

the Stand

south side news

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Syracuse, NY

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Issue 87

FREE

HOUSING HOPE

Freedom Commons is first replication of model designed by The Fortune Society

NEXT GENERATION

Syracuse Journalism Lab pairs students with mentors

at your service

Reflect on Van Robinson's long-standing commitment to the city of Syracuse

Learn how father Lamont Mitchell finds time to create memories with his daughters

family as priority

SKILLED TRADES Q&A



the Stand

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SCHOOL & YOUTH | Learn how Syracuse's first high school journalism lab seeks to train and inspire the next generation of media professionals.



FATHERHOOD | Father Lamont Mitchell strives to put family first and sets aside time for family bonding often and intentionally.



COMMUNITY | Lifetime advocate of tearing down the Interstate 81 viaduct Van Robinson reflects on his Syracuse political career and community involvement.



FEATURES | The Fortune Society's model — to build people, not prisons — sees its first replication in Syracuse's Freedom Commons, a mixed-use housing initiative.



SKILLED TRADES | Meet Christopher Montgomery, new director of Syracuse Builds, who has a mission to get local underrepresented groups trained and hired to projects like I-81.



COMMUNITY | Read Victoria Coit's vision to develop and revitalize a site in the Valley to create greater opportunities for Black entrepreneurs.

■ Cover photography by Mike Greenlar of Frank Czeresko

UPCOMING



For full listing of events, visit [MySouthSideStand.com/events/](https://mysouthsidestand.com/events/)

What: Black History Month Celebration
When: Noon to 5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 26
Where: The McCarthy Mercantile, 217 S. Salina St.
Details: BLAAC (Black Latino Asian Artist Coalition), a production company based in Syracuse, will celebrate Black History Month in downtown Syracuse at McCarthy Mercantile. The event will feature food, fun and unforgettable performances. All are welcome.
Cost: Free
To Learn More: Contact Michael John Heagerty at (315) 546-4919 or visit mccarthymercantile.com

What: Gifford Author Series with Dr. Eddie Glaude, Jr.
When: 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, March 9
Where: Crouse Hinds Theater John H. Mulroy Civic Center, 421 Montgomery St.
Details: Dr. Eddie Glaude is the James S. McDonnell Distinguished University Professor and chair of the Department of African American Studies at Princeton. His works examine the difficulties of race in America, combining history, philosophy, religion and a passion for social justice. His most recent book, "Begin Again: James Baldwin's America" and "Its Urgent Lessons for Our Own," acknowledges Baldwin's inspiration, instruction and guidance on matters of race.
Cost: \$30 to \$55
For tickets: Visit foclsyracuse.org/ticket-information/

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AD DEADLINES
Spring: March 23
Summer: May 25

Since publishing our Fall 2021 issue much has happened. COVID-19 vaccinations became more widely available followed by booster shots and then the Omicron variant spread like wildfire.

The downtick in cases allowed for a brief break in restrictions and chance for some in-person engagement, with caution.

This allowed for a few face-to-face meetings as we supported the launch of the Syracuse Journalism Lab. This effort, initiated by the Syracuse Press Club, became a success thanks to a number of local media partners — including The Stand. The effort also collaborated with the Syracuse City School District's Career and Technical Education Media Communications program. In addition to classroom instruction, the J-Lab worked to pair students with local media professionals as mentors.



This new project provided an opportunity for The Stand to further expand its partnership with local students, encourage other local media to engage and for all to work towards expanding future diversity in the industry.

A top priority of The Stand's board has also been to see more youth become involved. Last year's student essay contest and photo essay submitted by students in the media program were two ways we shared an inside look at what school life was like during the COVID-19 pandemic. Board members served as judges to that contest, including a recent addition Calvin Corridors. He works as the manager of Neighborhood Economic Development at CenterState CEO and has served with The Stand for over a year, helping identify business related stories and guide the project into its next decade.

A goal for The Stand is to continue to see our board and community grow increasingly active in carrying out the project's needs. In addition to Calvin, three more board members have been added in the past year: Douglass Bullock, Tyrone Dixon and Tiffany Lloyd, all individuals with strong ties to the South Side.

Douglass is an assistant district attorney with the Onondaga County District Attorney's Office. He hopes to see The Stand more widely distributed and utilized by members of the community.

Tyrone is a certified professional life coach, specializing in emotional intelligence. He believes everyone has the power within themselves to change their circumstance and is excited to work with The Stand, hoping to see the project produce podcasts and continue to share stories on new platforms.

And Tiffany serves as director of Women's Health and Empowerment at the Allyn Foundation. She served in the U.S. military reserves for 10 years, holds a bachelor's degree in psychology and recently earned a master's in organizational leadership. She holds several volunteer leadership positions, and also serves on the boards of CNY Arts, McMahon Ryan, Planned Parenthood and Street Addiction Institute.

I also must welcome the recently named Newhouse Executive Editor Edecio Martinez who will work to expand the reach of Stand stories to a wider audience. He is an award-winning digital media professional with extensive reporting, writing and editing experience. He served as head of video at Ziff Davis for two years and was an executive producer with Condé Nast Entertainment before that. He has also held positions with Upworthy, The Weather Channel and CBS Interactive.

— Ashley Kang

Upcoming Exhibit

What: FROM WHERE WE STAND: Photographs from The Stand's Annual South Side Photo Walk

When: April 2 to May 14

Where: ArtRage Gallery, 505 Hawley Ave.

Exhibition Hours: 2 to 6 p.m. Wednesday through Friday and Noon to 4 p.m. Saturday

The South Side Newspaper Project has given voice to Syracuse's South Side community since its founding in 2010. The annual Photo Walk is our largest community event, bringing together photographers of all skill levels and ages to explore the South Side, take photos and practice one's skills.

This exhibition features photographs taken during this event throughout its 12-year history and is a visual testament to the struggles and resiliency of the neighborhood.

A 10th anniversary exhibit (The Stand: 10 Years in Print) at Syracuse University's Link Gallery was cut short in March 2020 due to the COVID-19 lockdown. Thus, the 2020 Photo Walk pivoted from a group gathering to a photo contest, open citywide, allowing participants to independently document and capture the city in photos, especially during this unique moment in time.

Images on display have been curated by the gallery's staff and selected from each Photo Walk. Additional photos feature winning entries from this project's past two photo contests.

Note, COVID restrictions will apply and be followed by the gallery.

THE NEXT GENERATION

Syracuse Press Club launches new high school journalism lab



> Camalot Todd, in white sweater, works with media students, from left to right, Nathaniel Teska-Prince, Samantha McGiveron and Serenity Baxter in the school's broadcast studio. | Photo Provided by media teacher Jeffrey Newell

By Thad Green
The Stand Intern

Initiative works to introduce students to options in the field, diversify the future of the industry

A new generation of aspiring journalists are taking part in the Syracuse Journalism Lab to help tackle the lack of diversity seen in newsrooms.

