

the Stand

south side news

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Syracuse, NY

SUMMER 2022

Issue 89

FREE

NON-BINARY

How local teens are navigating difficult terrain

on the ground

Residents join in I-81 walking tour to learn next steps for highway plans

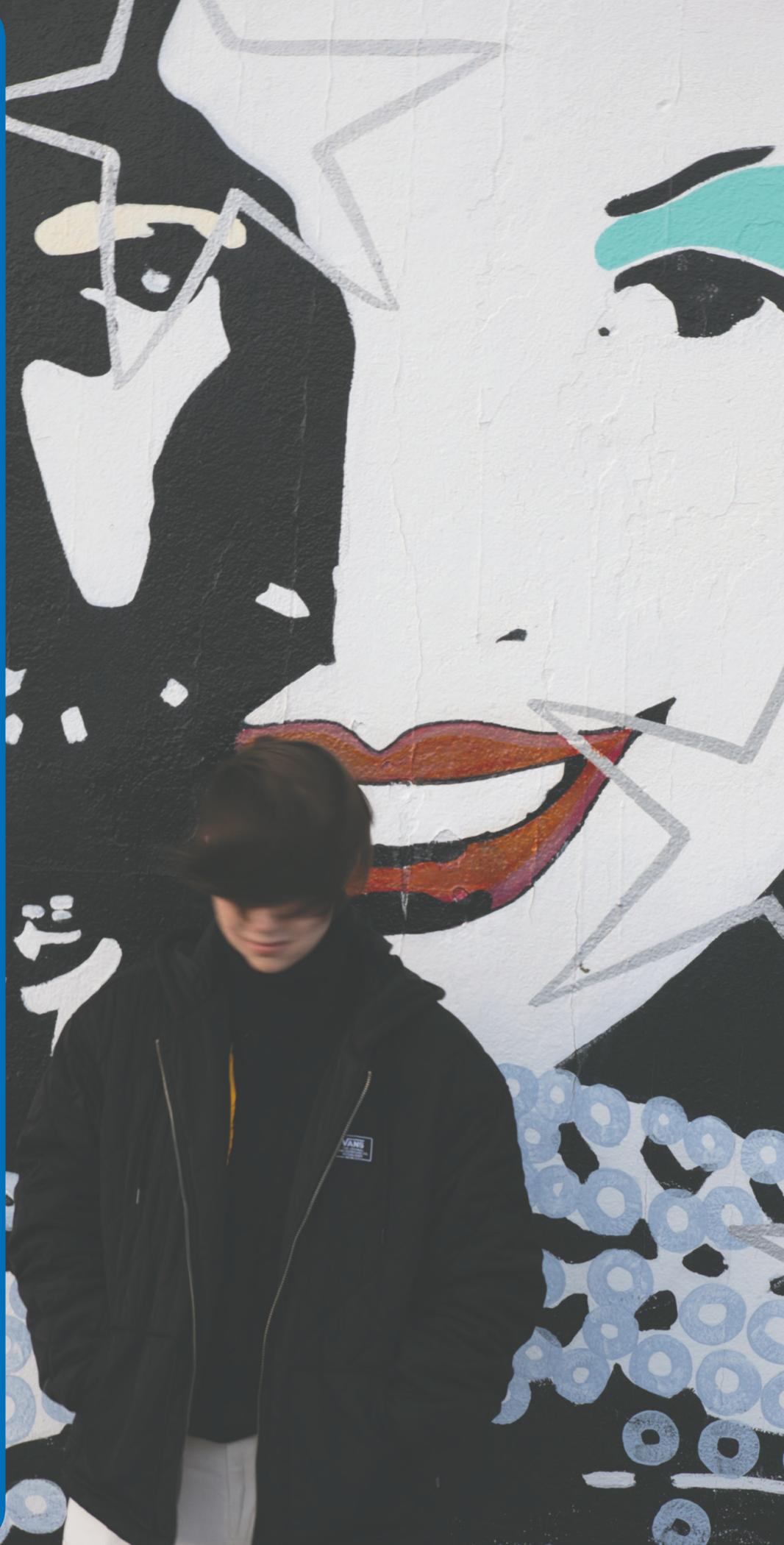
Final Blessing

Aging nuns move from convent of more than 30 years to give last gift to community

Sights on the Olympics

Amir Anderson wins 2022 USA Boxing National Qualifier

PLAY EXAMINES I-81



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UPCOMING

What: Blocks in Bloom
When: 9:30 a.m. to Noon Saturday, June 4
Where: 200 block of Corning Avenue
Details: Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County's Master Gardener volunteers will educate residents on Corning Avenue in Syracuse on preparing, planting and maintaining front yard flower gardens using donated perennials. The Blocks in Bloom aims to build community, enhance property values, promote safe neighborhoods and encourage healthy living. Residents are welcome to stop by, ask gardening questions and get information on becoming a Master Gardener. Additionally, there will be seedball making and planting activities for kids.
To learn more: Visit cconondaga.org or contact Cornell Cooperative Extension of Onondaga County at (315) 424-9485

What: Exhibit "Sekou Cooke: 15-81"
When: On view through Aug. 21
Where: Everson Museum of Art, 401 Harrison St.
Hours: 11 a.m. to 5 p.m. Wednesday and Friday, 11 a.m. to 8 p.m. Thursday and 10 a.m. to 5 p.m. Saturday and Sunday
Details: "15-81" presents architect and urban designer Sekou Cooke's project "We Outchea: Hip-Hop Fabrications and Public Space" alongside documents relating to the 15th Ward. The focus is on the legacy of placement and displacement of Black residents in Syracuse and considers various events in the city's history while simultaneously critiquing recent proposals to replace low-income communities with mixed-income housing. By contextualizing the project with photographs and ephemera that tell the story of the once vibrant 15th Ward, Cooke points to a post I-81 Syracuse future of entrepreneurship and innovation.
More Info: Visit everson.org

 For full listing of events, visit MySouthSideStand.com/events/

2022 PHOTO WALK

doors open
noon
Sunday,
June 19,
South Side
Innovation
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2610 S. Salina St.

Register online at MySouthSideStand.com

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#SouthSideShot
#PicturePortrait
#SyrSummerFun



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Joshua Michael King

By Ashley Reeves
The Stand Intern

Q. You are raising your two brothers. What did it feel like when you became their guardian?

A. I took custody when our father died in 2015. It's been really interesting. I've gone from being their awesome, cool, outrageous, trouble-making big brother to now the authority figure. It's been a difficult transition if I'm being transparent.

