond

“**T**imi” Komonibo didn’t attend prom as a high schooler, by choice. But she “got it,” and when her parents balked over her siblings’ enthusiasm for that teen rite of passage — the glamour, the gown, the tuxedos and the expense — she remembers that she fought for them.

The fight continues.

Ebitimi — only her father still calls her that — has turned her passion for fashion into an award-winning nonprofit. She knows that how we dress matters — and not just on prom day. The fashion “swaps” she organizes among shoppers in Syracuse funnel unclaimed outfits to others, often younger people who can’t afford them. These “leftovers” are hardly that to those who get them.

“I’ve always been interested in how fashion gives people the power to identify the way they want to identify,” Komonibo said. “It can make you look fancier than you

are, richer than you are, more confident than you are.”

Komonibo, who is the director of recruitment and diversity at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications at Syracuse University, is the founder and chief philanthropist of Style Lottery, a social enterprise advocating for sustainable fashion and using fashion as philanthropy. Sustainable fashion considers factors like sourcing and clothing reuse to help the environment.

Style Lottery pairs with different nonprofits to distribute clothing. Not long ago, Komonibo was awarded a Bustle Upstart Award, an honor recognizing young women in philanthropy, business, STEM and other fields, for her work with Style Lottery.

A recent swap was with Infinite POP, a downtown Syracuse pop-up shop, on Nov. 13 and Dec. 11. Infinite POP is a yearlong Syracuse pop-up shop that showcases locally made goods and services.

Komonibo’s friends, and she herself, will tell you that Style Lottery is Komonibo.

“Because I am Style Lottery, everywhere I go I get to work with really different organizations that similarly are helping people in the community,” Komonibo said.

She sees people’s fashion choices as an extension of

who they are and aspire to be. Her own style is made up of versatile clothing staples with pops of color (her go-to shades being poppy red and mustard yellow). Because of her dedication to sustainable fashion, she says she can be annoying to shop with because she is so aware of her carbon footprint. She tends to get absorbed in reading labels and paying attention to how items are made.

When Komonibo walks into 3fifteen, the thrift store in Marshall Square Mall on Syracuse University's campus, she knows exactly the type of clothing she wants. Flitting from rack to rack, Komonibo began a recent trip looking at skirts because it was almost winter, and she loves wearing skirts with tights in the cold. She also looked at button-up shirts, sweaters and jackets, all staple pieces of her wardrobe.

Spotting two polka-dot shirts, she said she has a thing for polka dots and needs to stop buying them. She was drawn to the jackets by a light pink moto jacket, which she says she would not wear herself because pink is not her color, but if she saw it at a swap it would definitely be something she would set aside for someone because it's versatile.

Komonibo's younger sister, Ineye, went shopping with her recently in Williamsburg, a neighborhood in Brooklyn, where they went to a store featuring sustainable items. Ineye watched as Komonibo asked questions about certain pieces and spent a lot of time Googling for more information. Yet Komonibo left without buying.

"It's stressful. I feel bad because she'll pick up one pair of jeans and a dress," Ineye said. Ineye knew her sister would do something related to fashion because Timi was always putting together stylish, sustainable looks as a teen because of the sisters' open-closet policy. "She saves me a lot of money because she only buys staples," Ineye said.

Komonibo was born in Nigeria. Her family moved to Houston when she was 8 years old. In between, they lived in London. She describes the experience as going from a place where everyone looks like you, to a place like London and then Houston where there is a mixture of diverse people. Now she's in upstate New York, which she describes as a whole different end of the spectrum in terms of culture and weather. Here, she says, people are dressing for the cold weather but still showing uniqueness.

The idea for Style Lottery sprouted from Komonibo's experience growing up with her two sisters — one older and one younger — and a brother. She realized later that a lot of people had sisters but they were not as open to sharing, or people did not have sisters and missed out on the opportunity.

"I really started Style Lottery when I was in undergrad," Komonibo said. "I have sisters who I always shared clothes with and when I went to college I really missed that experience. So it started as a strictly kind of social thing to just get my friends together and swap

clothes. But then we started realizing all the excess that we had from our swaps, that we could give them to people in the community who were in need."

When Komonibo moved to Syracuse to study public diplomacy for her master's degree, Style Lottery moved with her.

One of her friends from her master's program, Jennifer Osias, who would become a Style Lottery volunteer while they were at Syracuse University, can still remember the first couple of swaps that they hosted.

The first swap was in the living room of Komonibo's Westcott apartment in fall 2013, their first year as graduate students.

"So many people came," Osias said, "we couldn't fit all the clothes on the racks because we only had two. We had to put clothes on furniture. The dresses were on the couch, we used the table for shirts and the armchair for pants. A lot was left over because so many people came."