“As a social club, we always felt a bit limited as to what we could do to address that,” said Patrick Lohmann, a Syracuse Press Club (SPC) board member during the lab’s creation. “Finally, we just decided to try and do something directly.”

With the help of grant money and the support of local newsrooms, including The Stand which serves as the initiative’s fiscal sponsor, SPC was able to pilot the lab at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central (ITC).

“The lab will help students become job-ready and college-ready,” Lohmann said. “We hope to give them marketable skills, even if they don’t go into journalism.”

The first set of student participants included 30 ITC 11th graders. Most are minorities with some identifying as transgender or gender nonbinary.

“The mission of the lab is to prepare students to work in the journalism industry,” said Jeffrey Newell, media communications teacher at ITC. “Students from the city who have the perspective of the city of Syracuse can have the voice and vision to tell an accurate depiction of what the city of Syracuse is.”

Camalot Todd, who was hired in September as the high school journalism educator with funding support from The John Ben Snow Foundation, remembers early in her career the newsroom she worked for was not receptive to diverse perspectives.

“A lot of gatekeeping in journalism is designed to silence perspectives that haven’t historically been allowed to be written,” she said. “It was really shocking to experience blatant forms of prejudice, hate and sexism.”

Todd, now a mental health reporter for Spectrum News 1 in Buffalo, travels more than two hours each Friday to instruct the journalism students.

“I love teaching journalism almost as much as I love doing journalism, partly because I’m so critical about how the industry operates,” Todd said. “I would like the next batch of journalists growing up to have a better understanding of the struggles and barriers I had to face so that they know how to navigate it with a little more grace.”

J-LAB MISSION

To inspire talented high school students from Syracuse’s underrepresented communities to pursue careers in journalism

The Journalism Lab is a project of Syracuse Press Club working to cultivate an educational and career pipeline to support and create opportunities for students and local newsrooms into the future.

Promising youth are paired with mentors for individual support. An additional outcome is to improve the quality of news coverage in the region and publish under-told stories from the perspectives of burgeoning journalists.

MEET THE MENTORS

From syracuse.com: Meg Craig, Doug Dowty, James McClendon and Katrina Tulloch

Other local media: Ken Jackson, from Urban CNY, and Ashley Kang, from The Stand

Local professional photographer: Solon Quinn

Additionally: Zau Nhkum, ITC alumnus; Gracyn Doctor, reporter covering race and equity for WFAE; Shuchita Mishra, a comic artist, and Camalot Todd, a broadcast journalist

To learn more, visit bit.ly/3IhTcqU

FINDING BALANCE

By Cashmere Dancil
Syracuse Journalism Lab Student

How students manage school, their social life, jobs and mental health during the pandemic

For American teenagers getting a job in high school marks a coming of age; a sign that they can now make their financial decisions and are accountable for getting to work on time, maintaining their grades, friendships and their mental health.

But for Syracuse students this indicator is tainted by the once in a century COVID-19 pandemic, which now is in its third calendar year.

Jaden Davis, Abdul Shaalan and Thomas Ho are all 11th graders at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central. Additionally, all three also work as cashiers at different workplaces like Price Chopper and Wegmans.

Teens from ages 14 to 15 can work at least three hours on a school day and eight hours on other days, most likely on Saturday and Sunday. Their maximum weekly hours average around 18 hours, according to the New York Department of Labor.

While teens ages 16 to 17 can work four hours Monday through Thursday and eight hours on Friday, Saturday, Sunday and holidays, with a maximum of 28 hours a week.

Jaden said he got a job to help pay bills but says working through the pandemic has him very tired and drained. He adds, he felt like he didn't have a personal life because all he did was go to school, work and then sleep.

To balance all of this, he watches movies and TV shows on Netflix to unwind.

Nearly all students from kindergarten to 12th grade have experienced some challenge to their mental health and well-being throughout the pandemic — many losing access to school-based support services, according to the report “Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America’s Students,” by the U.S. Department of Education.

The average employment rate for youth ages 16 to 17 in 2020 was 22.3%, down 2 percentage points from 2019, according to pewresearch.org.

Thomas Ho wanted a job so he could help out with his family household more. He says he was of age to work and he wanted money. But he noted after working, he has had less time to do schoolwork because he gets tired from his job.



> Thomas Ho, Jaden Davis and Abdul Shaalan share how they find balance between work, school and free time during the pandemic. | Photo by Cashmere Dancil

Once, he couldn't make up a quiz, and added he feels miserable and not good.

Thomas balances all of this by playing games on his phone with friends.

While the average rate of employment for teens was slightly down in 2020, those who are trying to balance both can see the stress become detrimental to the student's physical and mental health — if there are not boundaries and balance between the two.

Abdul noted that he puts priorities ahead of work like school and friends, but sometimes he does get tired after long days.

He says he wanted a job so he could depend on himself without having to ask his family or friends for money. It felt natural to him to work more than anything else he had going on.

To balance all of this he hangs out with his girlfriend and friends in his free time.

Other ways to help balance a student's mental health is by going for a walk, calling a friend or taking deep breaths.

RECENT DATA

The report “Education in a Pandemic: The Disparate Impacts of COVID-19 on America’s Students” by the U.S. Department of Education found:

- Emerging evidence shows the pandemic negatively affected academic growth, widening pre-existing disparities.
- COVID-19 appears to have deepened the impact of disparities in access and opportunity facing many students of color in public schools, including technological and other barriers that make it harder to stay engaged in virtual classrooms.
- During the pandemic, lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and queer (LGBTQ+) students in elementary and secondary schools have faced particularly heightened risks for anxiety and stress and have lost regular access to affirming student organizations and supportive peers, teachers and school staff. These students also are at an increased risk of isolation and abuse from unsupportive family.

To view the report online, visit bit.ly/3tFM8Am

Lamont Mitchell

Nominated by David L. Chaplin

By Eddie Velazquez
The Stand Reporter

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

A. It felt like a huge responsibility but obviously a great deal of happiness and honor at the same time. It was a time when I really wanted to take account, stay focused and be the best father I could be for my children.

Q. What can you share about your children?

A. I am a father to three daughters: Isis Mitchell, 19, Mahoniss Graham, 15, and Lamya Mitchell, 10. Isis is studying to become a nurse at Onondaga Community College, focusing on helping people, and my two youngest are in high school and elementary school.

Q. How do you co-parent successfully?

A. We try to set up activities, moments and memories. We also like to go on vacation and trips outdoors. We like to go to recreational parks and lakes. I just like being with my family as much as possible in between work.

Q. Quality time seems to be the key ...

A. Yes, and it is all about being intentional in planning those moments. It is key. It is not just about those moments and memories happening, but it's about being intentional about setting them up.

