

the Stand

south side news

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Syracuse, NY

MARCH 2013 Issue 25 FREE

ARTISTIC EXPRESSION

Corcoran Senior wins Gold Key Award for self-portrait 'Eye See Me'

B&B Lounge
Owners strive to make bar a place all feel welcome, comfortable

Reaching Retirement
Jesse Dowdell will soon say farewell to SWCC

Mental awareness
Mother and daughter share teen's story to help others

ADVICE: MENTOR A MUSICIAN



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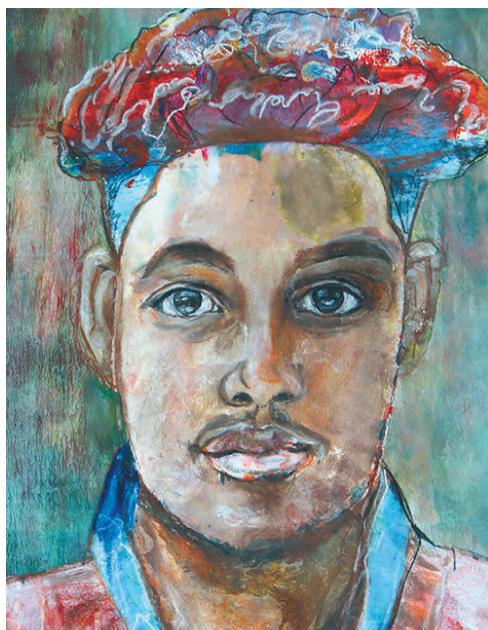
MONICA RICHARDSON

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PHOTOGRAPHERS**STUDENTS AT THE
S.I. NEWHOUSE SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS**SPECIAL THANKS
THIS MONTH**DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM, AMY
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SOUTH SIDE COMMUNICATION CENTER
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THE PUBLICATION'S EDITORIAL PURPOSE AND
IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.

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■ Cover photography of Rahmeik Bowen's self portrait by Steve Davis

An artist sees himself



> Self portrait, "Eye See Me," by Corcoran High School senior Rahmeik Bowen, won him a Gold Key award. | Steve Davis, Staff Photo. Bowen, right, likes to draw portraits. | Alyssa Greenberg, Staff Photo

In the following pages, you're likely to come across a familiar face.

Two stories spotlight leaders in our community who have often acted as father figures to those around them. For example, read praise for Jesse Dowdell, the soon-to-be-retired chief executive officer of the Southwest Community Center, from those who have worked closely with him. Also meet the two "Bills" behind the B&B Cocktail Lounge, a place that one employee says has taught him "how to be a better man."

And even more residents are profiled by our new Syracuse University reporters. Meet a 17-year-old living with a mental illness who has received help from a local group and wants to share her experiences as a way to help others. Celebrate with recent graduates of the Jobs for Life program. And get to know Dr. Mustafa Awayda, the medical director of the Rahma Health Clinic.

This semester we are lucky to have eight SU students dedicated to reporting for The Stand. We also have a number of photo students who have paired up with them. But we would still love to hear from you, the community. Let us know your ideas, your interests in working with the project and any suggestions.

You can do this in person in April when we hold two General Interest Sessions open to South Side residents. We want you to learn more about the project, have the opportunity to ask questions and learn ways you can get involved.

To reach me, email me at ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or call (315) 882-1054.

Ashley Kang



UPCOMING EVENTS

April
13 & 16

General Interest Meeting

We offer two opportunities — **10 a.m. Saturday, April 13,** and **6 p.m. Tuesday, April 16,** at the South Side Communication Center, 2331 S. Salina St. — to meet with The Stand to learn ways you can get involved. We are always looking for fresh ideas and new writers. If you want to learn more about the paper and how you can participate, plan to attend.

More Info.: Contact Ashley Kang at (315) 882-1054 or email ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

CALENDAR | MARCH

What: The James Carter Organ Trio

When: 7 p.m. Friday, March 8

Where: Storer Auditorium, Ferrante Hall on the OCC Campus, 4585 W. Seneca Turnpike

More Details: James Carter is a highly admired saxophonist. His music is fueled by deep respect and intimate knowledge of the jazz tradition.

Cost: Tickets are \$15 each and on sale now at Sound Garden in Armory Square (no limit). All seats reserved.

More Info.: Visit <http://jamescarterlive.com/>

What: St. Patrick's Parade

When: Noon Saturday, March 9

Where: Salina Street, downtown Syracuse

More Details: The 31st annual St. Patrick's Parade is being held a week before the big holiday and is held to collect and donate funds to benefit Syracuse Project Children and the Syracuse St. Patrick Hunger Project.

Cost: Free to attend

More Info.: Visit SyracuseStPatricksParade.org

WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor can be mailed to:

The Stand c/o Ashley Kang
South Side Communication Center
2331 South Salina St.
Syracuse, NY 13205

or emailed to:

The Stand's director,
Ashley Kang, at Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

All letters must be no more than 200 words in length and must contain the writer's full name, address and contact information.

Online Exclusive: These stories are featured at mysouthsidestand.com



HEALTH | New WIC food packaging promotes healthy eating in Syracuse.

SCHOOL AND YOUTH | Sentry program, which provides schools with security officers, works to protect students throughout the Syracuse City School District.

HIGH HONOR

On Jan. 24, Jesse Dowdell was honored for distinguished service to the Southwest Community Center by Sen. David Valesky and the New York State Senate

The resolution read: "It is the sense of this Legislative Body that those who enhance the quality of life in their community and have shown a long and sustained commitment to the maintenance of high standards in their profession, certainly have earned the recognition and applause of all the citizens of this great Empire State."

Source: NYS Senate



Jesse Dowdell

*Praised for his passion
for educating local youth*

By | Ruth Li
Staff reporter

Chief Executive Officer retiring next month from the Southwest Community Center

Looking like an art museum, the office of Jesse Dowdell has a heavy African feel, fully decorated with wooden masks and delicate handcrafts. These record the places across Africa where he has traveled over the years. On the wall, pictures hang — full of happy faces.

Downstairs, children run around and play games. Several people stand in a circle, chatting. Bursts of laughter are heard once in a while. This is the Southwest Community Center, a place where Dowdell has spent more than 25 years. But in April, he will leave here, say goodbye to the people he loves and start a new page of his life.

Dowdell, 68, will retire as chief executive officer of the Southwest Community Center.

Under his leadership, the center provides educational, social and cultural programs and services, including an afterschool program, HIV/AIDS awareness and family-planning programs. These are geared mainly to the low- and moderate-income residents of the Southwest community. The center serves as a hub in the community, establishing communications and connections among residents.

Dowdell's achievement at the center is significant. When he took over the job in 1986, the annual budget of the center was only about \$28,000, Dowdell said. The area was a transient community, where there was no long-term business investment. People living there were simply moving in and out, Dowdell said.

After years of hard work, the Southwest community has attracted homebuilders and established several affordable housing projects. As the area shifted to a growing community, the revenue grew to around \$4 million last year, according to Dowdell.

"When I walked in here years ago, the building here was filthy," he said. "But, it is not filthy any more. It is clean. It is something we can take pride in."

Dowdell credits his mother for his success and for his focus on youth education. After his parents split, he left his hometown of Auburn, Ala., with his mother and siblings. At the age of 12, they moved to Syracuse and lived in public housing. That time was quite tough for him, he said. But even in that situation, his mother never gave up



> Chief Executive Officer Jesse Dowdell of the Southwest Community Center sits among his possessions, which he will pack up when he retires next month. | Maddy Jones, Staff Photo

NOMINATE SOMEONE

Do you know a South Side Achiever? Nominate that person by contacting Ashley@mysouthsidedstand.com or (315) 882-1054

on their education.

“When we came here, six people lived on the income my mom made as a cook,” Dowdell said. “We were poor.” But he said his mother was serious about education. “She made sure we did what we were supposed to do — study.”

In 1986, Dowdell quit his job as a teacher in the Syracuse City School District, where he taught auditory education for third grade at Dr. King Elementary School. Dowdell decided to make a difference in the local community where he grew up by devoting his time to the Southwest Community Center.

Dowdell focuses on youth education and tries to make the center as accessible as possible to the community, especially young people. He inspires young people’s interest in education.

“Educate, educate, educate. The more you learn, the more you want to learn,” he said. “We spend a lot of time telling young people to put every effort that they can to get an education.”