Because of the large scale of the first Syracuse Style Lottery event, Komonibo moved her second to the Hall of Languages, which Osias can vividly remember. Osias remembers trying to get all of the clothing racks from the Newhouse School up the hill to the second floor of the Hall of Languages, which meant getting the racks with wheels up the stairs.

"It was a team effort," Osias said. "It was definitely a success, but also a learning experience."

Going forward, Komonibo plans to expand Style Lottery.

She is working with Annaya English, a junior at SU and Style Lottery's account manager at TNH Student Advertising Agency, to create what's called a "lookbook." A lookbook is a collection of photographs displaying a designer's collection to show for marketing purposes.

"She's so passionate about Style Lottery and also business-minded," English said. "We are working on a lookbook specifically for sustainable fashion and looking at fashion narratives for her to bring to companies for meetings and leave behind."

English said that the lookbook should be ready soon.

Besides her work with TNH, Komonibo wants to get a fashion truck to make Style Lottery mobile and do something for local teens around prom, that early defining moment that in a way was the root of her advocacy today.

"I don't think you should be excluded if you can't afford prom. A lot of times people don't go because they can't afford the dress or the hair, and if we can take care of that small detail and get you there, then no problem," Komonibo said of an issue that she regularly encounters with her work through Style Lottery.

"I think it's so big. I think prom is an important marker in a teenager's life. Even if it's something as simple as you getting your hair done and your makeup done and you're wearing a dress and you feel fancy for a couple of hours."

DONATION DRIVE

We Rise Above Poverty is seeking **donations this month** of feminine care products for homeless and at-risk youth.

The mission of the **We Rise Above Poverty** project is to collect and distribute toiletries and apparel for students at Danforth Middle School, which has an 8 percent homeless rate. All donations will be shared with Danforth students.

Items needed:

- Tampons (regular/super)
- Pads (regular/super)
- Panty liners
- Baby wipe travel packs — hypoallergenic
- Feminine product pouches
- Tampon cases

How to donate:

Donated items can be dropped off at Syracuse Community Connections, 401 South Ave.

For more information:

email reggie.kelley@riseabovepovertysyr.org

EXCHANGE CONTINUES

Over winter break, Syracuse City School District students, along with students from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications and The Stand's music columnist, Reggie Seigler, visited Grahamstown, South Africa. Stories from the trip showcase a similarity in cultures, and they create positive, realistic and authentic representations of South Africa.

To continue this cultural exchange, **The Stand** has partnered with the Grahamstown community paper, **Grocott's Mail**, to share stories on similar topics.

This month, we are sharing a personal column from **Madoda Mkalipi**, who works as the academic and business enterprise coordinator for Inkululeko. It follows Seigler's column, which we featured in The Stand last month.

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 to, attend and succeed at a university.

Learn more: Visit inkululeko.org

SCHOOL WORK

Grahamstown native on his journey from student to nonprofit worker



> Madoda Mkalipi works for Inkululeko, a nonprofit in his hometown of Grahamstown, South Africa, that helps students in the same schools he attended as a child. | Dominique Hildebrand, Staff Photo

By | Madoda Mkalipi
Guest columnist

Madoda Mkalipi shares his first-person account of factors that affect academic performance

I was born and raised in Grahamstown, South Africa, which is a small town in the Eastern Cape with an approximate population of 70,000 people. The unemployment rate is reported to be around 70 percent. Most people are living in poverty, and there is high inequality.

So far, I haven't moved out of Grahamstown. I started school here in 1994, at Tanti Lower Primary. It is a township school where we mainly spoke IsiXhosa, and English as our second language. I was then transferred to St Mary's Primary School in grade three where we spoke only English and Afrikaans. In 2002, I went to Nathaniel Nyaluza High School. I then went to study at Rhodes University and graduated with a bachelor's degree in commerce and a post-graduate certificate in education (PGCE). Currently, I am the academic and

business enterprise coordinator for a nonprofit organization (NPO).

I was raised in a warm and loving family by both my parents. I have three siblings — two sisters and one brother. I am the youngest. My mother was a domestic worker and also sewed clothes for a living. My father worked as a mower at Grahamstown Bowling Club. They received very minimum income, but they tried as much as they could to make sure that we didn't go to bed on an empty stomach and received the necessary needs. They both passed away — my mother when I was in grade 12 in 2006 and my father when I was doing my second year in 2009.

Grahamstown is a very interesting place to grow up and study because it's easy to get to most places without the use of transport. Hence, it was easy for us to reach out to community libraries, museums and other institutions whenever we were given assignments at school.

Also, Grahamstown is very fortunate because the Scifest Africa and the National Arts festivals are held here. Our teachers would take us to these events to see science exhibitions and artists performing. So, there were

some aspects of education we were exposed to at a very young age. There were other enrichment programmes that were initiated by various institutions that catered to different aspects of education to help improve talents and academic performance of learners.