Q. What can you share about each?

A. Javonte is 15, and Jayden is 14. They've been amazing leaders in this time when I quit my job as a fourth-grade teacher to ensure I was a support for them during the pandemic. This was when the real magic happened, and I got to see what my kids could really do. I wound up having seven other children learning in my living room because their families didn't have the option that I did. It was a beautiful thing to see my two boys teaching younger students, helping them with their fractions and practicing their writing. That's how they spent the majority of those two years until the other kids went back to school. I couldn't be more proud of them. They have such high levels of capability, understanding and leadership.

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

A. Allow them to parent themselves. I put a lot of responsibility on them, and allow them to make a lot of decisions for themselves. I've challenged them and pushed them to think critically. Then we use their experiences to reflect upon and learn from.

Q. Any advice for first-time dads?

A. It definitely doesn't come with a handbook. You have to remember what's really important, and that's to listen and allow them to teach you how they need to be parented. Sometimes you have to be tough. Then with other kids, you have to be gentle and nurturing. It's all about how well you're able to listen and respond to what it is that they actually need. It's easy for our kids to be silenced. So, as a parent, you have to make sure you're always in tune with that, what it is that they're really trying to tell you.

Q. What has been a favorite family tradition?

A. We love to watch movies. Nobody talks. We just laugh and

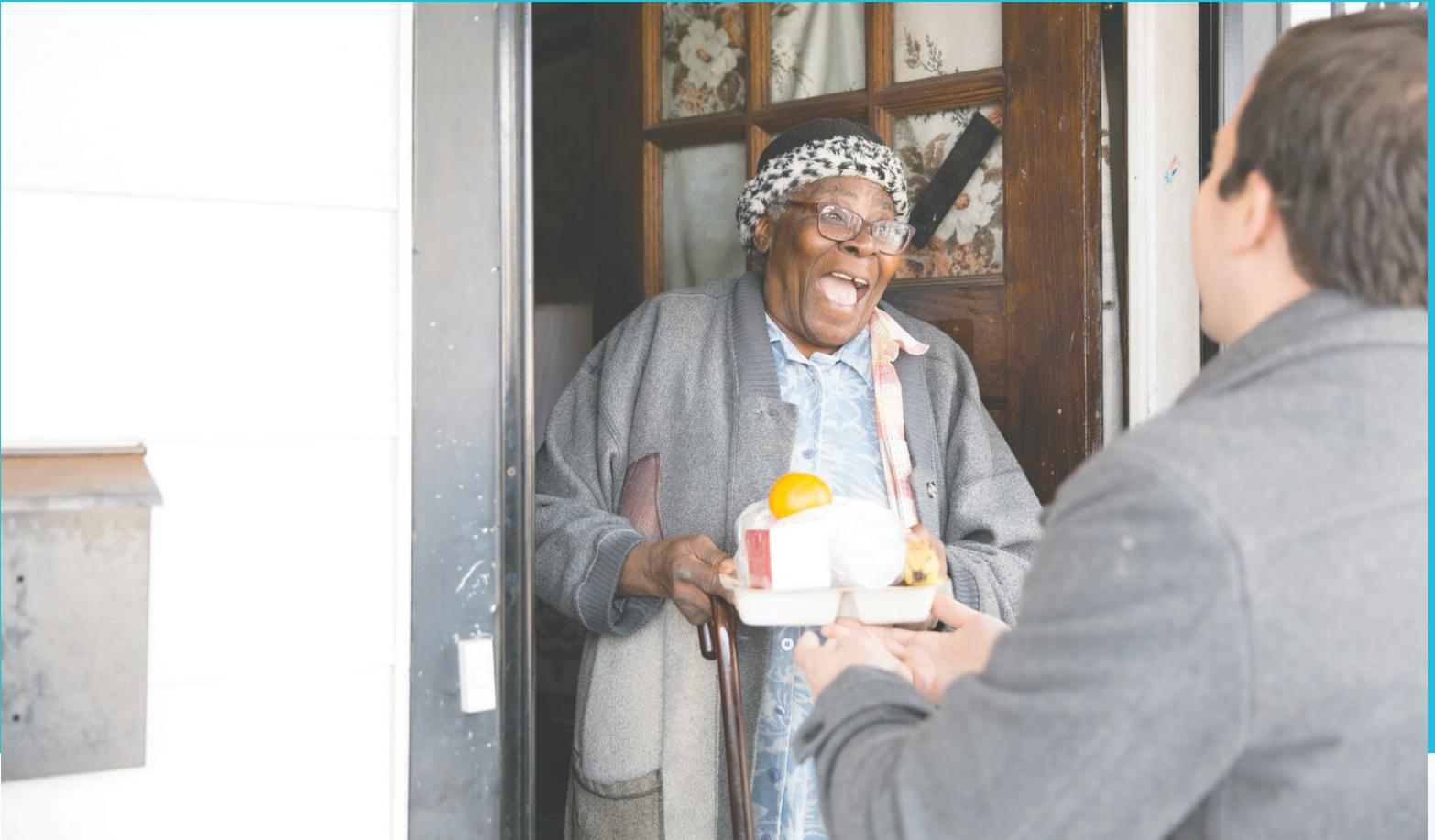


MEET JOSHUA MICHAEL KING: For seven years, King has served as the guardian to his younger brothers, Javonte and Jayden. He now works as a Regional Business Advisor at Child Care Solutions. | Provided Photo

react. It's our favorite thing to do. We don't always have time to do it, and I thought it would fade as they got older.

Another tradition we love is to explore. We've gone on expeditions once a year, and it's become part of their curriculum, starting when I used to homeschool them. We chart out our course and visit monuments and landmarks. It's not necessarily a vacation, but we will have some fun in there, too. We're really fixated on learning — developing both personally and communally.

“Listen and allow them to teach you”



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GET IN TOUCH

Families may call or text (315) 920-2787 to sign up for **Wellness Wednesdays** to receive free items such as diapers, clothes, wipes or feminine hygiene products at 2331 S. Salina St.

Current and future mothers may contact doulas through the center's website at sankofaheals.com

Additionally, follow the doulas' journey on these social media channels

- **Instagram** at @sankofaheals
- **Facebook** /sankofahealsSYR
- **Twitter** @sankofahealsSYR

IT TAKES A VILLAGE

How Sankofa Reproductive Health and Healing Center serves



> Doulas hold a training at the Sankofa Reproductive Health and Healing Center in 2021. | Provided Photo

By Lizzy Reardon
The Stand Reporter

Local, Black doulas offer support, assistance and childbirth education to South Side mothers

When she was 14 years old, SeQuoia Kemp was diagnosed with ovarian cysts and was told she would undergo surgery that week. She became hyper-aware of her reproductive organs and the constant pain. In preparation for her surgery, she refrained from eating and drinking. The repeated cancellations and rescheduling of her surgery took a toll on Kemp, who was starving.

By the age of 16, Kemp lost one of her ovaries due to delayed care.