Shakya Harrison, 36, met Dowdell when she was a young girl and attended the center’s afterschool program. For more than 16 years, she has worked for Dowdell, currently as a fiscal clerk at the center.

“He is a very nice man and very helpful,” Harrison said. “He tries to do as much as he can for the community.”

Harrison also mentioned that when she first started working at the center, her two children were still quite young. Dowdell showed concern about their education and was supportive, Harrison said, making sure they had access to school.

Having known Dowdell for 25 years, Ed Mitchell, athletic director at the center, thinks of Dowdell as a father figure.

“He means a lot to me as far as helping me raise my kids,” Mitchell said. “I just have a high-school degree, and he has taught me to go back to school, and go play basketball and get a college degree.”

Mitchell wishes Dowdell were not retiring soon because he loves to work and talk with him after work.

“We talk about sports, about life,” Mitchell said. “He worked all his life, and after he retires, he will enjoy himself. We will miss him, but he built this place.”

Jenny Pennington, executive assistant at the center, has worked for Dowdell since 1994.

“I will be sorry to see him go. He did a lot of good things for the community,” Pennington said. “He has passion for educating youth. This is his main thing: pushing education so that our children will be successful.”

Dowdell is a very compassionate person, she said.

“The compassion of him touches me. That, you don’t always get from a boss.”

FAREWELL EVENT

What: Wine Tasting Farewell to Jesse Dowdell

When: 6:30 to 8:30 p.m. Saturday, April 20

Where: King + King Architects, 358 W. Jefferson St.

More details: This event will also be a fundraiser for the organization

Cost: Ticket prices still to be determined

For tickets: Contact Jenny Pennington at the Southwest Community Center at (315) 671-5802

EAGLE WINGS VISITS WMHR

By | Leasia Thompson, Kevin Brunson,
Selena Brooks and Torrecer Rivers
all Eagle Wings Academy students

Two cars carrying a group of eight Eagle Wings Academy students and two teachers recently climbed an icy slope that led up to the Mars Hill Network Radio Station at 4044 Maykes Road. Some dreamed of what it might be like to be a professional singer or DJ and others wanted to see gadgets and enjoy a getaway.

As the 6th-8th graders made their way to the station, the Eagle Wings scholars were surprised to find this bucolic scenery just a 15-minute ride away from their tuition-free private urban school at 423 Valley Drive.

When the students arrived, Mark Hard, the station’s program director/director of ministry relations, greeted them. His joviality put the visitors to ease right away.

Mr. Hard proceeded to lead the students and teachers on a tour of the cozy, homey studio. He sang a favorite worship song about how Jesus is forever faithful and then recounted how he originally wanted to be a singer but never followed up with it.

Later, Mr. Hard taught about the different technology that goes into the radio broadcasts. He mentioned that he can control the radio waves by phone, computer and by the actual apparatus designed for the radio’s use. The students had prepared many



> An Eagle Wings student reads from a script with the help of Mark Hard at WMHR. | Provided photo

questions for Mr. Hard, and he generously took the time to answer each one.

Then, he let students put on headphones and huddle around the microphone as he recorded them. Some spoke lines from a script that introduced the network station. Others recorded their own sayings, most done in a humorous British accent. Mr. Hard demonstrated some basics of sound editing on the recordings. The students had a giggle or two as he played them back for the class to hear.

The Eagle Wings Academy youth said their thank yous and goodbyes, leaving with a greater insight into broadcasting careers.

BY THE NUMBERS

747,000 New York workers receive the minimum wage and would be directly affected by the increase

812,000 New York workers receive just above minimum wage and would be indirectly affected as employers adjust their wage scales

1.59 million people would be affected directly or indirectly by the increase

The low-wage workforce would receive **\$1.3 billion** more

The increase would add **7,300** jobs in New York

State GDP would go up by **\$840 million**

Source: Fiscal Policy Institute

JUST GETTING BY

Local employees share thoughts on proposed hourly wage increase



> Kayla Corron, a single mother going to college and working a minimum-wage job, says she thinks an increase in the minimum wage would make a positive impact in her life. | Joshua J. Wahl, Staff Photo

By | Cassandra Sweetman
Urban Affairs reporter

Nineteen states have raised the minimum wage; locally, workers tell how an increase would help

For Kayla Corron, missing work is devastating. “I had kidney stones so I had to take work off all last week,” said Corron, 23, who works at the Dollar Tree on West Seneca Turnpike on the South Side.

The day before Valentine’s Day she was back on the job, inflating hundreds of heart-shaped balloons.

“That’s \$150 I was out of so that’s why I’m short on rent and I can’t pay my phone bill,” Corron said. She shook her head in grim resignation and released another balloon into the pink cloud forming above her. “And now I lost money. It sucks.”

Corron works five days out of the week at the store making minimum wage. The other two days she spends at OCC studying to become an RN. And when she’s not working or studying, she devotes her time to her 4-year-old son.

Weeks ago, in his State of the State address, Gov. Andrew Cuomo proposed increasing the minimum wage from \$7.25 an hour to \$8.75 an hour. President Barack Obama — in his own State of the Union several weeks

later — called for an increase in the federal standard to \$9 an hour from \$7.25. Federal law is \$7.25 an hour, minimum; states must meet that, or exceed it.

Not long after Cuomo’s address, Democratic Assembly leaders introduced a bill that exceeded Cuomo’s call; it would raise the minimum hourly wage to \$9 in 2014. Assemblymen Bill Magnarelli, D-Syracuse, and Sam Roberts, D-Syracuse, support the bill.

Not everyone agrees raising the minimum wage is a good idea. Eileen Brophy is the president of Brophy Services, a janitorial service based in Syracuse that employs 115 people. Although all of her employees make above minimum wage, she said if it increased she would in turn be inclined to raise their salaries as well.

Increasing what she spends on their salaries would force her to raise the prices she charges clients, and for a business that is not a complete necessity to its clients, this could be a detriment, she said.

“I think to a business like mine, and any other janitorial industry, this is going to be very hurtful,” Brophy said.

The corporate office of the Dollar Tree could not be reached to comment on how an increase in the minimum wage might affect its business.

Don Dutkowsky, professor of economics at the Max-

well School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University, said he can see how an increase in the minimum wage could harm small businesses in a state he says is already unfriendly to them. However, he said the positive outweighs the negative.

“It encourages people to seek jobs with the idea that, ‘OK, if I work 40 hours a week and play it right, I can be out of poverty,’” Dutkowsky said.

At the same time, however, he has two qualifiers he thinks would be important to include. The first: finding another way to help businesses make up for what they could lose by raising wages. The second: limiting the increase to employees 18 years old and above.

“Sixteen and 17, these are not people who are starting households. These are not people in their own households yet. Basically, students looking for employment outside of school or something like that.”

Not so, according to 17-year-old Alexandra Huckle, who has two jobs — one at the Rite Aid on West Seneca Turnpike and the other as a night janitor. The high school senior says she pays all of her own bills, preferring to be independent of her parents. She would like to see a raise in her minimum-wage salary, but she also says she doesn’t think it would make very much of a difference.

“I think it would make it a lot easier, not being cut close with money all the time, I guess,” Huckle said. “But I think that other prices are going to rise with it so I don’t think it would do much.”

Someone working 40 hours a week on minimum wage today makes about \$15,000 annually. Increasing the wage would add about \$3,000 to that salary. For Corron, an increase in minimum wage wouldn’t solve all her problems, but it would help.

“Just having a little bit more,” Corron said. “Not struggling, worrying when I’m going to get my next paycheck so my car insurance isn’t going to be late or my phone bill’s due and my phone’s going to get shut off.”

But it’s not just the necessities that are important to her. “I’d work every day just so I can have extra money to take my son places that he likes to go, like Chuck E. Cheese’s, or the arcade at the mall. He loves the arcade at the mall.”

For Corron, not being able to provide these small pleasures for her son can be more difficult than not being able to pay the bills.

“He’s a Lego person and they’re expensive, oh my gosh. It would be nice to buy him a Lego once a month. I work a lot, I work hard, and it would be nice to do that for a reward, and I can’t.”