Q. What was your relationship like with your father?

A. There are a lot of different memories and topics that come to mind, but it was generally very healthy. As I got older, I really came to appreciate his leadership, his profession — he was a pastor — and all the things he taught me. All of these things have really taught me to be a successful parent.

Q. Did he or others have advice that stuck with you?

A. I cannot think of any one particular phrase, but just his faith in God, in church and community, as well as his character. All of that just really rubbed off on me. But his faith is probably the biggest thing I incorporated.

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

A. I don't think it is outside the norm, but for us, it is about being very intentional in setting up those special moments we share together. No matter how much patience it may take or how many resources it may take. I naturally enjoy doing that, and it leads to having really healthy relationships with your kids.



MEET FATHER LAMONT MITCHELL: This 41-year-old works as a purchase specialist at Syracuse University's Building Local Initiative. He has three daughters, from left to right: Mahoniss (Mani) Graham, Isis Mitchell and Lamya (Mya) Mitchell and is married to Deme Mitchell. | Provided Photo

Q. What is your opinion about commonly held stereotypes about Black fathers?

A. To me, negative stereotypes boil down to human beings highlighting others' flaws. It does not really set the tone for anyone else's household. For me, when I hear those types of things, it makes me want to reinforce the type of father I want to be.

Q. Any advice for first-time dads?

A. Be prepared to have a lot of patience, learn how to set an example for them and work as hard as you can to be involved.

Q. Is there a special tradition you have with your family?

A. Before all these changes with COVID-19, we always liked to travel to places with warm weather during December. We've enjoyed that for the last few years.

“It's about being intentional”

SEEKING FEEDBACK

Erie Canal Museum wants to hear from residents to enhance offerings



> Open daily from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m., the Erie Canal Museum is located at 318 Erie Boulevard East. | Photo Provided

By Renée Barry
Guest Contributor

Staff pledges to dive into the past to tell the full story behind how the Erie Canal was built

Transportation has evolved throughout time. The Erie Canal, a human-built waterway, was the United State's first big infrastructure project.

You can imagine it as a highway for boats.

Since its opening in 1825, the Erie Canal rapidly transformed its surroundings. The environment, transportation, communication and commerce of New York would never be the same again. These changes occurred from the sudden new possibilities for interaction between people, goods and ideas.

We, at the Erie Canal Museum, believe that this history is not discussed often enough, especially its complex relationship to the present.

The museum is located on Erie Boulevard in New York's only remaining Weighlock Building. Built in 1850, it was used as a tollbooth for canal boats moving through Syracuse. As transportation continued to advance, railroads and public roads soon outpaced canals. This is why the Erie Canal became paved over to

make Erie Boulevard, and why the Weighlock Building is now a museum. However, the Weighlock Building almost didn't become the Erie Canal Museum.

In the 1950s, new systems of highways were growing throughout the country. New York State considered building the interstate highway, I-81, right over the Weighlock Building and Syracuse City Hall. A powerful group of locals, predominantly white, organized politically to save the building and were successful.

Unfortunately, the next group to protest the construction of I-81 over their own homes was not listened to in the same way. The 15th Ward, one of Syracuse's primarily Black communities, was irreversibly demolished.

It is in this context that we, at the Erie Canal Museum, reflect on our entangled relationship to the past, present and future of the United States. We acknowledge that the museum stands while the 15th Ward no longer does. We strive to understand and reflect a more accurately diverse narrative of the Erie Canal through much needed research, programs and exhibits. This commitment began in 2020 and will continue to be a driving focus, but we need your help and input.

In 2022, the Erie Canal Museum will focus on the transforming effects that major infrastructure projects have had and continue to have on Syracuse.

SHARE A STORY

The Erie Canal Museum is starting a project to weave together local history and stories of social and environmental justice around the topic of infrastructure. We believe all of these things intersect at the Erie Canal, and we need your help.

If interested in getting involved, contact the museum's **Research Fellow Renée Barry** with ideas, suggestions, questions or to schedule a conversation.

Contact her by email at research@eriecanalmuseum.org

For more on the **Erie Canal Museum** and its programs, visit eriecanalmuseum.org

LATEST ON I-81 PLAN

In Gov. Andrea Hochul's State of the State Address, a top focus of her 228 initiatives proposed is to update infrastructure, specifically Interstate 81, which she noted is an essential travel corridor for the Central New York region.

She sees removal of the viaduct as a way to reimagine the 118-acre East Adams neighborhood, creating a "New 15th Ward."

"The revitalization project would create a mixed-use, mixed-income neighborhood where families — especially children — can thrive and have genuine opportunities for successful futures," she wrote.

The Department of Transportation received more than 7,500 comments on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement. Each will be reviewed and responded to by NYSDOT and the Federal Highway Administration before the Final Environmental Impact Statement is shared publicly. That release is set for early this year.

In the meantime, NYSDOT will continue to move forward with preparations and has issued a formal Letter of Intent for the first contract of the first phase of the project.

— Staff Report

LOCAL TRAILBLAZER

Van Robinson has served the Syracuse community for nearly 45 years



> Van Robinson, left, joined other local leaders in 2019 to posthumously admit William Herbert Johnson, Syracuse University College of Law's first Black graduate, to the New York State Bar. This was one of many longstanding injustices he has been a part of correcting. He stands with attorney Henry H. Melchor and wife Linda Brown-Robinson. | File Photo

By Maia Vines
The Stand Reporter

As common council president, he was one of the first political figures to speak on I-81

Where are the places to worship? Where are the places to get your hair cut? Where are the places to go?

These are all questions a young Van Robinson asked himself after moving from the Bronx to a new city in 1968. Robinson, who at that time had been asked by his company, Group Health Insurance, to open an office in Syracuse, decided to inquire about the city's National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) branch.

"Normally if you find someone there, they would know what's going on in the community," he said. But he soon came to realize that the city branch was inactive.

Several, including Robinson, petitioned national headquarters to reinstate the Syracuse branch, and 11 years after his arrival, the NAACP became active once again, offering local resources and addressing issues in



> Van Robinson reviews residents' visions for the future of I-81 with an aide during a 2013 public I-81 meeting held at the OnCenter Ballroom. | File Photo

the community, including housing, banking, education and policing.

Last October, Robinson was honored by Focus Greater Syracuse, a community-based organization that fosters citizen engagement, for his achievements, some of the most notable being the NAACP and his foresight on Interstate 81.

His former colleagues refer to him as a trailblazer, paving the way for milestones in public service; he was involved in the formation of the Citizen Review Board and helped strengthen the Minority and Women-Owned Business Enterprises (M/WBE) Program, which assists minority and female entrepreneurs in securing government contracts and grow their businesses.

The 84-year-old former Common Council president explained that the NAACP branch started with three interested citizens who wanted a city advocacy group, the ability to form allies and develop a branch to work through issues.