For three months, she walked around with a 10-centimeter cyst. Her mother pleaded with doctors to expedite the surgery and ease her pain.

“My mom did not really know what to do and just felt like the doctors were not listening to her,” Kemp said.

Kemp was experiencing medical racism and medical neglect, a fact she didn't realize until years later. This was 12 years ago; however, Kemp explained that the same issues are still present. Providers are not listening enough, not advocating, being neglectful, or downright racist.

Sankofa Reproductive Health and Healing Center's mission is to end preventable death and illness in Black, African and Indigenous communities in Syracuse.

Black women have pregnancy-related mortality rates over three times higher than the rate for white women, according to the Kaiser Family Foundation. The disparities increase with age and persist across education levels.

With 30% of Syracuse's population being Black, this issue is prevalent in the downtown and South Side communities where economic apartheid still prevails.

Offering free and reduced-priced full-spectrum doula care, childbirth education, support groups, yoga and wellness programs, Sankofa served 418 families in 2021, according to its annual report.

Kemp's own experience of medical neglect and racism as a teenager inspired her to become a doula,

found Doula 4 a Queen, and eventually co-founded the center. Doulas provide emotional support, childbirth and advocacy education, physical support during birth, and postpartum care such as breastfeeding or mental health guidance.

Kemp has witnessed the drastic disparities between the treatment of Black moms and white moms for the past eight years.

“My Black clients are seen as just combative or difficult,” Kemp said. “Whereas my white client was viewed as somebody who just knew her body.”

As a community-based center that employs community-based doulas, services are tailored to the specific needs of Syracuse’s underserved community.

During the Sankofa Community Give Back, the center provided 85 families with diapers, wipes, car seats, clothes, breast pumps, feminine hygiene products and fresh food, according to the 2021 annual report.

But the team does more than just support mothers and families.

“We not only care for our community, but we also care for each other,” said Kemp, speaking of her connection with the other Sankofa Doulas like Leeandra Torrance and Taylor John.

Torrance, a Sankofa community-based doula and mother, admitted that she goes to Kemp for everything and sees her as a mentor.

“I’ll ask her how should I say this email or what do I do with this meeting because she has been doing this for years,” Torrance said. “She knows it like the back of her hand.”

Torrance also revealed that she wished she had a doula when she was pregnant.

“Being a first-time mom, you don’t know a lot,” she said. “I didn’t have a bad pregnancy but to have that extra support and to get the information about my rights makes me wish I had one.”

When one doula assists with a difficult birth and needs time to rest and recuperate, one of the other doulas steps in to meet with the client.

John, a Sankofa community-based doula and a senior at Syracuse University, explained how important it is for the client to always feel supported.

“We have backup doulas for a reason,” she said. “You never want to leave your client by themselves or feeling alone.”

Torrance has been a backup doula for John. If John was not available, she would step in which required Torrance to already have built a relationship with the client. The emphasis is on ensuring the client is comfortable.

“You’re focusing on the client as a whole versus just the client as an individual, so you are focusing on all the context that makes that client,” John said.

This means delving into their home life which



> Hawa Farah with other volunteers in the center’s stocked wellness resource room. | Provided Photo

can be eye-opening and sometimes alarming. One of John’s clients was experiencing domestic violence which triggered John, as she herself is a survivor of intimate partner abuse.

“I not only took on my client’s emotions but it also triggered my own healing,” she said.

John felt like she wasn’t doing her job — she was talking to her but was that enough? She reached out to other doulas for advice.

“It really took my mentor to be like: what you are doing here — providing a space for your client to talk, to share, to tell her truth — is enough,” she said.

John had never thought of it like that. She began to realize that it is not always about teaching, but it’s also about discussing real issues going on in the client’s day-to-day life.

In Syracuse, community care requires patience. It is about holding space for mothers to vent and connect and providing emotional support for those experiencing financial or safety barriers.

“Many people want doula care, but can’t afford it, so you have to be patient with yourself and your service,” John said. “Community doula care is not about getting a check.”

Sankofa employed three local interns last summer including Hawa Farah. Farah, originally from Somalia, has lived in Syracuse for 15 years. She confessed that as someone who grew up here, she wanted to become a doctor and move away.

But Kemp changed that. She opened her mind to coming back to the community.

“SeQuoia always told us that whatever we do, to try to bring it back to the community, to home,” Farah said. “Syracuse brought you up so why not come back and help it.”

WHAT IS A DOULA

A **doula** is a person who provides emotional and physical support during pregnancy and childbirth. Doulas are not medical professionals.

Doulas don’t deliver babies or provide medical care, but a certified doula has taken a training program and passed an exam in how to help pregnant women and their families during the childbirth experience.

WHAT DOES A DOULA DO?

Doulas can perform different roles, depending on a mother’s needs.

- Labor or birth doulas provide continuous care during labor.
- Antepartum doulas support women who are put on bed rest to prevent preterm labor. They help with household tasks and childcare.
- Postpartum doulas support the new mom during the first few weeks after birth. They help with care and feeding of the baby and household tasks.

— Source: Web MD

LEARNING TO GROW

The **Building Men Program** is an after school offering that helps boys in their journey into manhood.

