

the **Stand** south side news

www.mysouthsidestand.com

Syracuse, NY

SUMMER 2013 Issue 27 **FREE**

READY TO SOAR

As Calmesha Givens pursues acting, she continues to give back

Inspirational Instructor

Media teacher Nick Lisi shares his photo experience

soft heart

Principal Delvin Vick hands out ice cream to reward hard work

Searching for Hope

Center supports those struggling with bereavement

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PHOTOGRAPHERS**STUDENTS AT THE
S.I. NEWHOUSE SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS**SPECIAL THANKS
THIS MONTH**DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,
AMY FALKNER, ELINA BERZINS,
NICHOLAS LISI, VINCENT COBB,
KORI HALE**CONTACT US**SOUTH SIDE NEWSPAPER PROJECT
(315) 882-1054
ASHLEY@MYSOUTHSIDESTAND.COMTHE STAND IS BASED OUT OF THE
SOUTH SIDE COMMUNICATION CENTER
2331 SOUTH SALINA STREET
SYRACUSE, NY 13205**DISCLAIMER**THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE STAND ARE NOT
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MATERIAL THE STAND DEEMS ACCEPTABLE TO
THE PUBLICATION'S EDITORIAL PURPOSE AND
IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.**4** **COMMUNITY** | Syracuse's newly developed Land Bank works to either collect delinquent taxes from property owners or foreclose in an effort to better overcome vacant housing.**6** **PROFILE** | Southside Academy Charter School Principal Delvin Vick reflects on his first year on the job.**10** **PROFILE** | Newly appointed media teacher Nick Lisi applies his news photographer skills in a different setting — the classroom at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central.**12** **PROFILE** | Calmesha Givens keeps her acting dreams alive while also working at On Point For College to help local students pursue their dreams.**16** **PROFILE** | Gwendolyn Fagan mentors youth in her role as director of the Afro-Academic, Cultural Technological and Scientific Olympics program and as a community member.**20** **COMMUNITY** | Hope for Bereaved is a center offering support to individuals and families suffering through the loss of a loved one.**22** **ENTERTAINMENT** | This year's NAACP ACT-SO competition yielded many winners, and our A Friendly Five columnist attended the recent awards banquet to check out the talent.

■ Cover photography of Calmesha Givens by Alyssa Greenberg

CALENDAR | SUMMER

What: Syracuse's annual Juneteenth Celebration
Friday, May 31: Recognition Dinner offered for \$35 at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall Atrium featuring soul food and entertainment**Saturday, June 8:** Winston Gaskin Community Walk for Wellness begins at 9 a.m. at Thornden Park. Entry fee is \$20 for adults, \$5 for ages 13-21 and free for children 12 and younger; visit 100blackmensyr.org**Friday, June 14:** Food, Fun and Family Day includes a 10 a.m. flag-raising ceremony at City Hall and a 5 p.m. party at the Spirit of Jubilee Park on South Avenue featuring Gospel music.**Saturday, June 15:** Parade starts at noon at the Dr. King Elementary School on Raynor Avenue and ends at Clinton Square; main event runs from 1:30 to 10 p.m. in Clinton Square in downtown Syracuse
Cost: June events free to attend**More Info.:** Visit syracusejuneteenth.org**What:** 12th annual Youth Day BBQ**When:** 11 a.m. to 6 p.m. Saturday, Aug. 17**Where:** Corner of South Salina and Wood Avenue**More Details:** This event is to help youth from Pre-K to college get the school supplies they need. Backpacks filled with school supplies will be given away to each youth that registers and attends. There will also be food and entertainment for all who attend.**Cost:** No cost, but students must register to receive free supplies. They must also bring their June report card with them to the event for sign-in and registration. Individual forms must be filled out for each student who is registering.**More Info.:** Call Mary Nelson at (315) 422-5690 or stop by The Mary Nelson Youth Center, located at 2849 S. Salina St., to fill out an application

While this summer issue of The Stand will be available through August, staff members of The Stand are still busy at work covering local events and sharing community news online. Check the website at mysouthsidestand.com for continuing coverage that will keep you up to date throughout the summer months.

In June, community correspondents will provide extensive coverage of Syracuse's Juneteenth celebration, set to be held June 15 in Clinton Square. Juneteenth recognizes the significance of June 19, 1865, the day the last American slaves in Texas and Louisiana heard about their freedom because of the Civil War. The day's celebration will feature local bands, dance troupes, family fun and more.