Now the branch has around 300 members, including several life members — the highest level of membership status. And although the chapter is named Syracuse-Onondaga, Robinson explained that the NAACP’s work extends to neighboring counties as well.

“We have made our attempt to be felt throughout the entire central region,” he said.

Since, Robinson has served as both vice president and president of the Syracuse NAACP chapter. Those visiting the New York State Fairgrounds can see his name in the Pan-African Village, renamed by former Gov. Andrew Cuomo in Robinson’s honor in 2018.

“He thought big about the community, about big change that would affect especially the minority or vulnerable community. And so now, folks who pick up that

torch that Van started, they have that big dream too,” said city deputy clerk Patricia McBride.

Throughout his career, Robinson has been vocal about his opposition to Interstate 81 remaining in place due to its impact on the Black community. A 2020 report by the New York Civil Liberties (NYCLU) found that Black residents in Syracuse have higher rates of lead exposure and asthma than white residents. Robinson was the first elected official to ask that the interstate be torn down.

“I think when he started talking about 81, people were dismissive. They didn’t think it was real. They didn’t think it was going to happen,” said city clerk John Copanas, who began working on campaigns with Robinson in the ’80s. “Every time he saw the governor, the governor knew he was going to talk about 81. Every time he saw state representatives, he talked about it. So, he kept it in the forefront. (I think) if he hadn’t done that, we (wouldn’t) be where we are today. I don’t think anybody else could have made that happen.”

Besides Robinson’s achievements, those who have worked closely with him can speak to his kind spirit and flair. “Anything that the president could do to help you, he was there, and he always had a smile,” said Carmalita Sapp-Walker, administrator officer to the common council president, who met Robinson in ’99 when he became councilor at-large. “And they say Steve Harvey was a dresser. Nah, President Van Robinson was a dresser.”

GET INVOLVED

The mission of the **Syracuse-Onondaga County NAACP Chapter** is to ensure the political, educational, social and economic equality and rights of all and to eliminate race-based discrimination.

Online: Visit syracusenaacp.com

Social: Follow on Instagram at [syracusenaacp/](https://www.instagram.com/syracusenaacp/) and Twitter [@SyracuseNAACP](https://twitter.com/SyracuseNAACP)

Contact: Email syracusenaacp@gmail.com

ON THE SIDE

THE BLACK EQUITY & EXCELLENCE FUND

supports community-based projects for the Black community of Central New York that promote and encourage self-sufficiency and improve the physical and economic conditions that affect quality of life. It also encourages dialogue that will strengthen race-related matters and support social and educational growth in the community.

Since its inception in June 2020, The Black Equity & Excellence Fund has already distributed over \$500,000 in grants. For more information or to support the fund, visit cnycf.org/equity.



CENTRAL NEW YORK
COMMUNITY FOUNDATION
315.422.9538 | CNYCF.ORG





Housing Trifecta

> Frank Czereszko sits on his bed at Freedom Commons Academy, a transitional housing facility on Burt Street. He moved in after hearing about the supportive housing Freedom Commons offers from Phyllis Riles, project director. | Mike Greenlar, Staff Photographer

By Sarah Dolgin
The Stand Reporter

Freedom Commons offers affordable, supportive and emergency options for the formerly incarcerated

Anyone who walks by Phyllis Riles' office is met with the sweet scent of the air freshener she sprays across the room. Vibrant curtains and purple flowers adorn the window and desk, decorating what was once a gray room with bursts of life. Above her desk is a sign which reads "Faith," representing the value she works to embody in her role as project director of Freedom Commons.

Referred to as simply the Commons by those who call it home, the site gives people returning home from incarceration

an opportunity to live in a safe and encouraging environment, alongside residents with no criminal backgrounds.

Participants must participate in 35 hours of productive activity per week. That could mean volunteering, taking part in specialized programming or working a job. Curfew is 10 p.m., and residents on probation are required to return home by 8 p.m.

Riles said the staff is not trying to restrict residents, but aims to provide structure, support and build discipline to help navigate for their futures.

"It's not a control thing. It's preparing them for the next step," she said. "I consciously make sure this doesn't feel like a minimum-security prison."

The housing model was created by The Fortune Society at its Castle Gardens site in Harlem more than two decades ago.

Syracuse's Freedom Commons is the first-ever replication of the model in Upstate New York.

Freedom Commons, opened during the start of the pandemic in 2020, is run through a partnership between the Center for Community Alternatives (CCA) and the Syracuse Housing Authority (SHA), with technical support from The Fortune Society

"Freedom Commons was named in honor of Syracuse's rich history in the anti-slavery movement and its historic significance in the underground railroad," said Andre Ward, associate vice president of The David Rothenberg Center for Public Policy at The Fortune Society.

Syracuse's development consists of 54 units — 43 affordable housing units and 11 permanent supportive housing units. Additionally, a dormitory-style wing provides emergency housing for the homeless.

"We run something called re-entry advocacy services, and it's been a service of ours for many, many years, where we look at barriers to housing, education, employment, (for people who have) a criminal record and how people can overcome those barriers," said David Condliffe, CCA's executive director.

To qualify for Freedom Commons Academy, an individual must have been recently released from incarceration with no access to shelter. The academy provides those eligible with emergency housing in the site's dormitory wing along with a case manager and resident advisors to help navigate and adjust to re-entry.

Residents of the academy get a bed and storage space along with access to communal spaces such as a living room, dining room, kitchen and computer lab.

A STRUCTURED ENVIRONMENT

"Simulating a structured environment that has positive activities in it to help build the capacity of an individual to live a life of contribution is essentially what Freedom Commons Academy is designed to do for people coming home," said Ward, who helps with the program's technical support for The Fortune Society.

Academy participants agree to two terms to stay in the program.

"There will not be an act or threat of violence, because in prison, the currency of survival is violence. We need people to adjust to a different way of resolving conflict," Condliffe said.

Riles said time spent getting to know each person who comes through Freedom Commons is a high priority for her.

"Everybody comes to the academy/permanent supportive housing with a different need, and a different level of coping, social and life skills. You can't say what that's going to look like until you actually meet the person, sit down with them and spend time," she said.



> David Condliffe, Center for Community Alternatives executive director, stands in front of Castle Gardens during a visit to the Harlem site in 2019. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photographer

"I'm friendly, so I'm hands on. They know my face, and I know their names, and that makes a difference, too, knowing that you know the community in which you work."

Riles sits in on case conferences with the Onondaga County Re-entry Task Force, reviews referrals for potential academy participants and meets with the individuals coming in. She stresses the importance of looking at those referred to the academy as people with a unique set of needs and personal metrics to succeed.

Frank Czereszko, 54, joined the academy program in August 2021. After being released from incarceration for a DWI and leaving the state while on probation, Czereszko stayed at the Salvation Army, like many who return from incarceration.