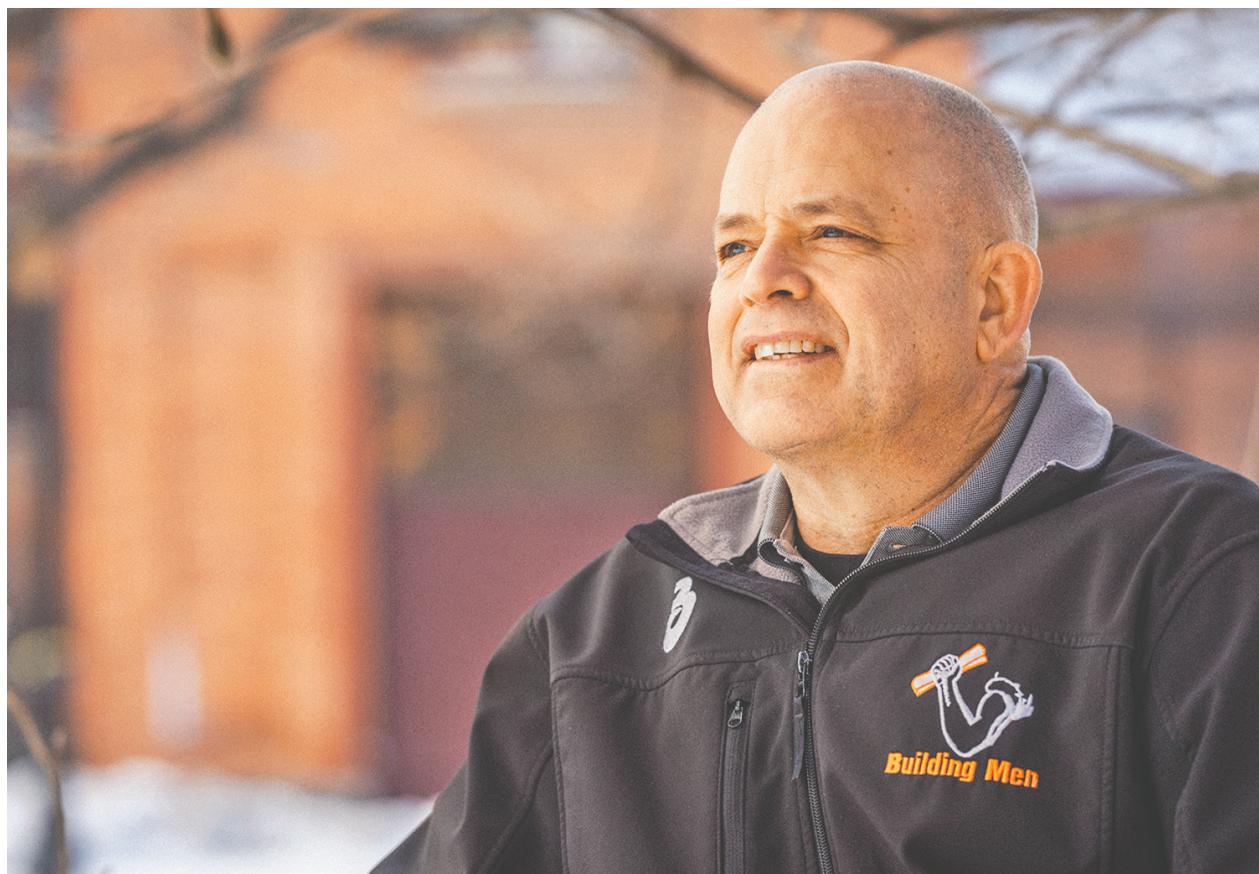
The journey includes different opportunities to experience and discuss authentic manhood. For example, attending chalk talks, listening to guest speakers, attending special events, participating in community service projects and rite of passage trips.

The program teaches youth how to set goals, create career/passion maps and make decisions.

Learn more online at buildingmenprogram.org or call (315) 440-4357

BUILDING MEN

How Joe Horan launched a mentoring program for Syracuse city students



> Joe Horan is director of The Building Men Program. The initiative helps around 175 students in fourth- to 12th-grades. | Provided Photo

By April Santana
Staff Reporter

He stresses importance of building relationships, challenges what it means to ‘be a man’

Joe Horan was doing everything right — by society’s standards. He got married. He bought a house. He successfully coached the middle school basketball team. He had it all figured out.

But when his relationship with his wife fell apart, Horan had to take a step back and reassess who he was as a man.

Horan, who was working as a physical education teacher at the time, was in pain and needed a change. Society’s expectations of manhood had let him down. Now he felt determined to teach his students another way through The Building Men Program.

In 2006, Horan scanned the gym at Levy Middle School watching the boys playing basketball when he had an epiphany: someone had to teach them that

society’s message of what it means to be a man was wrong — before it was too late.

A Syracuse native, Horan grew up on the West Side and attended Fowler High School. After attending Herkimer County Community College, he went to SUNY Cortland and then returned to teach in Syracuse, starting as a middle school gym teacher.

He launched The Building Men Program 13 years into his teaching career. The seeds were first planted after Horan read the book “Seasons of Life” by Jeffrey Marx which tells the story of Joe Ehrmann, a former NFL star. It taught Horan about being a healthy man and instilled values within him that he still emphasizes in The Building Men Program to this day.

His effort started as an intramural basketball team and then shifted to an after-school program that has grown to offerings in seven middle schools in the Syracuse City School District.

Sean Drake, a sociology professor at Syracuse University, says programs like Building Men “teach students the pathways to education.”

Middle school is a pivotal age to target; students tend to fall off when they no longer think they'll succeed, Drake says. These programs, he adds, can help fill in the gaps that occur in lower-income communities.

"Often we see this slippage between student aspiration and expectations," Drake said. "They have really high aspirations. They know what success looks like to them and their families, but their expectations are lower because of stereotypes, because their school doesn't have the resources they need and because they're worried about safety in their neighborhoods."

Through The Building Men Program, Horan aims to teach these young men that there is a bigger world than the one that is throwing them aside.

Participants include young males from the city of Syracuse, many of whom are minorities. Horan makes sure to bring in speakers that serve as positive role models.

"I think it's important for young people to see others who look like them and come from where they come. Those who can understand their situation and show them the way," Drake said.

Horan incorporates the outdoors into his lessons by having students take field trips to the Orenda Springs Experiential Learning Center where they go through the "Rite of Passage."

John Powers, executive director of Orenda Springs, says the students engage in a ceremonial event of officially becoming men. This end-of-year activity typically involves rope courses, bonfires and night walks.

At the center, they take part in physical activities that force them to work together and take on leadership roles, Horan explained. The participants of Building Men learn of future career paths that may relate to their interests in nature and the outdoors.

"Our education system doesn't do a great job in getting to the kids who are not good at math and reading," Powers said. "When they come out here, they learn how to use [other] skill sets, and we turn them into leaders. Kids who have a tough time leading at school become leaders out here because we give them opportunities that they're good at."

Horan agrees and pushes his mentees to be guided by significance, integrity and values and to become one who builds relationships (S.I.R.). He defines a man as a "sir," thus reiterating these virtues.

"I don't need them to be superstars," he said. "I just want them to be men."

He says it's about living for a cause greater than your own and "following your truth north."

He wants his students to be "a man, not *the man*."

OFFER SUPPORT

Building Men relies entirely on the support of members of the community.

Given the chance and the right mentorship, organizers believe that young men who have come from challenging beginnings can be forged into the leaders and role models the community needs.

Donations help support programs, recruitment of influential speakers, trips, food and supplies.

To make a donation, visit buildingmenprogram.org/donate/

DAO stands for
"Decentralized Autonomous
Organization"

www.web3is.wtf !?

Beyond the Binary

Story by: **Maia Vines**

Photos by: **Em Burriss**

High schoolers share challenges to being acknowledged as trans or non-binary

Evan Kulczynski usually stays quiet when another student calls him by the wrong pronouns. “I don’t like correcting them and potentially leading to something, like someone saying ‘No you sound like a girl, so you are a girl. I’m going to call you she/her,’” said Kulczynski, a senior at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central (ITC).

Kulczynski, 17, realized he was nonbinary four years ago and said luckily his school was accepting — including with changing his former name in the school’s system.

Now he feels more comfortable looking at his grades and school ID, which are no longer painful reminders of the disconnect he felt with his female identity.