GOV. CUOMO SPEAKS OUT

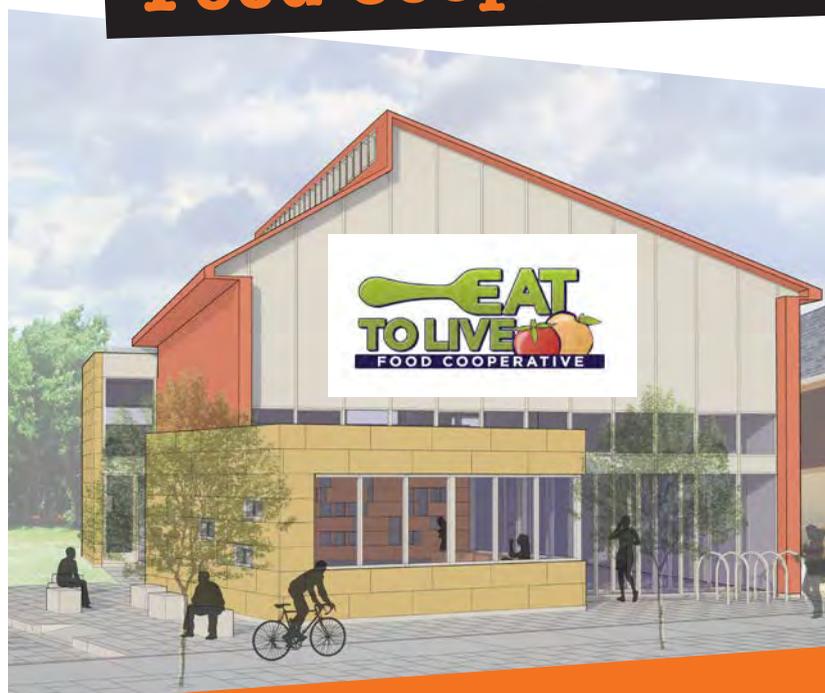
The current minimum wage is unlivable. It’s only \$14,616. The annual cost of gasoline is \$1,200. The annual cost of electricity is \$1,300. The annual cost of auto insurance is \$1,400.

The annual cost of groceries is \$6,500. The annual cost of childcare is \$10,000. The annual cost of housing is \$15,000 on a minimum wage of \$14,000. My friends, it does not add up. Nineteen other states have raised the minimum wage; we propose raising the minimum wage to \$8.75 an hour. It’s the right thing to do. It’s the fair thing to do. It is long overdue. We should have done it last year. Let’s do it this year.

Source: Gov. Andrew Cuomo, from his State of the State

Coming soon...

the **Eat to Live** **Food Cooperative!**



Your options for making healthy food choices are about to become a whole lot better. Expected to open in the **summer of 2013**, **Eat to Live Food Cooperative** will stock farm-fresh fruits and vegetables—and so much more—at affordable prices.

Designed to meet a critical need in the South Side neighborhood, the 3,000-square-foot grocery store will feature a wide array of products, as well as a café with delicious, healthy treats.

Syracuse University joined with many local partners to make this vital resource a reality. For more information, contact the Syracuse University South Side Initiative Office at **315.443.1916**.

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY: Scholarship in Action



JOBS FOR LIFE

- Mentors in the Jobs for Life Program are called Champions
- Applications are always being accepted for students or Champions
- The high school graduation rate for Syracuse is 45.9 percent
- The statewide high school graduation rate is 73.4 percent
- For Hispanic students, statewide, the rate is 57.3 percent
- For African-American students, statewide, the rate is 57.7 percent
- For white students, statewide, the rate is 83.7 percent

Source: New York State Education Department as of June 14, 2011

ACHIEVING SUCCESS

Friends graduate from 16-week job training program together



> Clentisha Joyner, left, says thank you to teacher Taylor Gordon for the support she received during the Jobs for Life program. Her friend, Saleina McClain, receives a certificate of completion as she graduates from the program. | Mark Logico, Staff Photo

By | Farron Stark
Urban Affairs reporter

Jobs for Life Program teaches practical, Biblical, job and character-building skills

Late on a Monday night in January you could hear the laughter coming from inside the foyer of a church on South Salina Street.

“I love my mommy!” shouted a 6-year-old with a smile from ear to ear. “She’s going to graduate and go to second grade!”

All of the adults chuckled, and so did the girl’s mother as she held back her tears. The puzzled child froze with a shocked look on her face.

“Isn’t she going to second grade?” she asked.

She didn’t understand what her mom was going through, what obstacles she had to overcome, and what still was ahead — but she knew how she felt about it all.

“I’m proud of her, I love my mommy.” And with that, she skipped into her mother’s arms for a hug. Her 3-year-old younger brother trailed behind.

Clentisha Joyner was heading out of her last class session before graduating from the Jobs for Life program at the Reformed Presbyterian Church.

Jobs for Life is a 16-week program that began in

October. It aims to help unemployed and underemployed people through mentorship, skills training and spiritual motivation. The course consisted of classes that targeted resumes, skill assessments, applications, conflict resolution and evaluations. But interlaced with the curriculum of Week 13 — titled “How Do I know I am Going in the Right Direction?” — was a study of the life of Joseph from the Bible. Other lessons intertwined the stories of David, Jonah and Noah.

“We aren’t Bible bashing, but we don’t hide who we are,” said Taylor Gordon, the student relation leader and a teacher in the program. “We’re going to teach you job skills that we think are going to be character-building.”

On Feb. 11, three students became the first graduating class from the program. Among them was Gordon’s mentee, Joyner.

“Without schooling and education, it does take a while to actually get that good job you need,” she said. “In high school and growing up, I wasn’t able to do presentations in front of a large crowd and I’m actually good at it now and it’s going to help me in the work field.”

But more than preparation for a job, Joyner points to her spiritual growth as well.

“Along the way of this journey, God is always here

so it's definitely a good place to be and learn about your life."

Joyner invited her friend Saleina McClain to go through the program with her, and both women — who dropped out of high school years ago — were able to graduate together. McClain said she's glad she followed through in a program with a faith center.

Joyner is, too. "I could be somewhere better than I thought I was and it showed me to trust in God and let him lead the way and you can make it anywhere if you ask God to help," Joyner said. "It (Jobs for Life) plants it in you and just going out there trying they don't teach you the stuff that they taught you here."

According to the National Center for Education Statistics, more than 3 million students drop out of public schooling each year across the country, more than 180,000 of them in the state of New York.

McClain vividly recalls her decision to drop out of school. She was 18 and in the 10th grade. She knew she was behind, and so did her teacher, but not the rest of her class.

"Then one day he broadcasted that to the whole class," McClain said. Embarrassed and humiliated, she started skipping school. It was only a matter of time

before she stopped going.

When the Jobs for Life program began, there were eight people enrolled, but five dropped out during the course. While some left because they were able to find a job, others just weren't committed. Gordon said he's always accepting applications and rarely turns down someone who genuinely shows interest.

"I'm just looking at the application to see that they're trying and that they care," he said. "We want to meet students where they are and develop them as people. It's a classroom program, but it's also about mentorship."

At the end of their last class meeting, pizza was served for the students and mentors. As Joyner smiled and said, "I'm graduating," Gordon was right across the end of the table cheering her along.

"I very rarely depend on people," Joyner said. "I like to do it myself unless I'm to the point that I can't do it all. I'd like to teach my kids there's nothing wrong with asking for help."

The following Monday, with her two children and mentor encouraging her, Joyner graduated. "I'm always looking forward to something new that's happening," Joyner said. Next, she wants to conquer her GED.

SIGN UP

Applications are always being accepted for enrollment in the Jobs for Life program.

Applications can be found at the Reformed Presbyterian Church at 2517 S. Salina St.

For more information about involvement in the program as a student or mentor, contact Taylor Gordon at: (315) 476-5618.

The next time the 16-week course begins is still to be determined.

"I read [The Stand] to see what others have achieved and the obstacles they've overcome to reach such milestones. I also like to see the South Side portrayed in a light that isn't bad and mainly about statistics."

— *Gina Bryant, Senior Stylist at Ma'Dears Hair Salon & The Stand Reader*



How to purchase an ad

If interested in running an ad, contact **Ashley Kang** to request a rate card and discuss options by emailing Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or by calling (315) 882-1054. The Stand's rate card can also be found online. www.mysouthsidestand.com

ON THE SIDE

HOSPITAL ATTENTION

Dr. Mustafa Awayda, who works full time at the VA Medical Center, also helps out as a hospitalist at Crouse Hospital.