He met Riles at the weekly group sessions she leads. He received a screening at the CCA to help assess his needs and is now following a path of personalized care to put himself in a better position.

"Honestly, it's an awesome place for somebody that has it in their mind that they want to get their life back on track, and be in a safe environment where you can have all these tools available to get back on your feet," Czereszko said.

APPLY FOR HOUSING

Qualified applicants must have a pre-tax income of less than:

- For 1 Person: \$27,850
- For 2: \$31,800
- For 3: \$35,800
- For 4: \$39,750
- For 5: \$42,950
- For 6: \$46,150

Once an application nears the top of the Wait List, the household will be screened based on income eligibility, student status, landlord references, housekeeping standards, criminal history, credit references and household composition. If the screening process is completed successfully, the individual or household will be offered an apartment when one becomes available.

Housing Choice Vouchers (Section 8) are accepted.

To learn more, contact Phyllis Riles at (315) 422-5638 ext. 354 or email priles@communityalternatives.org

GRAND OPENING

The mixed-use emergency, supportive and affordable housing held a grand opening and ribbon cutting ceremony Nov. 14, 2019, with elected officials, community advocates and some residents in attendance.

The majority of Freedom Commons tenants began to move in the following month or by early 2020.

Mayor Ben Walsh spoke during the ceremony, noting the limited options formerly incarcerated individuals have when going through re-entry.

“This project is a shining example of the burgeoning revitalization of the South Side,” he said, “and will serve as a beacon of hope to those seeking a second chance.”



> Freedom Commons is the first upstate adaptation of the Fortune Society’s innovative housing model. Its aim is to serve those who have trouble securing permanent, affordable housing and individuals returning from prison. | File Photo

Czerezsko works at UPS and says he enjoys the work. He had been a professional hairdresser before serving time. Describing himself as a goal-oriented person, he spends his time taking advantage of the program’s amenities to search for employment and work on his housing application for one of the development’s supportive housing units.

Czerezsko said his time at the academy has brought him into a new mindset of acceptance and faith that the universe will place him where he is needed, and that he must prioritize happiness and wellness over monetary wealth.

“It’s not so much about the money as it is about truly being happy and being able to focus on things that I have put off doing to better myself and also to address personal issues from my past,” he said.

He is working to reconnect with family and friends with whom he lost touch and is also utilizing the academy’s resources to heal past wounds and move forward.

“I’ve talked to people that I know that stayed at the mission and that are still on the streets, and I have to say, if it wasn’t for this place, it would’ve been a lot more challenging for me to be able to get re-established,” he said.

Freedom Commons Academy is funded by Onondaga County’s Department of Social Services as emergency housing. Technically, emergency housing is meant

to provide people facing homelessness with a place to stay for 30 to 45 days.

Kelly Gonzalez, deputy director at the Syracuse and Rochester Center for Community Alternatives, said the Fortune Society, especially president and chief executive officer JoAnne Page, advised CCA through each step when forming Freedom Commons.

“We had never done housing before,” she said. “JoAnne Page was there from day one — from helping us draft and reviewing grant applications to helping us with the design of what it (Freedom Commons) should look like. We were able to visit The Fortune Society, talk to their staff (and) attend a Thursday night meeting.” This weekly meeting is an integral part of The Fortune Society’s holistic re-entry model. It offers a platform for all residents to check in with staff and peers, share hardships, celebrate successes and build community.

Gonzalez explained that CCA will not enforce the emergency housing timeline, as the organization works to support the individual needs and re-entry periods of its residents. Transitional housing entails a more flexible and longer time period for residents to get acclimated and prepare for permanent housing options.

The CCA is working to try and cross-fund its program so the academy can be deemed transitional housing, and in turn receive broader funding from the state and

federal government to support the academy, reducing the funding pressure from the county.

Gonzalez believes that the “big pitch” to remedy the transitional housing hurdle lies within state funding.

“There should be state money for transitional housing,” she said. “We would love to see more state dollars be put towards the program, so it doesn’t just fall to Onondaga County to pay for the program.”

Freedom Commons recently added four beds to the academy’s housing and is working to certify them as transitional housing beds as opposed to emergency housing beds, which make up the rest of the beds provided. Gonzalez hopes this will help the program begin to develop transitional housing opportunities for future residents.

Ideally, Gonzalez dreams of a mix between state, county, federal and foundation dollars to support Freedom Commons’ variety of programs, housing periods (whether they are emergency or transitional) and services, in order to take away the restrictions and stress that come along with sole county funding.

To qualify for a permanent supportive housing unit, applicants must have either a history of incarceration or be directly impacted by the criminal justice system, a documented disability or life challenge such as mental health or substance abuse issues, be formerly homeless and make an income that is 30 percent of the area median income, which was reported as \$79,500 for Syracuse by the U.S. Department of Housing in 2019.

According to Ward, residents in permanent supportive housing have access to services such as case management, literacy services, medical exams, job placement, conflict resolution, legal services, counseling and more.

Some of the units are supported through the SHA’s

Section 8 vouchers, and the rest have subsidized rent through the Empire State Supportive Housing Initiative, but all supportive services are covered by the initiative.

The affordable housing units include unfurnished one- to three-bedroom apartments and townhouses, in which applicants must make 50 percent of the area median income to qualify. Applications are chosen by the SHA Lottery process.

While there are three different housing types at Freedom Commons, Riles said the staff work to care for everyone within the community.

“We’re here for the whole building, and that has been a blessing to be able to support the community as a whole, and not make it feel like it’s a separate thing. It’s two partners, but one goal,” Riles said.

She admires the bonds forged between employees and residents.

“Here at the Freedom Commons Academy community, we’re like a family,” Riles said. “When people feel that kind of energy in a space, they’re gonna want to come back, and that’s what I’m most proud of.”

As she works through the harder days on the job, Riles reminds herself of the beautiful connections created at Freedom Commons and how they are living examples of her favorite Gandhi quote:

“Where there’s love, there’s life.”

face, and I know their names, and that makes a difference, too, knowing that you know the community in which you work.”

Riles does intakes, sits in on through the harder days on the job, Riles reminds herself of the beautiful connections created at Freedom Commons and how they are living examples of her favorite Gandhi quote:

“Where there’s love there’s life.”

BY THE NUMBERS

- \$14.6 million housing project
- 72,989 sq ft
- 54 total apartments
- 43 affordable units designated for individuals or families with incomes at or below 50% of the Area Media Income (AMI)
- 11 permanent supportive units designated for individuals or families whose income is at or below 30% of the AMI and who also have previously experienced homelessness and criminal justice involvement

ON THE SIDE



> Additional amenities include a computer lab and shared kitchen space, along with a learning center, laundry facilities, a community meeting space and communal dining area. | Sarah Dolgin, Staff Photographer

Preparing a Pipeline

By Ashley Kang
The Stand Director

How Syracuse Build's new director, Christopher Montgomery, is mobilizing a local workforce

The planned reconstruction of Interstate 81 will remake portions of the South Side as well as downtown, creating hundreds of jobs as soon as this year. Intentional efforts are underway to ensure local and minority workers are hired to fill these needs thanks to a collaborative effort by the city of Syracuse, Onondaga County, CenterState CEO and Central & Northern New York Building Trades Council.