ITC social worker Melissa Mendez, who works with about 580 students, helps notify teachers about changes in students’ preferred names and pronouns. “If you’re one of the only students who is using a one-person bathroom, not changing for gym or teachers are constantly getting your pronouns wrong, it can be very isolating to be trans or nonbinary,” Mendez said.

Last summer, the U.S.

Department of Education confirmed that Title IX protects students from discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity. Title IX guidelines apply to organizational employees like teachers, staff and administrators, along with students. The protections, though, haven’t stopped states, most notably Texas, from pursuing policies targeting non-binary and trans students. They also don’t protect transgender students from gender role conflict.

Gender role conflict is defined as the devaluation, restriction or violation of oneself or another person when trying to adhere to rigid gender role expectations, according

to Dr. Daniel Miller, a mental health counselor at Dr. Spiegelhoff & Associates in Camillus. Devaluation can be internal — restricting oneself because of societal standards — or external when someone demeans someone else who embraces their gender expression.

“Oftentimes, the early 20s is when we start to figure out a little bit more about who we are,” Miller said. “What I’ve noticed is, with my adolescent clients, they’re much more aware and willing to talk about the gender spectrum and embracing nonbinary and androgynous forms of gender expression and identity.”

A student’s home life can also affect struggles with gender identity — something that Jeffrey Newell, a media communications teacher at ITC, has witnessed.

Newell, who received mandatory district-wide training on LGBT issues, said that he tries to be attentive to language in parent meetings, avoiding gender-specific pronouns because he knows some parents are not accepting of their child’s transition.

Jasper Cotroneo, 16, a student in Newell’s media class began transitioning two years ago. In December, Cotroneo drew a comic on being misgendered.

Little to none of Cotroneo’s school friends are transgender, meaning they don’t face similar obstacles. “It feels kind of lonely,” Cotroneo said.

“Over quarantine, I was able to surround myself with people that were more like me, especially over the internet,” Cotroneo said. “It really opened my eyes; like, I don’t really need to hide myself. If somebody doesn’t accept me for me, then that’s their problem, I guess.”



| Evan Kulczynski



This comic, “The Issue on Gender in American Schools,” by high school junior Jasper Cotroneo follows the story of a transmasculine student named Milo who is constantly misgendered by classmates and teachers.

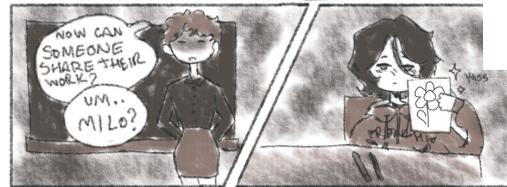
| Jasper Cotroneo



MILO IS A STUDENT WHO IDENTIFIES AS TRANSMASCULINE



HE DESCRIBES HIS EXPERIENCE OF BEING OUT AT SCHOOL AS TERRIBLE + EXHAUSTING



MILO EVEN EXPLAINS HOW HIS CLASSMATES DELIBERATELY IGNORE HIS GENDER IDENTITY—

—AND SOME OF HIS TEACHERS, TOO.

THOUGH SOME DO SHOW TO BE TRYING THEIR BEST



IF THAT WASN'T BAD ENOUGH A WHOPPING 52% OF GENDERQUEER STUDENTS HAVE REPORTED CONSIDERING SUICIDE IN 2020. ***

MILO THINKS THAT MAJOR IMPROVEMENTS CAN BE MADE. TEACHERS & STUDENTS ALIKE SHOULD BE LESS IGNORANT & EDUCATE THEMSELVES.

NEARLY 75% OF TRANS + NON-BINARY STUDENTS FEEL UNSAFE AT SCHOOL *

&

59% OF THEM EVEN GET REFUSED CHOICE OF BATHROOM **

* welcomingschools.org
** transequality.org
*** Forbes.com

KNOCKOUT NAMES

Every boxer has a favorite punch, strike or combination to clobber their opponent with.

For Amir “Cash” Anderson, that favorite punch looks different each time he steps inside the ring.

“I like all punches,” he said. “Anything that hits.”

Anderson’s friend and teammate Imari Williams, who he trains with, likes throwing the right hook.

But between sparing sessions, there’s time for some experimentation. In an artistic process, the teenage boxers choreograph punch combinations.

There’s the “boom shakalaka,” a right hook to the body, a left hook to the body, then a lead hook and another cross to the opponent’s head.

Or the “shoeshine,” four uppercuts then a “big hook” to the head, sure to leave the other fighter woozy.

Throwing these punches requires no thought, just trust in your training.

“The more you think the more you get frustrated, and you get mad,” Anderson said. “They say it’s a thinking man’s sport, but really it isn’t.”

A ROCKY START

Local boxer Amir “Cash” Anderson goes from underdog to top dog



> Amir “Cash” Anderson spars during a recent practice at West Area Athletic & Education Center. | Nya Bragg, Staff Photographer

By Dean Zulkofske
The Stand Reporter

After winning 2022 USA Boxing National Qualifier, sights set on 2024 Olympic Games

There’s plenty to think about and even more to overthink.

The walk from his home near Western Lights to the boxing gym is just over a mile. Amir “Cash” Anderson makes the walk six days a week. He sees all sorts of things.

He passes rundown faces on his way to Ray Rinaldi’s West Area Athletic and Education Center on South Geddes Street, where the sound of leather hitting a punching bag is heard behind a coach’s directions.

“I see everything I don’t want to be,” said Anderson, sitting on a bench still wet with sweat after training.

“I hate walking,” added his friend Imari Williams sitting next to him. “You could be innocent and still get shot. Wrong place, wrong time. A bullet don’t go no

name on it.”

The two boys, both city high schoolers, are safe within the walls of the boxing gym. The building used to be a McDonald’s restaurant. The dark red tile flooring is still the same where the kitchen once sat.

The boxing gym’s coach, Chris Burns, who teaches and tutors math with the Syracuse City School District, converted part of the old dining area into a classroom. A whiteboard scribbled with equations stands at the front of the room in front of computers where kids finish their homework after sparring sessions.

This is safe. This is where Anderson, who started training with Burns at age 7 to defend himself at school, molded into a national champion. The boy who cried at his Thornden Park Bulldogs football practices won the 2021 USA Boxing Youth Championship last December at 156 pounds. With that win, Anderson, a senior at PSLA at Fowler High School, earned a spot on the USA Youth Training team. He one-upped that at the end of April.

On April 30, he fought in Cleveland, Ohio, and won the 2022 USA Boxing National Qualifier at 156 pounds

in the tournament's Elite division. Anderson, who started the tournament as the No. 1 overall seed, achieved his goal of making the Team USA training squad in the Elite, Junior and Youth divisions.