The term “hospitalist” was first used in 1996 to describe doctors who take care of in-patients.

They are responsible for providing care and facilitating communication between patients, family members, social workers and other medical professionals.

They provide a particular level of continuity for patients in the hospital.

Source: Dr. Mustafa Awayda

A BUSY SCHEDULE

Here is where Dr. Mustafa Awayda works, volunteers, teaches and studies in a typical week:

- VA Medical Center
- Syracuse Community Health Center HIV Clinic
- Rahma Health Clinic
- Crouse Hospital’s Hospitalist Program
- Medicaid Managed Care program Total Care
- SUNY Upstate Medical University
- Syracuse University, Masters of Public Health

HELPING PATIENTS

New director of Rahma Health Clinic provides healthcare for uninsured

By | Marisa DeCandido
Urban Affairs reporter

Doctor Mustafa Awayda — with many roles — always has his patients’ best interest in mind

When Dr. Mustafa Awayda settled in the United States in 1993, he suffered from a bit of culture shock.

“For the first year, I was happy I had running water and electricity 24-7, which used to be a luxury in Lebanon because of a civil war from 1975 to 1990,” he said.

Yet after that first year, Awayda began to realize that treating his patients in the United States was not that different than in Lebanon.

“Overseas, people think that in the United States they have it all, and unfortunately people here have everything BUT all,” Awayda said. “Attending to these people in two different parts of the world, I think poverty has the same face and speaks the same language. People are in need and people are reaching out regardless of where they are.”

Awayda has continued to see and help that need throughout his 20 years in Syracuse. The husband and father of three is a respected member of the community through his years of work at the Syracuse Community Health Center and VA Medical Center. Now, Awayda is adding one more job title to his impressive list of achievements: medical director of the new Rahma Health Clinic.

The Rahma Health Clinic, located at 3100 S. Salina St., recently opened to serve the needs of the uninsured members of the South Side community. Some 11.6 percent of Syracuse residents do not have health insurance, according to a 2011 report from Excellus Blue Cross Blue Shield. Patients must make an appointment to visit the clinic during business hours, from 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. Saturdays and 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. the third Wednesday of each month.

Since its unofficial opening in November, there has been a steady influx of patients, according to Rahma Clinic founder and Awayda’s friend Magda Bayoumi. While there were just three patients the first day, recent weeks have seen as many as 12 to 15. Perhaps even more surprising than the number of patients, however, has been some of their stories, Bayoumi said.

“There was one woman who came to the clinic who is a part-time nurse and can’t afford healthcare,” Bayoumi explained. “She works as often as she can and she fills in for other nurses, and it’s amazing that here is someone who is providing healthcare for others and she



> Dr. Mustafa Awayda, in his VA Center office on Irving Avenue. On the wall: His credentials to practice medicine in New York. He has been in Syracuse 20 years. His wife is a doctor also — a rheumatologist. | Steve Davis, Staff Photo

can’t even afford healthcare for herself.”

Awayda has years of experience treating uninsured patients. His medical career started in Lebanon, where he graduated from medical school at the American University of Beirut in 1991. For two years, he traveled back and forth between Lebanon and the United States, seeking a hospital to continue his medical education and training like several of his classmates in Lebanon. He decided to settle in Syracuse and started residency training at Upstate University Hospital in 1993.

From there, Awayda spent four years as a primary doctor at the Syracuse Community Health Center, followed by seven years as the center’s medical director. The center provides quality healthcare at a lower cost than private doctors. Now, he works fulltime at the VA Medical Center as a doctor of internal medicine in addition to volunteering at Rahma.

At the VA Medical Center, Awayda is one of the hardest working doctors, according to co-worker and friend Dr. Tomas Vence.

“He often comes back to help after hours just to see if patients are OK,” Vence said. “I can’t even think of a

specific example because he does it so often. He is here late almost every day.”

While Awayda works as a hospitalist at the VA Medical Center, he also chose to become an HIV specialist after an experience he had in Atlanta.

“In 1991, I did a month rotation at Grady Memorial Hospital when I was still a student,” he said. “More than half of the wards were packed with patients dying from some form of HIV or AIDS, and that really affected me.”

Awayda now volunteers once a week at the Community Health Center’s HIV Clinic, which he helped to develop. However, Awayda has more than a full-time job and volunteer work on his plate.

“I am everywhere,” he said.

Awayda helps with the Crouse Hospital hospitalist program and works with the Medicaid Managed Care organization Total Care. He is also pursuing his master’s degree in Syracuse University’s Masters of Public Health program.

Besides his patients, however, Awayda has a few other important people in his life. Awayda’s wife, Fatme, also works as a physician in Syracuse. She is a doctor of internal medicine and rheumatology for Upstate and the VA Medical Center. Despite both of their heavy workloads, they are a family-oriented pair, according to Vence.

“I admire (Awayda). He is a good friend, father and husband,” Vence said. “His wife is a busy person, too, and they have triplets — which is not always easy to

handle when you’re both working.”

With both mom and dad in the medical field, however, the Awaydas’ teenage triplets — Yasmeen, Karen and Kamel — already have expressed interest in following in their parents’ footsteps, according to Awayda.

“They are freshmen in high school now, and it’s interesting to see the uniqueness of their interests,” Awayda said. “My son wants to be an orthopedic surgeon and one of my girls wants to be a migraine specialist, a neurologist.

“They love the field, but I’m glad they didn’t just replicate our liking. They’ve adopted their own interests.”

The entire family is heavily involved in the Rahma Clinic, according to Bayoumi. However, their volunteer work is not just about healthcare, she said.

“The kids come to the clinic to help with raking or cleaning, and their parents bring them and show them that this is what our vision is all about,” Bayoumi said. “They say, ‘This is what you need to be as a human being.’ It’s not just you go to school and be a great student, it’s that you give back to the community. You can see the difference in the kids. It’s such a loving family.”

That loving family, while busy, is determined to see the clinic succeed. The goal is for the clinic to eventually open every weekday, Awayda said. For now, however, they will continue to do what they can twice a week for the South Side community.

“Every single patient at the clinic has said, ‘You are doing something phenomenal,’” he explained. “The feedback has been overwhelming.”



> Mohamed Khater, president of the Rahma Health Clinic Board, addresses Congressman Dan Maffei and the crowd at the grand opening of the clinic on Feb. 16. | Kayla Rice, Staff Photo

CLINIC HOURS

Address: 3100 S. Salina St., Syracuse

Hours: Saturdays 10:30 a.m. to 2:30 p.m.; and 5:30 to 8:30 p.m. the third Wednesday of each month

For an appointment: (315) 565-5667

E-mail contact: rahmahealth@gmail.com

ALL ABOUT AWAYDA

- Comes from a family of physicians, including his uncle who inspired him to go into healthcare for low-income and middle-class families.
- Speaks English, French and Arabic.
- He and his wife are from the same hometown in Lebanon, but they did not meet until their first residency training.
- Awayda’s triplets were born on April 1, 1998 — not an April Fool’s Joke!
- He visits Lebanon every year, but he still calls Syracuse home.

HOW TO DONATE

Make checks payable to Muslim American Care and Compassion Alliance.

Send to 3100 S. Salina St., Syracuse, NY 13205



'Eye See Me'

> Rahmeik Bowen spent the most time on the eyes in this award-winning self portrait. "I noticed that the eyes really stood out." | Steve Davis, Staff Photo

By | Rebecca Petit
Urban Affairs reporter

Corcoran art student's self portrait wins highest honor with Gold Key art award

Out of more than 4,500 pieces of artwork submitted in a competition from throughout the Central New York region, Rahmeik Bowen's creation has been deemed special. Very special.

He was chosen as a Gold Key recipient at the 2013 Scholastic Art Awards for his painting Eye See Me. He's the only high school student in the Syracuse City School District who won a Gold Key award in fine arts. Yet winning came as a surprise to the 17-year-old senior from Corcoran High School who had not even planned to

enter the contest.

"It was my first time working with acrylic paints, so I was not even expecting to be submitting it," Bowen said. "Until the deadline came up, and my teacher was, like, 'Why don't you submit it?'"

The Gold Key is the highest award an artist can receive at the Scholastic Art Awards, followed by the Silver Key and Honorable Mention. Terri Konu, coordinator of the CNY Regional Scholastic Art Awards, said the Central New York region presents about 1,100 awards, including fewer than 300 Gold Keys. "So it's a pretty prestigious award here," Konu said.