If you have ever thought about getting involved with this community newspaper, Juneteenth is the perfect opportunity. The event lasts all day, allowing you to stop by whenever it is convenient. There are many offerings. You could practice your photography skills during the morning's parade or put your creativity to the test reporting on local bands' performances.

To learn more about how to help with Juneteenth coverage, contact me with any questions. I'll help get you prepared and armed with a T-shirt, notepad and questions for covering the day's event.

Also this summer, we'll hold another Photo Walk in July open to all in the community. Nick Lisi, former Syracuse Post-Standard photographer and now media teacher at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, will lead a short lesson on the morning of July 13 followed by the day's walk. You can learn more about Lisi on Page 10, where he is profiled.

Shots from the day's Photo Walk will again be featured in our next print issue, scheduled to come out in September. Our Photo Walks have been our most popular workshops and have been daylong adventures on foot to document life on the South Side.

Don't have a camera? Don't let that stop you. We'll have a limited number of cameras available to loan out, so RSVP early to reserve one.

For more on our summer workshop, contact me at Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or (315) 882-1054.

Ashley Kang



UPCOMING EVENTS

June

Juneteenth Coverage

Saturday, June 15

The Stand's community correspondents and new writers will meet at the South Side Communication Center, located at 2331 S. Salina St., before heading out to the Syracuse Juneteenth celebration in Clinton Square. Times to meet and cover the event are flexible. Stories and photos by each reporter will be featured online.

July

Fourth annual Photo Walk

Saturday, July 13

Photo Walk participants will follow a map through the South Side. Event will open at 10 a.m. with a short lesson by a professional photographer at the South Side Innovation Center, 2610 S. Salina St. After the walk, participants will share their photos with the group, and the day's best shots will be published in the September print issue of The Stand. A limited number of digital cameras are available for loan. To reserve a camera and sign up for the Photo Walk, contact Ashley Kang by phone or email by July 10.

More Info.: Call (315) 882-1054 or email Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

SPECIAL PROFILE SERIES IN THIS ISSUE — AND TO COME

This summer issue features four profiles of community members — and when we return in September, we will provide another set of profiles. We take this opportunity each year to offer this special profile series, which expands on The Stand's regular "Achiever" feature.

The Stand is all about people who are contributing to the South Side community. If you have a nomination for our regular "Achiever" profile, please let us know.

LAND BANK FACTS

Seizable properties

SOUTH SIDE

295 seizable properties

116 vacant lots

63 vacant buildings

53 occupied buildings



> 350 Garfield Ave.



> 1631 S. Salina St.

SOUTHWEST

225 seizable properties

107 vacant lots

56 vacant buildings

51 occupied buildings

ELMWOOD

212 seizable properties

66 vacant lots

51 vacant buildings

15 occupied buildings

BRIGHTON

496 seizable properties

154 vacant lots

122 vacant buildings

32 occupied buildings

To share concerns about a property: Call Syracuse Code Enforcement at (315) 448-8695 or email gspdc@syr.gov.net

STROLLING *the* SOUTH SIDE

Land Bank: Not Just a Vacant Promise



> Katelyn Wright, a land use planner with the city of Syracuse, speaks to residents at a SUN meeting at Payton Memorial Temple about the city's new Land Bank plan. The Syracuse Land Bank is one of the first five to be created in New York. Other places, such as Flint, Mich., and Cuyahoga County in Ohio, which Wright notes have been models for the Syracuse project, have Land Banks as well. | Kirsten Celo, Staff Photo

By | Natalie Caceres
Staff reporter

The city of Syracuse moves forward to combat tax delinquent, vacant and abandoned homes

It's common to walk down any street on the South Side and come across at least one vacant or abandoned property. It is a familiar sight for residents: windows boarded up, wooden steps broken, shingles on the verge of falling.

The Greater Syracuse Property Development Corporation, commonly referred to as the Land Bank, might be just what the city needs as a remedy. Since November, the Land Bank has been sending out foreclosure notices to tax-delinquent properties, with promising results.

"Having the Land Bank there is enabling the city to make a real threat of foreclosure for the first time and enforce property tax collection in a more aggressive way," said Katelyn Wright, land use planner with the city of Syracuse. "It's an independent not-for-profit corporation whose purpose is to assemble, redevelop and market properties that are abandoned and tax delinquent to get back into productive use."