Together these groups are united by the newly installed director of Syracuse Build, Christopher Montgomery, who shares that his very first job was actually in construction.

“Working for the family business — CC Paving & Excavating,” he said. “I started helping out at an early age and worked throughout high school and into college. It gave me knowledge of what construction entails, like, working in all weather conditions and being up at 6 a.m.”

A large component of the initiative includes the Syracuse Build's Pathways to Apprenticeship program. This paid training aims to expand access to the building trades for women, minorities and veterans. Montgomery says he's exploring ways to enhance it in the future by possibly offering two cohorts at once, due to the program's demand.

Applications to join the third cohort will be accepted until Feb. 24.

Q. First, give me the elevator pitch for Syracuse Build?

A. Syracuse Build is an initiative with the goal to build a robust and inclusive workforce pipeline to align upcoming employment opportunities in our area with local workers. Within Syracuse Build, we work to establish a suite of programs that can help cultivate a stronger quantity of qualified workers to meet workforce needs. It's important for city residents, because it is intentional, and we want to see local folks hired to local projects.



MEET CHRISTOPHER MONTGOMERY: Serving as director of Syracuse Build since July, Montgomery is the public point-of-contact in developing the city's pre-apprenticeship training initiative to connect residents to local positions in construction. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photographer

Q. What is the course like?

A. It's 11 weeks and uses Multi-Craft Core Curriculum (MC3). This is a standard unit, nationally recognized curriculum used in multiple pre-apprenticeship and apprenticeship programs. Syracuse Build did its research and chose this because it is championed by many.

The course includes classroom hours and field trips. Enrollees have a chance to get their CPR first aid and OSHA (Occupational Safety and Health Administration) training. They are offered an industry overview with visits from different unions that train in different areas. Then there are shadowing opportunities and/or going to the unions to see directly what specific areas are like.

Q. What are the next steps once a participant completes training?

A. For Cohort One, after their graduation there are a couple different things happening. Some have been invited to join the union or are already in a union. Some applied for union apprenticeship opportunities and are waiting for enrollment windows to open. But know there are

ways for those folks to get to work, and they have gone to work with the prospective units that they want to work with while they're waiting for their apprenticeship enrollment process. This is likely at an entry-level position within that union and they won't be formerly with the union yet, but they do have opportunities to work and go straight to work while they await the start of an apprenticeship.

Q. What positions are in greatest demand?

A. Right now, in construction: CDL drivers, carpenters, laborers and heavy mechanic and technician operators. Those are the four that were needed last week, especially CDL. Also, HVAC and building maintenance.

Q. How does your prior experience make you the best fit for this role?

A. Throughout my career, being looked at as you're not ready for certain opportunities or this may not be the right fit for you ... Being told that I couldn't but still learning and being able to persevere, being able to accomplish, drew me into this career path. Now I'm able to advocate, but I'm also able to be empathetic. To let those we work with know, you can do this; these opportunities are for you.

On the other side of it, is having some great opportunities. The networks I've been able to build, the education that I've had as well as opportunities to enhance my skills with certain employers. I utilized employer benefits to successfully obtain a degree, and as soon as I had the opportunity to find employment that helped me advance my skills, I took it. For years, I worked two full-time jobs. Prior to this role, I served as the staff assistant and program coordinator at the Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center (EOC). I'm lucky to be mentored by folks in our area that are strong in career positions that I aspire to.

Q. Who is one of your mentors?

A. One is Tim Penix, vice president at SUNY EOC. He's been my mentor since college. I've had the privilege of being around him and learning from him.

Q. You previously worked for Penix. What was it like when you told him you were leaving?

A. It was a very hard conversation. But he would always tell me, "One of these days, you're going to leave me ... whenever there's a career opportunity for you, I know you're going to be the right person for it." While I worked for him, he did tell me, too, "I don't see you here long; you have so much to give." Having someone like him that was able to groom me and see both what I did well and where my areas of

improvement are ... to have those comprehensive conversations where he gives me compliments but also lets me know, these are areas that you want to look at improving as you navigate to different roles. I found that inspirational but also really beneficial. It allowed me to hone in and focus.

Q. How do you incorporate his leadership model?

A. By allowing myself to have those close, sometimes intimate conversations. To go to individuals and say, "Hey, I know this is where you want to go. But this is what is stacked against you as you go through the front door. These are certain things you want to hone in on. This is how you move from an entry-level position into a career, and then this is how you can grow your career. It's not going to be cakes and rainbows at the beginning, there's going to be a lot of challenges associated with being in the position that you're in. So how motivated are you to be in this position? What are you able to learn? What are you able to concentrate on and perfect in your role, so that as new roles and new opportunities present themselves, you're able to navigate into those roles and be successful?" I've experienced this with not only Black males but many I've worked with. I like to meet folks where they are and be able to help them throughout the process. And the most important part is having them know that I'm in their network. I'm not somebody that's a pass through, you know, that you're going to meet today and I'm going to forget about you tomorrow. As long as I meet you, I'm able to be in your network and help you navigate your career.

Q. What do you like most about your current work?

A. I like the robust conversations that are being had. I like to pop into the Pathways to Apprenticeship and observe what's happening throughout that class, as it progresses from week 1 to 11. The time spent with anchor partner institutions — like the city of Syracuse, Onondaga County, SUNY Upstate and Syracuse University — that we work with to make sure that we're identifying their needs, looking at policies and the one-on-one conversations (I have) with the deputy mayor, who I report to.

I am identifying the needs for construction-related positions and learning all the new developments of major projects. I push for Syracuse Build to be intentional about being a driver for local hire. That's what I love about the work. The chance — and this sudden shift in my role in this new position — to be the one to make decisions not simply help support them. To say this is where we're going. This is how we're going to drive this initiative.

HOW TO APPLY

Information sessions for the Pathways to Apprenticeship program are held virtually on Tuesdays and Thursdays through Feb. 24. For more on each session, visit bit.ly/3HJMABp

Acceptance into the Pathways program is competitive.

To meet the minimum requirements, applicants must:

- Be 18 years or older
- Live in the city of Syracuse
- Desire a career in construction
- Be authorized to work in the United States
- Have a high school diploma or equivalent
- Read, write and speak in English for training and safety purposes
- Be physically capable to do construction work

To apply: Complete the form at bit.ly/3qUSVDY

Candidates will be notified April 15 if they are accepted to the program and will begin May 2.