The mile stretch between home and the gym is all Anderson, 18, needs to know right now. But already, boxing has taken him around the United States from Dallas, Texas, to Colorado Springs, Colorado.

Boxing, what Anderson calls his meditation, taught him how to fight for himself and his goals.

"I don't really think about anything, I just let my body do what it does," Anderson said. "Once I start thinking, that's when it gets tricky, that's when it gets frustrating. The more you think the more you get frustrated, and you get mad."

Anderson's friend Williams, the only other fighter in the gym who can switch between south paw and orthodox stances, is now standing, showing off a picture on his iPhone.

It's of the two of them posing with other young fighters from the gym after a tournament in 2017. Anderson stands in the back, taller than the others, the only kid without a belt to hold.

"We all won a belt, he was the only one crying," Williams said about the picture. "I'm proud of him. I feel like we accomplished something. It's only up from here, and I can't wait to be right there with him."

Anderson didn't have the same immediate success some of the others in the gym had. Burns said he was average, just like many of the other kids when he started. For Burns, "Cash's" nickname used to be "waterworks" because of how often Anderson cried at the gym.

Winning was a process for Anderson. He built on little victories, like lasting until a later round or reaching the podium at tournaments. But he said he never worried about the losses. Yes, it hurt to lose, especially at a young age, but he used that emotion as motivation.

"I was just having this conversation with him last week," Burns said. "The reason why he's really on a good path for success is because he didn't have the easy way. He didn't win every single one of his fights early. He was able to get those failures that you need in order to see if you actually have perseverance."

And Anderson does. His next goal is to reach Paris, France, to represent the United States in the 2024 Summer Olympics. He isn't thinking about that in the ring but has plenty to think about on his walk home.

It's there, on that walk, where Anderson starts thinking again. He thinks about how he can make a difference.

"Like poverty. I would like to buy houses and rent them out for cheaper prices so families can get more food and nice stuff," Anderson said. "(I see) things that I don't want to be and things that I want to change."

Within the West Area Athletic and Education Center boxing gym, yellowed newspaper clippings stick to the walls and a bell signals the start of the next sparring round. Williams is still to his left, Burns circles in front of them with the brightly lit ring sitting behind him.

Anderson stares ahead.

"It's more than the recognition," he said. "It's honor for me."



> This spring, Amir "Cash" Anderson fought in Cleveland, Ohio, and won the 2022 USA Boxing National Qualifier. Anderson, who started the tournament as the No. 1 overall seed, achieved his goal of making the Team USA training squad in the Elite, Junior and Youth divisions. | Nya Bragg, Staff Photo

GUEST HOUSE

Sarah's Guest House

provides lodging, transportation, meals and comfort to patients and families of patients receiving medical care in Central New York.

This nonprofit is not funded by state or federal monies and relies on the generosity of the community and volunteers.

Guests pay \$25 per night but no one is turned away for inability to pay.

The nonprofit has a wish list of items needed and seeks individuals and groups to volunteer to make meals, plan an event, do lawn work and housekeeping.

To volunteer, call (315) 475-1747 or email Briana@sarahsguesthouse.org

To learn more, visit sarahsguesthouse.org

FINAL BLESSING

Aging nuns move from convent to give last gift to Syracuse community



> Nuns from Most Holy Rosary, from left to right, Sisters Joan Ottman, Helen Ann Charlebois and Maria Grace Quartiero moved at the end of 2021 to allow for Sarah's Guest House to expand. | LaTrenda Carswell, Staff Photographer

By Darian Stevenson
The Stand Reporter

Move allows Sarah's Guest House to double occupancy for visitors seeking medical care

Three nuns have given up their living space to allow for renovations on Sarah's Guest House, a nonprofit on Syracuse's Southwest Side that serves as a haven for family members accompanying a loved one in need of medical care. Sisters Joan Ottman, Grace Quartiero and Helen Ann Charlebois, each over the age of 80, said the gesture was a final gift to the community.

The guest house provides lodging, transportation and meals to patients and families of patients receiving care in Central New York. It sits on the corner of Bellevue and Roberts avenues. Before it was known as Sarah's Guest House, it was home to the sisters of Most Holy Rosary.

The guest house has split half of Most Holy Rosary Convent with three of its remaining nuns since 2005, paying \$1 per year as tenants to offer rooms for rent to guests. In an effort to help the guest house expand

and receive grants, the sisters agreed to move from the convent they have served for over three decades.

"[The guest house's] ministry is getting bigger and bigger and bigger, and it's a very important ministry," said Charlebois, of the Cathedral Academy of Pompei.

She refers to the guest house as a ministry because the nonprofit is "following in Jesus' path of ministering to people in need."

"Our side was a very big space, and there's only three of us left," she said. "We're certainly not getting any bigger. So, we said it was time."

The convent was built in 1915 with enough room to house 21 sisters. Charlebois has lived in the convent three separate times and served under three ministries.

She became a sister servant of the Immaculate Heart of Mary in 1967. Later, she taught students ranging from second graders to 12th graders and was a principal for 30 years at multiple parochial schools in the city.

While living in the convent, Charlebois said each sister had their own ministry, but they supported and cared for one another when they lived together.

"We're all different and we all have our own friends outside of the community, but when we're together,

we're together for a common purpose and that is to be Jesus' representatives," Charlebois said. "But you're also there for [each other] when things aren't going well in their personal lives and to support them, their sadnesses and their families."

The convent's backyard is what Charlebois will miss most. Although she wasn't the sister with the green thumb, she loved the lilies, tulips and daffodils that bloomed in the summer — if the deer didn't get to them first. Charlebois always knew spring was at its peak when the stone wall marking the end of the property would flourish with greenery and wildflowers along with the butterfly tree erupted into full bloom. In the warmer days, the sisters would often hold prayer in that spot.

"The [backyard] was lovely," Charlebois said. "I always said it was the best of two worlds living in the Syracuse convent. If you were a city girl, you looked out the front windows and you got your city. If you were a country girl, you looked out the back windows and you got your country."

When the convent split into two to accommodate Sarah's Guest House, the sisters lost access to the backyard. It was a sacrifice, but one Charlebois felt was necessary for the well-being of the community.

Then, in December 2021, the sisters moved into the rectory across the street from the guest house.

"To be able to help continue [to serve the community], I'm more than willing to find a new home to live in," Charlebois said.

David Haas, executive director of Sarah's Guest House, is grateful for the sisters and their decision to move.

"They will tell you that a part of their mission of giving back was to give up their home," Haas said. "They didn't have to [move]. They could have said once we have passed on or moved on, you guys can have the building. It was a huge gift."

Servicing over a thousand people annually, the guest house has been recommended to families receiving medical care at Upstate University Hospital by Dr. Leslie Kohman, a professor of surgery specializing in thoracic surgery and hospice and palliative medicine.