Added Michael Field, vice president of the organizing committee, "It's big. I don't think Corcoran has had a Gold Key winner in maybe eight years."



> The art class has fewer than 10 students, all of whom were required to take home their current projects to work on over February break. Rahmeik Bowen has been exposed to the arts since his grandmother brought him to meet famous artist and illustrator Tom Feelings when Bowen was 9 years old. | Alyssa Greenberg, Staff Photo

Bowen's mother, Wanda Titus, remembers Bowen drawing people when he was 4 years old, and the award came as a surprise to her, too.

"I didn't know he entered the contest, actually," Titus said. "He didn't tell me, until something came in the mail saying that he won the award. I'm like 'What award?' It was a big surprise."

Bowen says his favorite things to draw are portraits. "I like drawing a face and playing around with facial features," Bowen explained as he flipped through the pages of his portfolio. His favorite portrait is Eye See Me. "It was one of my first self-portraits."

The winning self-portrait took Bowen about one month to complete, a little longer than the portraits in his portfolio. Bowen remembers working on the piece continually, while in class, after school and even taking it home. Coming up with the title was very easy, he said.

"After I finished it, I noticed that the eyes really stood out. I worked on that the most. I kept going over it and going over it. So I thought the most important part of the portrait were the eyes," he said.

Bowen credits Vincent van Gogh for inspiration behind his winning piece. "I'm really inspired by the impressionist movement. Artists like Van Gogh and his self-portraits and the brush strokes he used."

Growing up on the South Side of Syracuse, Bowen's first artistic role model was Tom Feelings. Feelings was an artist, illustrator, author, teacher and activist. Through his works, he captured the African-American experience.

"Seeing his work made me want to take it more seriously. I wanted to achieve his look and I thought it was really inspiring," Bowen said. Bowen and his grandmother, Deborah Banks, both remember the day she took him to meet the illustrator when he was 9 years old. That was Bowen's very first exposure to the world of art.

Banks is an advocate of the arts. "I just really think it's important for my grandkids to be exposed to their culture and their history," she said. "I also took him to the community folk art gallery, just opportunities for him to see, experience and meet particularly African-American artists. I try to do that early on."

Banks was one person who was not surprised to hear that Bowen had won a Gold Key award. "I'm very proud of him but I'm not surprised of his capabilities. He's always been encouraged to be himself and not to be afraid to express himself and let his creative juices flow."

The honor will help Bowen become recognized. Since its founding in 1923, the program has identified the potential of some of the nation's most brilliant artists, including Andy Warhol, Philip Pearlstein, and Cy Twombly.

IN THEIR WORDS

THE ARTIST

"Definitely don't be afraid to take a risk. Because this was my first time working in this medium and I didn't know what I was doing really, until I started messing around. So I think that definitely be open and be willing to take risks and make mistakes."

— Rahmeik Bowen,
Corcoran student

THE TEACHER

"What I love about Rahmeik is he's very willing to try all medias and just gets better. Yes, he has progressed immensely and that painting was a very different direction for him. That's why I think it afforded him a great deal of success."

— Christina Sikorski,
art teacher

WHO IS TOM FEELINGS?

Tom Feelings is a famous artist and illustrator of children's books, whose main subjects were taken from the black people in his community.

Born in Brooklyn, N.Y., he attended the School of Visual Arts for two years before joining the Air Force in 1953, working in London as a staff artist. In 1958 he created the revolutionary comic strip "Tommy Traveler In the World of Black History for the New York Age."

Around 1968, he met Bertram Fitzgerald and became one of the early contributors to his new line of black history comics, the "Golden Legacy."

In 1972, Feelings was the first African-American artist to win a Caldecott Honor Award for "Moja Means One: A Swahili Counting Book." In the mid-'90s, he moved to Columbia, S.C., where he taught art at the University of South Carolina. There, he published his best-known work, "The Middle Passage," a powerful portrayal of the slave trade. It won the 1996 Coretta Scott King Award.

Feelings was working on finishing his last picture book, "I Saw Your Face," with poet Kwame Dawes before his death in 2003.

Sources: Juneteenth.com and us.penguin.com

bly. According to The Scholastic Art Awards, it continues to be the oldest, most prestigious recognition program for creative teens in the United States.

According to Field, in recent years more city schools have started to become more active in submitting pieces. Suburban schools have been proactive for a long time, making them more apt to win. Field believes the role that art plays in education, especially in city schools, is very important.

"I think art teaches kids to think in a different way," Field said. "If you're looking at a still life, you have to look at that still life and somehow put it on a blank sheet of paper and make it look three-dimensional and look real. There's a lot of problem-solving involved, where you may not get that in other subjects."

Bowen already has applied to five art schools, including Parsons The New School for Design in Manhattan. He hopes to one day have his own art studio in New York City doing photography and design. "I definitely want to do art the rest of my life. I would love to work for magazines like Vogue and Harper's Bazaar, and do editorials for them because I'm into photography."

Bowen's art teacher, Christina Sikorski, recognizes his abilities. "When we get a student like Rahmeik, you know there's a talent there," she said. "Rahmeik from his first days told me he just wanted to go to art school."

Sikorski was a designer in New York City for more than 20 years. She believes that art in a child's life can be very meaningful. "It's a great outlet for kids to express themselves and also the sense of achievement," she said. "The basis of my classes is predominately that. It's not about the end result. It's about this journey they took to get there."

Bowen and other local winners will go on to the National Scholastic Art Awards. There he will get a chance to win money, anywhere from \$100 to \$500 to be used toward college.

"Art for me is a form of self-expression. It's my outlet. I'm able to convey all of my emotions, thoughts and ideas through my pieces. It's my way to creatively vent," Bowen said.

With his winning artwork currently on display at the Whitney Applied Technology Center at Onondaga Community College, Bowen now gets the opportunity to show the public how he sees himself.



> Rahmeik Bowen has always loved to draw, and he says it is his way to "creatively vent." | Alyssa Greenberg, Staff Photo

LANDING A LOCATION

Small businesses must work hard to secure just the right office space



> Deborah Holloway works in her South Salina Street office. It's the height of the tax season, and she says this space provides the room she needs, not easy to find on the South Side. She is in space renovated by landlord Mark Armstrong, of Bauer Plumbing, who is just across the hall. | Steve Davis, Staff Photo

By | Kori Hale
Urban Affairs reporter

Business owner helps out next generation of small business entrepreneurs with office space

Deborah Holloway sits with several accordion folders around her. Business is in full swing for the 2013 tax season. She peers over the mound of papers on her desk in her first-floor office and remarks how happy she is that the building has heat — and air conditioning.

While that might not seem important now, it is. Many offices don't come with air conditioning, which could be a real problem if Syracuse suffers another summer like the one in 2012 with temperatures over 100 degrees.

Holloway looked at several spaces on the South Side for her accounting business but they were too big or expensive and lacked adequate parking for her customers.

"My business has more visibility since moving here," Holloway said. Most of her customers drive or take the bus, so being able to easily locate her office is a necessity.

When Holloway faced the challenge of finding an affordable South Side office space for her expanding company, she eventually met Mark Armstrong of Bauer

Plumbing. He and his wife, who own Bauer Plumbing, have made it possible for small businesses to flourish on South Salina Street.

"We've always been excited about the neighborhood coming back to what it was," Armstrong said. "People being able to have their businesses here instead of being pushed further away from the city."

The Bauer Plumbing building at 1911 S. Salina St. has been in this community for 100 years. The couple wanted to do their part to help out the next generation of business owners, so they renovated their building. Now they can accommodate three businesses on the second floor and two businesses on the first.

"We won't take just anybody. We want to keep more of an office park situation," said Armstrong, whose office spaces are all about 350 square feet. "We look at what kind of business they have, how long they've been in business and their plans for the future."

The South Side Innovation Center on South Salina Street is a place that hosts new and existing small businesses through training and development programs. With monthly bills like rent, Internet access and utilities, things can add up quickly.

"We don't want our clients to have sticker shock, with all these added expenses," said Margaret Butler, operations manager at the SSIC.

For \$126.75 a month, a small business can start at the SSIC. "For a 10 by 10 office ... it already has the desk in it, it has the computer, it has the telephone," Butler said. "They get a mailbox, all the utilities and copy, scanning, faxing are included."