Q. What is something in this field that surprised you?

A. I will say I was pleasantly surprised at the amount of collaboration I've found. Just the number of folks that are brought in to the Syracuse Build Initiative. I was nervous as to what that was going to look like as I interviewed and got into the role, but to see how everyone collaborates around construction initiatives, trades jobs and local hiring, which is something that needs to be corrected now. There needs to be a blueprint made for how local hiring happens on all aspects of construction, and I was pleasantly surprised to see in my first few months on the job, many partners on board.



> Montgomery congratulates a graduate of the first cohort in August 2021. | LaTrenda Carswell, Staff Photographer

Q. What are your top priorities?

A. To align Syracuse Build with opportunities. When there's major projects, such as I-81, how does Syracuse Build align itself to be able to possibly have internal hiring opportunities? I work with anchor partners and institutions to establish and communicate a community benefits goal and look at policies or incentives related to hiring. I also work with a network of partners to ensure I'm building out a robust pipeline to support the job needs on the backend. One of my top priorities is creating a software tool where I'm able to track enrollees' training and have them ready for when the next opportunity presents itself. So, if a contractor comes and says, 'Hey, I need X amount of carpenters;' I'm able to say this is the number of folks in our area that have been trained and qualified and able to work on that project.

Q. What other challenges or barriers do you see?

A. Getting more Black and Brown folks into the unions. Making sure that the barriers that can (restrict) them (from being) selected for an opportunity are better mitigated. Not only do you see the barriers with licenses, childcare, transportation, but you also see academic barriers. We need to ensure support is in place, like financial literacy, making sure that if there's anything in their criminal background that may prohibit them from getting opportunities (is mitigated) and making sure that we're doing everything on our end so they are a well-rounded, quality applicant coming into the door.

Then if opportunities don't present themselves, how do we hold those unions accountable?

This is another thing with tracking (with this software), I want to be able to track where they are in their career. Then how do we have those conversations with the unions to say, "I see this person has been in your apprenticeship? Other apprentices have X, Y and Z. Why

isn't this apprentice there too?" So if we're able to track that, I believe we can start having those dialogues.

This is a long ways from happening until we start to get folks to go through the pre-apprenticeship, get them into the apprenticeship programs and then actually start to follow them in their career.

Q. Many in the skilled trades are reaching retirement, how can a new generation be encouraged to join the field?

A. For me, something I've seen is that the beauty of a career in construction is that the aspirations are very high. There's not a limit to what you can do. It's diverse. There's many routes within the industry, whether it's an apprenticeship program, studying for a degree or applying for an entry level role, one can work their way up based off of hard work and hands-on experience. I always encourage folks to research the construction industry, because you never know what you're going to find. Plus, construction will always be in demand.

Q. How will you feel when the first Pathways to Apprenticeship individual is hired to work on I-81?

A. That is going to be a really high moment. And I will want to build off of that. How do we grow from one to 100? To 200? How do we continue to make sure folks are trained and ready for such opportunities? We know that not everyone is going to have the opportunity to work on I-81, but the goal is for them to have a long-lasting career in construction. How can we make sure that happens? How do we also track that they're still working, still able to have that career in construction? To make sure we are able to have their backs in real time through local hire practices and policies?

Over the next five years, that's my goal: To ensure this initiative is a model that can be replicated.

POWERED BY GROWTH

Meet the Syracuse native with a vision for a new community space

By Toluwanimi Fajolu
The Stand Reporter

The proposed development aims to unite and revitalize a marginalized community

Syracuse native Victoria Coit announced a plan for a development on South Salina Street through her company 7Even Streams last summer alongside David and Simone Hills. The site will serve as a community space that a select group of entrepreneurs will be able to rent. The vision includes a fresh meat market and a ghost restaurant — one set up for delivery and takeout only — where two to three entrepreneurs can obtain two-year leases.

The development will also be the home of the company's philanthropic program called PH.G. This seven-week series gives previously incarcerated men more than 30 skills to grow and build a new life.

Coit's venture is an example of how residents can use local entrepreneurship to not only improve but serve their community.

All of these efforts focus on minority and women-owned businesses, which Jennifer Tift, board president of the Syracuse Development Economic Cooperation, said shows Coit's determination to help her community.

"The fact that she wants to focus on development within that particular part of our community, I think, shows a real willingness to invest in that neighborhood, the people who live there and work there," Tift said.

The South Salina Street development is still in the planning stages, but when completed, it will result from the many interests Coit prides herself in acquiring. This comes from her need for change and the enjoyment of watching things evolve.

"I'm a starter. I'm a mover. I get bored easily," Coit said. "I enjoy seeing things evolve."

Evolve she did.

By 2007, Coit decided to move to Washington, D.C., where she worked for a major construction contractor and explored her passion for food during her time as a chef at various restaurants. But Coit realized it wasn't the career path she envisioned. So she returned to Syracuse to rediscover her place in her hometown.

"I never really was engaged with my city before I left," Coit said. "I challenged myself to come back, be engaged and look at it with different eyes, and see what part I played inside of this puzzle of a city."

In 2012, Coit returned, deciding to experience the city as if she was rediscovering it for the first time. Her



> Victoria Coit speaks in June about her real estate development planned for the Valley area of Syracuse. | Provided Photo

discoveries pushed her to start her first magazine, Salt Of The Earth, which focused on local, Black women.

Due to the busyness that comes with the birth of a newborn, the magazine was discontinued. But Coit's journey to act on her dreams didn't stop. In 2016, she started a second magazine, Cuse Culture, with her close friend Vanessa Campbell. This served as an extension of SOTE, highlighting Black men and women in Syracuse.

It next turned into an organization offering networking events. Coit sees being in the right spaces as important to the strategy needed to succeed as an entrepreneur.

This is something that Simone, a partner in the enterprise, said Coit has always done.

"She's always been that way — bringing people together, networking ... taking pride in our community, and building something to be proud of," she said.

Coit's time in D.C. also gave her a different perspective, allowing her to see Syracuse in a new light. "I knew there were great people here, but I also didn't see any of that being highlighted," she said.

"I was peeling away the layers of what my role was inside of all of this," Coit went on to describe.

She says she took that time to push herself to take the leap no matter how scary.

"I challenged myself for one year to act. No matter what," she said. "If I was scared, if I didn't feel like I had resources or people backing me, just to act. One thing led to another, and then it just became my philosophy."

FOR UPDATES

What: 7Even Streams

Location: 4702 S. Salina St.