According to Kohman, Upstate is the only academic health center in a 17-county region. It has specialty services that aren't available at other hospitals. She said Sarah's Guest House is an essential resource for families and patients going through frequent or daily treatment in Central New York.

"[Upstate] serves many patients throughout a large area," Kohman said. "Besides the transportation difficulties, a lot of these patients come from rural areas, and our rural New York population is poor."

Despite minimal costs for a room in the guest house, Kohman added it also allows for families to be together during hard times, an important aspect to a patient's recovery.

Before being rebranded to Sarah's Guest House in 2014, Sarah House was founded by Mary Keough in 1994. Keough opened the facility after her nephew was diagnosed with leukemia. He was travel-

ing to New Hampshire and Minnesota for bone marrow transplants and encountered healthcare hospitality homes. That's when Keough saw the growing need for a home-style stay for individuals and their families who were traveling to receive medical care.

Julie May, a volunteer of Sarah's Guest House, said she wanted to contribute to the guest house in any way she could after she heard about the nonprofit's mission.

"I just love being part of something that really is making a difference," May said. "I can't even tell you how many times I've met up with a person staying here and they're just in tears because they're so happy to have found this place."

May became close with a mother who traveled from Nigeria to take care of her son who had a stroke. May helped her adapt to life in the United States.

"She had to come over here, never even being in America, and I used to take her to the grocery store on Salina Street, and I took her to a hairdresser so she could get her hair done. I totally got so attached to her," May said. "That's why this [guest house] is so important."

The nonprofit remained a tenant to the convent, an arrangement Haas described as a "steal of a deal," for quite some time. But as a tenant, the organization could not apply for specific grants to help with the upkeep of the property.

"If we wanted to update the bathrooms, it would be on us," Haas said. "We couldn't apply for a grant to have those done because anybody would look at us and say, 'Well, you're just a tenant.'"

According to Haas, the guest house doesn't receive state or federal funding. The nonprofit relies on donations from corporations, foundations and individuals. The guest house also had to turn away over 800 guests per year due to limited space.

That's when Haas and the board of directors of Sarah's Guest House decided they needed a long-term solution.

Most Holy Rosary's board of trustees voted to sell the building to Sarah's Guest House at its Dec. 22, 2021, meeting. Despite an estimated value of \$400,000, the church finalized the building's sale for \$25,000.

As the owners, the nonprofit plans to turn the garage into a new entryway and lobby, update the kitchen, create an exercise space and double the number of bedrooms from 11 to 22.

In addition, a \$100,000 grant from the Mother Cabrini Health Foundation will support installation of an elevator to accommodate those who cannot utilize stairs. It is expected to be installed by the end of the year.

Charlebois said the decision to move was an easy one when given the chance to help others. She said all she needs is a roof over her head.

"When you meet guests, they have nothing but good things to say and are grateful that it was there when they needed it," Charlebois said. "It's very fulfilling to know that for these number of years, we've been able to support [a nonprofit] that Syracuse needs and it's done in such a loving fashion."

"We said it was time."

— Sister Helen Ann Charlebois

RELIC REMOVED

Gov. Kathy Hochul announced the release of the **Final Environmental Impact Statement** for the Interstate 81 Viaduct Project April 14. The project is on track to break ground in the fall of 2022 and will remove the existing elevated structure dividing the city of Syracuse.

The viaduct will be replaced with a new business loop and an integrated community grid that will disperse traffic along local north-south and east-west streets, in an effort to reconnect neighborhoods severed by the interstate.

“The Interstate 81 project represents a historic opportunity to correct the errors of the past and remove a relic of outdated and ill-conceived highway planning that never should have been constructed in downtown Syracuse,” Hochul said. “Release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement clears the way for us to move forward with this project and bring new opportunities for growth and prosperity to all the communities of Central New York.”

— Release from the New York State Department of Transportation

I-81 CONCERNS

Residents attend walking tours to discuss latest construction plans

By Eddie Velazquez
The Stand Reporter

Health impact, noise pollution and clear understanding of next steps were issues raised

New York Civil Liberties Union organizers and State Department of Transportation officials directed a community conversation on the Interstate 81 project that will transform the aging viaduct in the next six years.

New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) officials fielded questions from city residents and local elected leaders on public health and access to new business opportunities ushered in by the project’s “business loop” component.

The \$2.25 billion project will have two construction phases. Phase 1 will start later this year, while Phase 2 is scheduled to begin in 2026. The first phase includes changes to roads and infrastructure near STEAM at Dr. King Elementary School. During this phase, construction crews will begin tearing down parts of the elevated portion of I-81 in the city.

Syracuse Common Council President Helen Hudson, along with lifelong city resident and tenants rights advocate Cathy Fudge, asked NYSDOT Regional Director David Smith questions regarding the public health impacts construction can have on nearby residents.

“We need to know in which way you plan to remediate the health issues we are going to have from the reshaping of this viaduct,” said Hudson, alluding to a comment made by Fudge about the already high rate of city residents with pulmonary health issues. According to the city’s 2019 Community Health Assessment and Improvement Plan, 13% of Syracuse residents deal with asthma or similar respiratory health issues.

“Is there going to be anything set up to help folks as we proceed with this and we inevitably see our rates are higher due to construction and demolition?” Hudson asked Smith.

Smith acknowledged Hudson’s concerns, but replied that NYSDOT will not be the agency dealing with the public health effects of the project.

“We cannot do that at the DOT,” Smith said.

“Under highway law, that is not part of the law.”

In response, Fudge said, “NYSDOT will be responsible for the effects of the project.”

“None of us desire for those (pulmonary health) rates to be higher,” Smith said. “But that is not something we can take care of. It may be that there are



> NYS DOT I-81 Project Director Mark Frechette, at center, motions ahead to where Business Loop 81 will be, at the present intersection of Van Buren Street and Renwick Avenue during a walking tour for residents. | Mike Greenlar, Staff Photographer

other agencies who can do that.”

A city resident, who declined to be identified, followed up on Smith’s comments, noting the effects of pollution ushered in by the I-81 project will target areas such as Pioneer Homes, one of the first public housing developments in the country. The housing project bore the brunt of displacement and economic inequities that arose from the initial construction of I-81.

“I have a respiratory problem,” the resident said. “My doctor already said ‘I don’t care how small your exposure to dust is, you cannot be there.’”

A roundabout initially planned near the elementary school was a cause for concern for residents due to its proximity to the school building. The roundabout was recently moved closer to an intersection between Renwick Avenue and Van Buren Street.

Colleen Gibbons said NYSDOT needs to continue to monitor residents’ concerns in relation to the roundabout.