Most clients graduate to bigger spaces during their three-year stay at the SSIC, eventually moving up to a 400-square-foot office. Even though smaller offices are ideal for a new business, it still presents a few challenges.

"The main problem that we see with a lot of our clients is that they need a location that actually has storage place that's affordable, and there's nothing like that out there," Butler said.

As a lifelong resident on the South Side, Joseph Bryant has a strong commitment to the neighborhood and its revitalization. He owns Joseph Bryant and Associates Construction Company. His company is giving business owners an opportunity to become more visible and easier to reach by renovating buildings and creating new workplaces.

"The office space that I'm creating will serve as a leasing office for residential places," he said.

Bryant started at the SSIC, and eventually his business outgrew the space. He then moved to the Bauer Plumbing building, where he currently leases office space.

FINDING AN OFFICE

- Conduct research on the property. Be sure it will meet your needs.
- Analyze the costs: rent, equipment, utilities and furniture.
- Keep a pro and con list
- Consider the lease. Most places have a minimum contract of 2 to 5 years.
- Follow a plan. Create a budget, choose an area, tour available space, request a lease.

Source: Margaret Butler and Mark Armstrong

SMALL BUSINESSES

- Small businesses in NYS are defined as fewer than 500 employees.
- There were 1.9 million in the state in 2009.
- 77.1% were very small (0-20 employees).*
- Represented 99% of all employers.
- Employed 51.7% of the private-sector workforce.

Source: New York State Small Business Development Center

*About two-thirds of all small businesses in NYS are in the "0 employees" category, according to gaebler.com, Resources for Entrepreneurs, which also reports that there are about 930,000 self-employed persons in the state, according to U.S. Census data

ON THE FIRST TEE

Bill Denham and Billy Ray McDonald help with such programs as “The First Tee,” an international golf program for youth to learn different values through the game of golf.

McDonald, an avid golfer, helps to find youth around the South Side to join the organization.

For more information on The First Tee, visit www.thefirsttee.org

CAMPING OUT

Charles Martin, a longtime employee at the B&B Cocktail Lounge, says a camping trip for young South Side boys is currently in the works, with the hope that it will happen this year.

Martin says Denham and McDonald will serve as mentors on the trip and will teach the young men fun activities, such as how to fish and how to make a fire. If interested, call (315) 478-9670.

STROLLING *the* SOUTH SIDE

Owners strive to make B&B Cocktail Lounge a bar patrons can call home



> The B&B Cocktail Lounge, aptly named after owners Bill Denham and Billy Ray McDonald, opened nearly 23 years ago on the South Side. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo

By | Natalie Caceres
Staff reporter

South Avenue cocktail lounge serves as a welcoming place for South Siders for more than two decades

When Bill Denham, 65, and Billy Ray McDonald, 70, opened up the B&B Cocktail Lounge on South Avenue nearly 23 years ago, they had one thought in mind: make it more than just a place to grab a drink. They wanted neighbors and friends on the South Side and around it to have a place of comfort — a place where everybody knows your name and you know theirs, too.

There is something about Denham and McDonald that makes you want to grab a hot cider and pull up a chair. Their voices have a rhythmic bass so in unison it's like listening to a harmonic melody. Their ability to finish each other's sentences is emblematic of the brotherly relationship these two have developed over time.

They met while both worked at the Carrier Corporation in Syracuse more than 30 years ago. While looking

at some real estate, they came up with the idea to open what is now known as a landmark around the South Side: The B&B Cocktail Lounge.

“We saw that the place was for sale and knew it was the one,” Denham said about the lounge located on the corner of South Avenue and Tallman Street.

They bought the space for about \$52,000 back in October 1989 and were open for business almost a month later. However, the purpose of their purchase was not to simply provide a place where people could grab an after-work drink. Instead, and still true today, they want the lounge to be a place where young and old can come by and feel at home.

“Our focus is to bring people together, a place where they can meet, have good conversation and a sandwich,” Denham said.

Added McDonald, “I'd like people to know that this place is here for them and those in the community where they can relax and enjoy themselves and have a good time.”

When the idea initially arose from Denham about opening a bar, McDonald admits he was a little unsure about how to run such a business. But with Denham by his side, anything was possible.

“The name B&B comes from Bill and Bill,” McDonald said. After 23 years of running a successful bar, McDonald says he's proud to be an owner alongside his friend. And by the length of time some of their employees have worked too, it would seem B&B really is the place to be.

“Some of them have been here 18 or 19 years,” Denham said.

One is Charles Martin, 46, who has been working at the B&B since he was 26 years old. The bar, he says, is not only a home for him — it's a place that has taught him how to be a better man. He says much is owed to Denham and McDonald.

“They're two of the most wonderful guys to work for,” Martin said. “I've been here 20 years, and they put me on track. I can always look to them for advice.”

Martin, who is father to a young boy and girl, says that Denham and McDonald have helped to inspire not only him but also his children. Having lost a son who was murdered years ago, Martin is keen on using his mentors and the B&B as a model of how to live and encourage a successful and fulfilling life.

“They helped me through all my life. The good, the

SUGGEST A LOCATION

To submit an idea for Strolling the South Side, contact Ashley Kang at (315) 882-1054 or Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

bad, the ugly,” Martin said. “These two guys right here? They’re like my dads.”

Denham and McDonald help spread this message of community embracement through several events they hold or sponsor each year, such as Customer Appreciation Day, election events and friendly get-togethers like birthdays.

Both are involved with volunteer work — at the Inner City Rotary Club, the Southwest Center Board, New York State Blues Festival Board, Syracuse Association of Retired Men, and the Syracuse Golf Association. So it’s no surprise that the B&B is treated with fondness by the community.

“We’re a family,” Denham said about their relationship with neighbors and friends.

A long-standing tradition at the bar is based on an idea that Martin brought to the table seven years ago: “Family Day at The B&B” — where anybody, not just South Side residents, can stop by the last Sunday of July for barbecue, games and fun in the parking lot next to the B&B.

“It started out for the kids and ended up being a community event,” Martin said.

Part of the day includes “Operation Safe ID” — a partnership with the Syracuse Police Department in which ID pictures can be taken of South Side youth. Their information would be immediately available, for example, should one of them be lost one day.

It’s yet another way that Denham, McDonald and Martin are passionate about the community.

“We want to show these kids a different way of living,” Martin said.

McDonald shares his outlook about helping the community youth. “The things I want to relate to them is that they have to stay focused on things that they want to do, things that they’re trying to do.” he said.

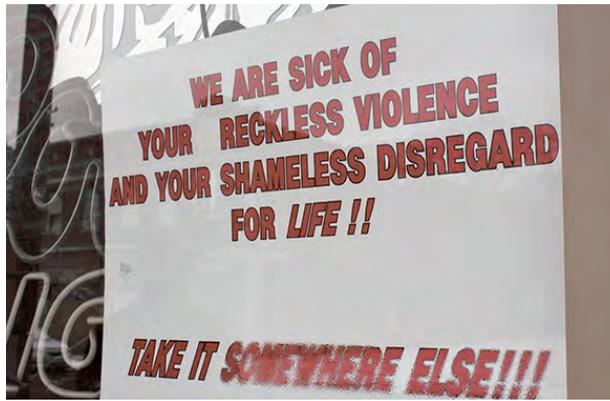
But the support doesn’t end with the youth. The three all come back to the fact that besides being a bar, the B&B is a place they want people to feel comfortable and relaxed.

“We want to continue to gain respect from the community” and vice versa, Denham said.

Martin puts it best when asked to describe the B&B. “It’s more than just a bar.”



> Left to right: Co-owner Billy Ray McDonald, 70, employee Charles Martin, 46, and co-owner Bill Denham, 65, pose inside the B&B Cocktail Lounge. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo



> The owners of the B&B Cocktail Lounge placed a sign in the window to discourage ongoing violence in the area. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo



> The community gathering place is located at 310 South Ave. | Natalie Caceres, Staff Photo



Find these words in this story

Emblematic

Serving as a visible symbol for something abstract

Initially

At first; originally; at the beginning

Long-standing

Describing something that has been done for so long that it has become convention.

How would you use these words in a sentence?