In my senior year, from 2005 to 2006, in high school, I participated in Gadra/St Andrew's college enrichment project. Gadra is an education NPO in Grahamstown, and St Andrew's College is a private school. They collaborated to provide Saturday classes to township learners who obtained an average of 60 percent or higher in English, math and physical science. This helped a lot because we had an opportunity to use the resources we didn't have in our own schools. For example, instead of observing our chemistry teacher performing science experiments for us in class, we actually performed the experiments ourselves using the St Andrew's laboratory and tools. Some learners had an opportunity to type at the computer's keyboard for the first time.

There were various factors in the Grahamstown township that affected our academic performance negatively, and they differ from individual to individual. I was one of those learners who lived in informal settlements, which meant that I grew up in a house with no electricity up until 2009. This was one of the biggest factors that limited my abilities to perform better at school. We would use candles and paraffin lamps to study at night. If they ran out quickly, it would mean that one would have to go to sleep and try to wake up in the early hours of the following day before going to school and catch up with school work. That's possible only if it's summer because of an early sunrise. It was close to impossible to study during the day because there were a load of household chores waiting for us immediately after school. However, we managed to develop study methods to find a balance between the two.

Unfortunately, there were other factors that made it very difficult for us because they were out of our control, such as the poor education system. To start with, there were no feeding schemes in those days. Most of the learners from my school were affected by poverty. This meant that we couldn't afford to carry lunch boxes or lunch money each and every day of the month. We would stay in school for long hours, even afternoon classes on an empty stomach and by then, our concentration levels were close to zero. This didn't yield positive results for everyone. In my personal view, I think it's one of the influences that led to people dropping out of school to find work or a quick buck elsewhere.

There were some teachers who really tried their best to ensure we received quality education, but there were very few of them and the system, in some instances, would not go in their favour. For example, when teachers are striking, the union members won't allow anyone to teach. These strikes may take a very long time, resulting in the greatest harm caused to the young learners. When

teachers get back to work, it's hard to catch up with the syllabus, and the education department doesn't make significant provisions that will lead to positive outcomes. There are many cases where we wrote final exams without finishing the syllabus, resulting in many learners obtaining results that didn't reflect their true abilities. This, in turn, had a negative impact on our confidence.

There are other numerous factors such as teacher absenteeism, shortage of textbooks, shortage of furniture in classrooms, etc. However, I think we all have a role to play in order to contribute to children's education. This includes parents and community to produce a more conducive learning environment for kids at an early age. Some, if not most, learners from my community are not even encouraged to read every day or their parents do not even follow up on their academic progress.

At Inkululeko, we are trying to take part in ensuring that we work together with our community to contribute to township education. We take learners from various schools in the township and invite tutors from Rhodes University and tutors from Syracuse University to assist and support our learners. We provide internet access, books and other programmes that will help improve their marks, enhance their critical thinking skills and lift their confidence.

A Syracuse team that visited us in May 2017 played a very critical role in making our learners open up about their own social-related issues. This team did a course on stress management. The reality here is that usually learners sometimes become reluctant to interact freely with people from different environments, especially if they are from different backgrounds or different races. I think it's because of confidence issues, where they do not want to be seen as inferior by the other party, partly because of factors such as social class and language barriers.

However, the Syracuse team was very warm and enthusiastic about their visit to South Africa, and they were very keen to learn to speak IsiXhosa. So, this meant that both learners and Syracuse have something to learn from one another. This elevated our learners' esteem. Both parties had so much fun, and the whole project was a success. The project uncovered some of our learners' talents that I have never seen before.

In December/January, another group of Syracuse students from the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications visited South Africa. We selected four of our learners to join them to explore and do interviews with Grahamstown residents. Again, they had so much fun. Inkululeko learners had the opportunity to write articles and use some resources that the Syracuse students brought along. This was, again, an overwhelming experience for them. Also, the Syracuse team learned a lot about the similarities and differences between Syracuse and Grahamstown.

I am sure they have a different perspective now about Africa than before they came here.

MORE ONLINE

Students from the **Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central**, who visited South Africa over winter break, produced a video featuring many of the students Inkululeko has helped

To watch their video, **"Inkululeko Thanks Supporters,"** visit the media students' YouTube page by searching for "ITC Eagles"

MEET STUDENT XOLISA JODWANA



To hear directly from 19-year-old

Inkululeko student Jodwana, visit mysouthsidestand.com for his takeaway on meeting Syracuse students when they visited Grahamstown

CANCER SCREENINGS



SHERRI LALONDE AND
SEKOU RAWLINS, MD,
IN THE COLONOSCOPY
SUITE WITH A PATIENT

UPSTATE CANCER CENTER CARES ABOUT YOU

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