When one property is left vacant or is abandoned, it deteriorates and becomes an eyesore. And when it happens to one house, others follow because the need to uphold an appealing neighborhood aesthetic is no longer there, Wright says. The owners not only forget the property, but they also often forget to pay taxes — creating a fiscal concern.

"Some (properties) are inevitably going to go vacant," Wright said. "We need a big intervention like this. The Land Bank is going to be critical to reversing that trend."

The South Side includes some historic properties, such as 350 Garfield Ave. and 1631 S. Salina St. The need to preserve or rejuvenate these homes is greater than ever to restore a sense of pride in the neighborhood.

"If you can change the perception of a neighborhood, you can help attract people to move in," Wright said on how to generate real estate interest in such areas.

"If we would have had a Land Bank years ago, we would have been able to preserve (the property), market it and get someone to take over the property," Wright said.

In the past, the city has used tax auctions and lien

“Our ultimate goal is to have owners pay their taxes and keep their properties.”

— Katelyn Wright

sales to collect taxes and find a new property owner. But the city wasn't always able to ensure what would happen with the property afterward.

The Land Bank method allows the city to take ownership of the property after a reasonable amount of time, given the owner has not already paid taxes or made attempts to remedy the tax-delinquency. It also enables the city to find qualified candidates who must demonstrate that they not only have the financial means, but that they also have a plan after purchase.

“It's going to be exciting and wonderful,” said Sharon Sherman, a member of the Citizens Advisory Board of Syracuse, a volunteer board that was appointed by the Syracuse Common Council. The board's role is to advise the Land Bank on how to deal with properties once they are acquired and provide guidelines for management and disposition of real property within the city, Sherman said. They hope to have a draft of guidelines to present to the Common Council in the next month or so.

“Eventually there will be opportunities for people who want to do something positive with the property to be able to obtain it, fix it and make it their homes,” Sherman said.

Right now there are roughly 295 properties on the South Side that are seizable. The Land Bank's process was put into motion in what can be described as a phasing method in conjunction with the change in the city's tax collection system.

“Having the Land Bank there at the end of the day to accept title-to-properties that we foreclose on is enabling the city to make the real threat of foreclosure for the first time,” Wright said about how useful the Land Bank is turning out to be. “We can enforce our property tax collection in a more aggressive way and at the same time have positive outcomes for our neighborhoods.”

Here's how it works: Property taxes in Syracuse are due on a quarterly system — once in January, April, July and finally October. If someone fails to pay for the entire year, the property becomes tax delinquent. That following April, the city sends out a notice that a one-year lien has been placed on the property. Once the lien expires, and given the taxes are still unpaid, the Land Bank has the right to seize the property, take measures to help prevent further deterioration and secure responsible buyers.

This past November, the city sent out the first batch of 200 notices. Working on a district-to-district assessment, property owners who had still failed to pay their taxes were reminded through the letter that once the lien expires, the city has the right to foreclose their property and transfer the title to the Land Bank.

“Once the Land Bank acquires a single-family home, there will be no taxes left on it, no water bill, no liens,” Sherman said about the situation after properties are potentially seized this summer. “It will be up to the city for arranging repairs and anything else that has to be done, but it leaves possibilities for someone to become a homeowner.”

Vito Sciscioli, mayor of the board members of the Greater Syracuse Property Development Corporation, says that one major factor they are consistently working on is the financing of this endeavor to try to build revenue in as neutral a way as possible.

“The difficulties have been putting the financing in place,” Sciscioli said. He adds that the funding had been confusing for some so he, along with the other board members, have made it a goal to try to design their financial plan to best benefit the community.

“It's taken a while to settle down for what the best way is to approach it. Right now we have a plan,” he said. “Once we get more rapport, we can see if there are better ways of bringing revenue or finding other ways of leveraging them.”

Part of the planned budget is dependent on whether the Common Council goes along with Mayor Stephanie Miner's proposal to them. Sciscioli hopes that once the Land Bank picks up momentum, they can acquire new funders that have shown interest.

The focus of the Land Bank for areas like the South Side, and homes like the ones on Garfield and Salina, is not to try and foreclose as soon as possible and sell to a developer.