ON THE SIDE

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ON THE SIDE

IN CORA'S WORDS

With encouragement from OnCare, 17-year-old Cora Smith wrote her personal story as a paper for a school assignment. In these excerpts, Cora describes what it is like to live with Borderline Personality Disorder and Bipolar Disorder.

CUTTING

"I thought I wanted to commit suicide. They call that 'self-harm' and it is a guaranteed trip to the psychiatric hospital. The next time I went I had to go because I still wanted to kill myself and started doing something new. I was copying something I read in a book. I thought that by hurting myself, cutting like the girl in the story did, it would help me."

CHEEKING

"Each one of those hospitals put me on medications that were supposed to help me. But they had all kinds of weird side-effects that made me feel worst before I felt better. Some didn't work while others helped a little. ... I began to hate taking the meds. I hated them so much I began to fake taking them. This is called 'cheeking' and I 'cheeked' them straight into the toilet."



> Cora Smith, 17, has been diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and Bipolar Disorder. | Provided Photo

MENTAL AWARENESS

Teen with multiple personalities wants to help others even as she copes

By | Paige Sedgewick
Urban Affairs reporter

Approach to treatment through ACCESS team brings together all entities in a person's life

When a girl started to pick on Cora Smith her freshman year in high school in 2010, she responded with alarming rage. Cora, 14, pulled the sleeves of her sweatshirt down, put her hood up, and went to work. Cora grabbed the girl by the throat, dangling her off the floor. She threw a punch that missed, denting a locker.

Alarmed, the school summoned Cora's mom, Khreltz Vest, to come right away. Vest, puzzled at first, questioned the teacher's account.

"Cora's not the 'fighter type,'" she said into the phone.

Then Vest wondered aloud if Cora had adjusted her sleeves and hood. Had her voice grown deeper? The teacher answered in agreement. "Congratulations," Vest said. "You guys met 'Marshall.' Because 'Marshall' is the one that fights for her, Marshall is the one that does it."

"Marshall" was just one of Cora's personalities. Cora was diagnosed with Borderline Personality Disorder and Bipolar Disorder in 2009 on her third hospital trip to BryLin Hospitals, which is a private psychological hospital in Buffalo. Entering high school, Cora recalls having eight different voices.

"Marshall, Bella, Andrew, and Tron. ... Eight voices, but only four of them had names," Cora said.

Now, Cora is 17 and trying to function despite everything that has happened to her. She attends Nottingham High School, where she is a junior. She lives on the South Side with her mom, dad, two brothers, sister-in-law, and her niece. Cora has been living without the voices in her head since summer 2012. Throughout this journey, both Cora and Vest have decided to speak out and let others who are suffering find help, like they did. But, it was a long struggle for them to reach this point.

"The more we were in the hospital and the more we saw doctors, they kept saying, 'Your daughter is very complicated and hard to diagnose,'" Vest said.

Cora and her family were able to find the help that Cora needed through OnCare, which describes itself as a "federally funded community initiative that improves outcomes for Onondaga County children and youth ages 5-21 with significant behavioral and emotional challenges." Since OnCare was established in 2010 with a \$9 million federal grant, 116 parents and 145 youth/young adults have been involved. The parents and youth have

participated in their own counseling and care and also have represented OnCare at state and national events.

OnCare is a place where families can become more aware and actually have a say in what is going on with their children, Vest said. She acknowledged that OnCare does not have all the answers, but helps coordinate the many different services children and young adults — especially minority populations — may end up juggling. When Cora and Vest sought treatment from OnCare, they had already been seeing doctors, but felt the doctors didn't always listen. OnCare put them on the ACCESS team, which helps coordinate everything.

The expenses, however, are not covered by OnCare. Vest receives a stipend for Cora's care because when she adopted her, she was considered a possible "problem" because of her developmental disabilities. They also are on Medicaid.

OnCare reports that four out of five children who experience mental health symptoms do not receive any treatment. Some 17,500 children in Onondaga County between 5 and 18 have a mental, emotional or behavioral challenge, according to OnCare's 2011 Community Report. Half of the 145 youths who have been involved with OnCare are 11 to 15 years old. The majority of the patients are male — 66 percent — while 54 percent are white and 24 percent are African-American.

"One of the most exciting achievements this year was awarding \$1.4 million in funding to local agencies to create 13 new programs to meet the needs of children, youth and families," states OnCare's 2011 Community Report.

But before OnCare stepped in to help, Vest and Cora were still having issues at home.

There was the time, Vest recalled, that started with yet another call from school. Cora's pulse had dropped to 37, and she was on her way by ambulance to the hospital. Vest was so worried, she beat them there.

Doctors determined they should take Cora off her medications, without consulting her psychiatrist, and with disastrous results, Vest recalled. By 3 a.m., Cora was threatening the nurses and had locked herself in the bathroom. She talked about killing herself and others.

Vest again hurried to the hospital, this time to find nurses gathered outside of Cora's room, afraid to enter. Vest edged to the bathroom door and asked Cora what was going on. Cora replied in her deep voice, saying, "I want to go home."

Vest knew immediately that "Marshall" was in control again, and she was able to defuse the crisis.

IN CORA'S WORDS

(continued)

COPING

"I can't say that I have completely gotten over cutting because I think about it sometimes. I can say that I am done with suicidal thoughts. I also think I can stick to taking my meds this time even though I know that there will be times where I get stressed and hear voices. There might even be more trips to CPEP and the hospital. I have learned and accept that my illnesses are like my skin color. They will never change or go away for the rest of my life."

Continued on Page 20

ON THE SIDE

ONCARE SERVICES

A few of the new services that OnCare offers. All are reported in the OnCare 2011 Community Report:

- More support groups for children and their families to prepare for a successful transition home from residential treatment.
- Training for parents with children and youth with challenging behaviors.
- Educational consultation for children and youth with learning challenges.

YOUTH SUPPORT

- 24 support group sessions with 365 participants
- A Youth Leadership program. There are three 7-week sessions. Level 1 focuses on how to advocate for yourself, Level 2 focuses on learning how to be a positive support to other youth, and Level 3 focuses on learning how to advocate for system-level change.
- 45 youth graduated from Level 1, 20 youth graduated from Level 2, and 13 youth graduated from Level 3.

Source: OnCare oncaresoc.org

Continued from Page 19

Now, Vest remembers when OnCare first started to make a difference in dealing with such crises. She took Cora to an OnCare meeting, where many representatives were gathered. Under the OnCare model to coordinate services and care, there were teachers, doctors, people from juvenile justice and a judge, all of whom have been involved a great deal with Cora since her episodes began. Vest remembers sharing with them all — at once — how Cora was struggling. They circled a table and asked Cora about her episodes and medicines.

“I’m really tired of them telling me what the medication is supposed to do,” Cora told the group, “because when I’m taking it and I try to tell you that’s not what it does ... they don’t listen to me.”

Vest had watched her daughter work her way through many different medications and doctors through the years before OnCare. This was the day, she recalled, when things changed and she finally was able to share with a group some of the awful side effects that plagued her: low pulse, weight loss, and shakes. Vest recalls a representative from Onondaga County Mental Health seated at the table, who spoke up: “We need to find out how the patient is reacting to this medication.”

Vest describes what happened next. “It started this chain reaction of family-driven care,” Vest said. “It is youth-guided because they’re the ones that it is all hap-

pening to, and they’re the ones that are taking the meds. But then it is family-driven because as a parent, I know what I want done.”

Even though things can be difficult for Cora, she is trying to cope the best she can. One crucial part is keeping on track with medications, but in a combination that works better. She takes Lithium 300 mg, twice daily; Zyprexa, 5 mg in the morning and 15 mg at night; Propranolol, 5 mg twice daily; Bzotropine, 5 mg twice daily; and Metformin, 500 mg twice daily.

The voices are gone.

Cora also sees her therapist once a week and looks forward to when she will go maybe every other week.

It is not a seamless improvement, though. Cora recently had a cutting episode and was admitted to Hutchings Psychiatric Center in Syracuse for help. Cora and Vest understand that episodes like this may happen.

For Cora, cutting herself is sometimes a way to cope with problems. Vest says it is her way of releasing pain.

“She is hurting inside and doesn’t know how to get rid of it, so if she gives herself physical pain, it lessens the emotional pain,” Vest explained.

Linda Lopez, who is the director of OnCare, said the ACCESS model is important.