Email: Send to Hi@7evenStreams.world

STAY UP
TO DATE

Store: Children of the Summer

Address: 217 S. Salina St. basement

Online: Visit childrenofthesummer.com

Email: Send to Info@childrenofthesummer.com

Follow on Social:

- **Instagram:** @childrenofthesummer
- **Twitter:** @COScompany
- **Facebook:** Search "Children of The Summer"

SPREADING SUCCESS

How local brand Children of the Summer uses artistic collaboration to grow



> Seth Colton, founder of Children of the Summer, outside the new space located in the basement of the McCarthy Mercantile in downtown Syracuse. | Photo Provided

By Rebecca Meluch
The Stand Reporter

Started in 2013, this entertainment business has expanded to a new location downtown

Seth Colton crouched on the ground as he fidgeted with a jammed VCR player. It was a few days after launching his business — Children of the Summer — at a new location in the McCarthy Mercantile, and he couldn't get the relic to work.

The vivid, blue TV screen illuminated a row of cased CDs, a pile of old "Barney & Friends" tapes, lines of freshly shelved hats and a collection of empty cardboard boxes. Colton had a vision for the shop, one that would establish a community drawn to rare cassette tapes and locally made garments.

He started and founded Children of the Summer, a Syracuse-based lifestyle, management and retail agency, in 2013. His multi-platform business works with artists and creatives who are passionate about hip-hop and

R&B music.

Unlike the other shops in the McCarthy basement, Children of the Summer is not a typical retail space. Local shoppers and out-of-town visitors may enter the shop and find themselves there for hours.

Like most conventional shopping experiences, some patrons sift through the racks of clothes and try on a hat. But what stands behind the glass-paned storefront isn't about transactions or items that can be carried out in a bag.

"The retail aspect is not the most important part," Colton said. "The most important is having a space and a place for our culture and our community to meet weekly."

Fixed in the middle of the shop is a long black couch where visitors can sit in front of old box TVs.

When he pictured the flagship opening, Colton brought in the keepsake cassette tapes and a vintage SEGA console for customers and Children of the Summer regulars to bond over and pass time.

Kids can drift into the shop and spend time play-

ing video games or watch old videos while their parents browse other storefronts. As word spreads, its growing number of “fans” can congregate in the back corner of the McCarthy basement and chat while listening to music playing off Colton’s laptop. Some will walk out with a receipt. Others will leave with an industry contact and a lasting memory of engaging with a local creator.

Children of the Summer consists of local musicians, such as LeekIndaCut and Colton himself, commonly known as Seth Dollar. The team also includes a handful of graphic designers, video directors, producers and web managers.

The team operated out of a downtown office space on James Street before moving into the mercantile space at 217 S. Salina St.

At the previous office, Children of the Summer created and sold merchandise, produced music and video content. To grow followers, the brand appeared at local venues and shared content through music streaming platforms. But Colton felt something was missing — a center where the group could connect and meet with fans, advertise and display their work, and establish a communal space among other young digital creatives in Syracuse.

“I’m very protective of my brand,” Colton said. “If I’m to do something ... it has to make sense.”

After bringing in and displaying more merchandise, moving around furniture and even getting the ancient VCR player to work, Colton soon saw the hub for Children of the Summer come together in a way he and the group envisioned.

Since its late summer launch, the store has sold out of much of its original merchandise and has had to replenish its stock of T-shirts and hats and create new retail items.

Every season, a new item will launch, Colton said. As fall brings colder temperatures, a new line of women’s wear is available and soon children and infant clothing will be on sale.

On Nov. 1, Children of the Summer began its partnership with CNY Works to employ at least six city youth between the ages of 16 to 24.

Colton himself was hired by iHeartRadio through the CNY Works program when he was 16. He worked roughly 20 hours a week in the marketing department and had his own show called “Step it Up,” he recalled.

“The overall goal for the CNY Works is that I want people to leave with something,” Colton said. “I know there’s other kids out there that probably want to do these things but have no idea that there’s outlets already in Syracuse.”

When Colton first visited the McCarthy Mercantile, he said he thought the place felt sustainable for Children of the Summer. “We didn’t open this spot because we thought that there would be good traffic down there,”

Colton began. “It was (because it’s) a great space to enable our fans to be.”

Michael John Heagerty, the owner and founder of the McCarthy Mercantile, said the space brought something unique to the underground shopping scene.

“We’re happy to have a new shop there that helps unlock another piece of the mercantile,” Heagerty said. “Our hope would be any day of the week, you walk down there and there’s something different happening, to the point where whenever you come back, it’s a new experience.”

Since the opening, Colton said he’s noticed that more long-time supporters are eager to buy Children of the Summer products than they were in the past.

“Buying the clothing is kind of like being a part of it for them,” said Trigg the Ruler, a longtime creator for Children of the Summer.

While sales and visits are consistent at the shop, Children of the Summer has undergone a lot of structural changes, whether that be shifting creators to different roles or bringing on new team members.

Trigg the Ruler has been a member of Colton’s team since the beginning. He’s contributed his own music, produced music videos and content and now helps at the shop and is learning more about digital marketing.

Last July, he created and filmed a music video for local Syracuse rapper Scorey. The song and video “Guardian Angel” has already surpassed one million views on YouTube in its first two months of being posted.

Since Children of the Summer was founded, the local group has seen more than one million new impressions on its social media pages, whether that be views, likes or mentions of the company and the individual artists it works with.

Olivia DePietto is a sophomore at Syracuse University’s Bandier Program — a curriculum for students who are interested in the media, marketing and business of the music industry. When she first started the program, DePietto was searching for new ways to be involved with Syracuse’s local music scene. She started to follow Children of the Summer and the artists it represented, specifically LeekIndaCut and Colton himself.

“What I love about Children of the Summer is that it’s mixing all the different elements of music and making it their brand,” she said. “I wanted to get involved more locally, and I feel like finding Children of the Summer was the perfect way.”

Whether it comes to restocking the shelves in the shop, producing new video and artistic content and adding more people to its team, Children of the Summer works to involve the Syracuse community and create a spot where others, too, have an artistic outlet.

“Children of the Summer is not a label. It’s really not a corporate entity,” Colton said. “It’s a family-run brand. It has its own base.”

SIDE HUSTLE

Seth Colton also serves as director of **Supporting Our Young Leaders (SOYL)**, which is another collaborative effort that works to provide the next generation of leaders the tools needed to develop a career or become entrepreneurs.

SOYL’s goal is to develop a modern ecosystem in the Syracuse and Central New York region through community activation and immersive events.

SOYL’s website is an interactive platform for young leaders and supporters from the community to register for career discussions, employment opportunities, personal workshops and its digital series, IRL. IRL stands for “In Real Life” and it creates programming to share the stories of New York entrepreneurs.

To learn more, visit soylsyr.com

**DAD IS
TRAILING
OFF IN THE
MIDDLE
OF HIS
SENTENCES.**

**KNOW
WHERE
ALZHEIMER'S
AND ALL
DEMENTIA
HIDE.**

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New problems with words or speaking
is a warning sign of Alzheimer's.
Learn more at alz.org/10signs