“That needs to be first and foremost to NYSDOT. These are people who live in this neighborhood and are directly affected by the roundabout,” she said. “A couple of extra minutes in the car are not going to make a

difference for motorists.”

Gibbons said she is impressed with the community engagement the project has generated thus far.

Part of the concerns South Side residents have had was the seeming uncertainty regarding the “Business Loop 81,” which is part of the project’s second phase. Phase 2 will transform I-690 and turn the existing Almond Street into Business Loop 81, a limited-access highway that would connect the South Side neighborhood, downtown and other business districts. The highway has raised noise pollution concerns among residents.

During the April 30 walk-through with community residents and NYSDOT officials, New York Civil Liberties Union (NYCLU) Senior Organizer David Rufus said residents of nearby McBride Street will be most impacted.

“Folks have talked about the need for slowing down traffic in this area in order to reduce the volume. They are concerned when they try to sleep at night,” Rufus said. “There is so much information and so many dynamics that it is hard to figure out what is actually going on.”

Smith said during the walk-through that the inclusion of a noise barrier between the Business Loop and the area around STEAM at Dr. King can help alleviate some concerns, as well as free up as much property as possible for non-transportation use.

Ultimately, Rufus said the state still has a long way to go to continue listening to residents’ concerns.

On pollution, Rufus said NYCLU will continue to ask what agency will ultimately be responsible for protecting residents.

“NYSDOT continues to say that is not their job,” he said. “We are going to continue to ask until we get an answer.”

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SHOW DATES

M&T Bank will host a pay-what-you-will performance for the debut show at 7:30 p.m. June 8.

Pay-what-you-will tickets must be claimed in person at the Box Office or by phone at (315) 443-3275 on the day of the performance only, subject to availability.

The Box Office opens at 10 a.m. and will remain open until the start of the show. There is a limit of four tickets per person.

“**salt/city/blues**” will be performed live through June 26 at Syracuse Stage, 820 E. Genesee St.

For tickets, call the Box Office at the number above or visit syracusestage.org; for groups of 10 or more, call Group Services at (315) 443-9844.

DISENFRACTURED

Syracuse Playwright Kyle Bass examines I-81's impact on the community

By Darian Stevenson
Staff Reporter

‘salt/city/blues’ hones in on racial, class divides created by a highway cutting through the city

The Federal-Aid Highway Act, approved by Congress in 1956, authorized more than 41,000 miles of safe, efficient roads that would revolutionize American interstate travel and commerce. But the highway expansion widely scarred America’s urban communities of color, including Syracuse’s own South Side.

That’s why Kyle Bass, a playwright with Syracuse roots, created “salt/city/blues.” The play centers on race, class, familial tension and a theme mirroring Syracuse’s I-81 conflict of commerce thoroughfares in Black and brown communities, attached to a bluesy aesthetic.

“I was sort of interested in the injury that the highway exacerbated 60 years ago when it went up,” Bass said. “What it did to the 15th Ward, dividing the Black communities as so many roads were being barreled through what are termed blighted communities, Black poor communities, in the service to commerce.”

Through the lens of Yolonda Mourning, a Black woman working as a consultant on a project created to remove part of a highway dividing Salt City. The region’s complicated history on race and inner-city development, along with her own family divide, will be confronted.

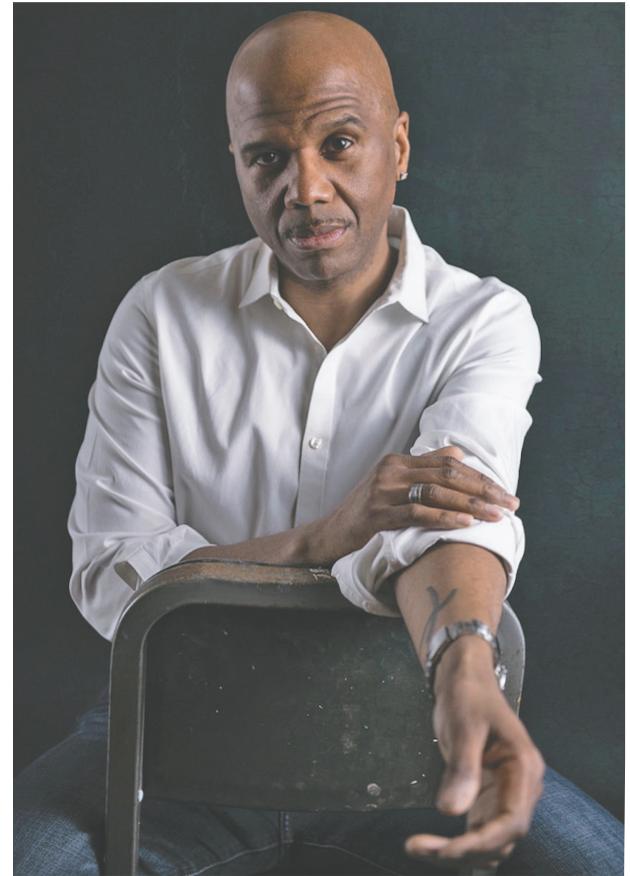
Gilbert McCauley, director, said the play addresses conversations around city division. “There’s something at the heart of why people should be concerned about what happens to those who live in their cities,” he said.

“I think the play is pointing at why people are and can be overlooked and why some lives seem less important,” McCauley said.

The United States Census Bureau’s reported national poverty rates in 2019 show 18.8% of Blacks live below the poverty line, compared to white Americans at a 7.3% rate.

But Bass took a nontraditional route to the play based on a report of Syracuse’s economy. According to Data USA, 23.6% of white Americans live in poverty, more than triple the national rate.

“I was looking at ideas of class in a way that we don’t usually see,” Bass said. “Traditionally, in plays, we see Black and brown people are the have-nots and white folks are the haves and it’s always about getting ahead. Here, I looked more deeply.”



> Kyle Bass is the first resident playwright for Syracuse Stage. | Provided Photo

Bass’ main character, Yolonda, is a woman of means. As the consultant on the highway project, she will have to face how she can best reshape her broken community.

Jill Anderson, managing director for Syracuse Stage, said, “gone are the days of just sitting and watching a play.” She admires Bass for taking on topics that spark meaningful conversations.

“Kyle’s sort of a cultural omnivore,” Anderson said. “Watching how he takes in information, whether it’s art, whether it’s news, whether it’s conversation, and seeing all that become something else — it weaves together and comes out in this beautiful other form. I love it, and I don’t understand how anybody can do it.”

Bass looks forward to showcasing his play and allowing an audience to not only watch something moving but watch a story with both conflict and humor.

“I don’t tend to write comedy, but [the characters] are funny,” Bass said. “They make me laugh, and that’s a surprise to me. I hope it will be a pleasure to the audience to have a full journey of emotions in the play.”

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