“Families didn’t know where to call when their child was really struggling,” Lopez said. “Families expressed



> Khreltz Vest holds out her hands with excitement as her granddaughter, Kyrie, walks across the table toward her. With Kyrie’s father, Aaron, tapping the back of her legs and her mother, Gloria, watching, the little girl walks three steps before stopping — her new record. | Glorianna Picini, Staff Photo



> Khreltz Vest holds her daughter Cora's file. If her house is ever on fire, Vest said the first thing she'll do is go into the house to grab the box with her children's files. She said that she can get a little singed, as long as those papers don't get lost. | Glorianna Picini, Staff Photo

over and over that they didn't know how to navigate this complex system of services that we have in our community, so the ACCESS team is actually a one-stop shop for them. The ACCESS team has on it mental health staff, child welfare staff, criminal justice staff, and parents who play a professional role in the ACCESS team who have life experience."

OnCare also offers a support group every Thursday for the youth to come and talk with one another. This is a safe haven for the youths with mental illnesses to meet with other individuals going through the same issues.

Bruce Brumfield, director of Youth Involvement, said the sessions help the youths discover what they need.

"We want individuals to hear their story and we also want an individual to be able to speak with their mom,

their provider, and their doctors ... because the youth or child knows what's wrong," Brumfield said.

Brumfield said he's seen a lot of the youth gain confidence through the support group, but it is all based on how much the individual wants to get from OnCare. Brumfield says his mission is for the youth to be happy and be an advocate for change. Staff members teach the youth how to accept their mental health challenges, and they also share advocacy skills so they can become more aware of their own mental illness.

This encouragement has helped Cora write her story on paper. Cora wrote a paper as a school assignment, explaining in detail what she has gone through with her Borderline Personality and Bipolar Disorder. This story has helped others see what Cora is going through on a daily basis with her mental illnesses.

Bipolar and Borderline Personality Disorder are not often heard in everyday life. Bipolar is known as a mental illness that causes people to have episodes of severe high and low moods, according to WebMD. Borderline Personality Disorder is a mental illness with intense mood swings, impulsive behaviors, and severe problems with self worth, according to WebMD.

Dr. William Wittlin, a local psychiatrist who sees adults, adolescents, and children, said though he cannot speak specifically about Cora's issues, he has had patients with both Bipolar Disorder and Borderline Personality Disorder. Wittlin said professionals first need to get the patients to explain what it means when they cut themselves. Wittlin said Borderline Personality Disorder and Bipolar Disorder aren't related specifically in psychiatry, but it's not uncommon to be diagnosed with both of these mental illnesses together.

"My guess is that the issues around her Borderline Personality Disorder probably have to in part be dealt with through psychotherapy, or some other form of therapy instead of medication," Wittlin said about why patients might cut themselves even when on medication.

In one of her writings, Cora describes how she feels about herself in comparison to other people.

"I am not crazy or 'working without a full deck.' It just means that I am working with a different deck."

HELP FOR A CHILD

Those who are concerned about their child with emotional or behavioral challenges may call the ACCESS/Youth Emergency Services line.

Call: (315) 463-1100

Hours: 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

What to expect: During this call, you will be asked to provide demographic and background information about the child and family.

In many cases a follow-up visit will be scheduled to complete a more thorough assessment and to help identify the needs and strengths of the child and family, as well as the appropriate services to address those needs.

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SPRING MUSICAL

Corcoran High School will present “**City of Angels**,” a musical comedy that weaves together two plots: the “real” world of a writer trying to turn his book into a screenplay, and the “reel” world of the fictional film.

IF YOU GO

What: “City of Angels”

Where: Corcoran High School Auditorium (rear entrance), 919 Glenwood Ave.

Performances: 7 p.m. Friday and Saturday, March 8 and 9

More Details: Call the high school at (315) 435-4321

MUSIC ROLE MODELS

‘A lot of young girls don’t get the encouragement needed to pursue it’



> Susan Royal, a professional drummer, performs with The Shakedown. | Photo by Tom Honan

By | Reggie Seigler
A Friendly Five columnist

Local female musicians advise youth to seek musical mentors and to join school programs

As March of each year rolls around, we start to think about the impact of women on our world. Women have been leaders in just about all aspects of modern society, including politics, business and religion. Music is no different. For Women’s History Month, it is fitting for the Friendly Five column to talk about women in music.

In the male-dominated music industry, people might have to think a little to name a few female instrumentalists but surely they will come up with some. Actually, I can readily think of a few. There’s Aretha Franklin, Patrice Rushen, Carole King and Alicia Keys. They are all keyboard masters. And then there’s India.Arie, Lauryn Hill and Bonnie Raitt, who play guitar. They, as the first group, are also singers/songwriters.

Locally, we have a few women instrumentalists, too. Quickly I can think of mother and daughter team Phyllis and Phylicia Reaves. Phylicia, 20, is now in her third year at Albany State University. Before she went to college, she and her mother played a lot in the local

churches. Phyllis has been playing the piano in church for more than 30 years. She grew up playing the piano in church as a member of a family group. Her aunt, Rener McFadden, was the group’s director. Phyllis continued the tradition by teaching Phylicia about music. She allowed Phylicia to accompany her with the drums while she played the piano at church. Phylicia eventually began learning to play the piano herself.

Eveny Parker and Susan (Sue) Royal are two others. Eveny teaches music at Nottingham High School, her alma mater. She began learning to play instruments when she was a student there.

“When I saw that there was a need for a bass player in the band, I said, ‘I can do that.’ So I picked it up and played it.”

She has also been known to play the drums and the piano for the same reasons. She is a leader like that. She has the ability to step in and pick up the slack when things are lacking. For example, when the church that she and her family attend needed a drummer, she played drums for them. Now she’s playing the piano for her students because there is a need.

Sue is a professional drummer and uses the guitar to write songs. It’s natural for her because she comes from a musical family. Her father, Thomas Royal, was a very

BEHIND THE NAME

Reggie Seigler’s “A Friendly Five” column is named in memory of a singing group in which his two uncles — Mango Gray and George Gray — were members.

The group was called “The Friendly Five,” and his uncles moved it from Clarksdale, Miss., to Syracuse in the 1950s.

popular saxophonist with the Emeralds and one of her uncles played the trumpet with various bands. Her two sisters also play guitar. Sue plays the drums in a couple of working local bands. Her main band is The Shakedown. The Shakedown plays a mix of covers and original music. Recently, they completed a recording and made a video at the famed Sun Studio in Memphis, Tenn. She is also one-third part of an all-female "project band" called Miss 3. Their membership includes Missy "Miss E" Ragonese, guitar, and Kate Kolb on bass.

I asked Sue why there weren't more women instrumentalists.

She answered: "A lot of young girls don't get the encouragement needed to pursue it."

She offered the following advice for young girls who want to be musicians.

"Find a musical mentor and a spiritual mentor," she advised. "Young girls should also get into the music programs at their schools."

Eveny Parker would certainly ditto that statement. She recognizes the need for positive role models. Learning to play an instrument and getting an education for her came with the encouragement of positive role models.

"I was told that I could do it, and I believed it. I also knew that it (music) could be used as a vehicle to getting my education."

Eveny graduated from Syracuse University's Setnor

School of Music.

"SU offered a scholarship for me to go to school for the tuba, so that's what I did. I liked the tuba because it is a bass instrument, and I like the way bass instruments function in music. I don't consider myself to be a fluent player (meaning that she's not a virtuoso). However, I am a very literate musician."

If it was all about personal desires, Eveny said she wouldn't mind being a stage manager on Broadway or for another large venue. She also expressed the need for leadership in our public education and expressed a potential interest in pursuing a career in administration possibly as a superintendent.

Whatever the future holds, Eveny enjoys being a musician and providing mentorship for other young girls who want to be musicians and just need someone to tell them that they can do it. And, oh yes, that goes the same for boys, too, with her.

The common thread between all of these women is that they all had someone there to encourage their desires to become musicians, even though the field is dominated by men, I believe that there are many more Phyllis & Phylcias, Evenys and Susans out there.

Look out music industry because they're coming.

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

LINKS TO SUE ROYAL



Miss 3 performs "Wipe Out" at the Taste of Syracuse on

June 9, 2011. <http://youtu.be/DCgVTrmRkps>

The Shakedown performs its single Blonde (In The Wintertime) for the Live at Sun Studio session July 2010. http://youtu.be/JyD_ER7z8cl

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