It's quite the opposite.

“Our ultimate goal is to have owners pay their taxes and keep their properties,” Wright explained.

And it's something she has already begun to see. Of the 200 letters sent out in November, 60 have resulted in payment of taxes or plans for payment so the properties no longer are in danger of foreclosure. Wright is happy with this result because it means a step in the right direction as the city works through a three-year backlog.

Wright is hopeful that this new system will help bring together communities like the South Side and strengthen their neighborhoods. She emphasizes, though, that residents can also help out by notifying the city if they have concerns about a property.

“Calling in those things to the city codes line will get results ... all of the eyes that can help us are extremely beneficial,” Wright said. “I think that in the long term, people are going to want to come back to Syracuse.”

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PRINCIPAL: DELVIN VICK

Determined educator who puts his students first

"Let's get it done"

By | Joe Diglio
Urban Affairs reporter

Southside Academy Charter School's leader reflects after his first year: "The job doesn't stop,"

After students experienced a long day of state testing at Southside Academy Charter School, principal Delvin Vick decided to give them a reward for their hard work. While the students in third through eighth grades spent the afternoon preparing for the next morning of testing, Vick walked the halls handing out ice cream in classrooms.

Although he was giving them treats, Vick was just as capable of showing another side.

"Now be thankful," Vick told the students. "If you complain, I'll be happy to take it back."

This spring marked the close of Vick's first year as principal at Southside. As he left one classroom for another, stopping to offer a "Hello" to a student along the way, he was quick to point out to a visitor the essence of his experience so far: "The job doesn't stop."

Vick said he made the move north because he and his wife, Alesia, were looking for a change in location.

"I applied for a couple of jobs out of state and found a school that would be a good fit," he said of Southside.

He said he thinks the school, which serves 682 students from kindergarten through eighth grade, matches well with his administrative style, which he describes as personable.

"I like to put my students first, and have a family-type atmosphere with parents," Vick said. "But at the same time, my mindset coming from the public school system is, 'Let's get it done.'"

Jonathan Dell, the manager of school culture at Southside, said Vick does a good job of maintaining high standards for everyone and communicating them clearly.

"He keeps everybody informed. He lets us know what he expects out of us."

Kathy Parker, a kindergarten teacher at Southside, said Vick keeps up with the school's rapidly changing expectations. She said their superiors at National Heritage Academies, which manages a number of charter schools, including Southside, are constantly suggesting changes.

"He is a man who's in a hundred different places," Parker said of how Vick responds. "If you need him, he'll be there for you."

Sarah Zolik, another kindergarten teacher, agreed, saying Vick has learned how to deal with a wide variety

of challenges on the fly.

"He's getting better at multitasking. That's something he always has to do," Zolik said. "As a principal, you have a lot going on, but he handles it very well."

Vick is a native of Zebulon, N.C., just outside of Raleigh, and he has spent most of his life in the state. But he got his start in education overseas, in Japan. A former professor of Vick's at East Carolina University, his alma mater, introduced Vick to the Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme, which promotes cross-cultural relations between Japan and other countries through foreign language education and international exchange activities. In 1999, Vick was accepted into the program; he spent the next two years teaching in Shijonawate City.

His trip to Japan marked the first time Vick boarded an airplane.

"I had a lot of preconceived images of how Japan was, people walking around in kimonos, doing martial arts," he said. "But it's very modern, like the United States. People are working, trying to feed their families."

He had a rough time adjusting at first, and he considered going home after a few months in Japan. But he stuck it out with help from his friend, Steve McGowan. McGowan, a fellow North Carolinian, from Greensboro, owned a teashop near Vick's home in Japan. The two bonded over their home-state connection, and McGowan took Vick under his wing, having him over for dinner often and showing him around the city.

Vick's younger brother, Reggie, wasn't surprised that Delvin's path led him halfway across the world.

"The mailbox in the front yard wasn't enough," Reggie said. "He'd see past that. He knew the world is much bigger than what he grew up in."

Reggie added that just making it to Japan was a testament to his brother's character.

"He does what he says," Reggie said. "He said he was going to Japan to teach, something nobody in our family considered, and he did it."

Vick showed this determination even as a young teen. "If he wanted to play basketball, he was going to play whether it was across the street or across town," Reggie said.

Vick ended up loving Japan so much, he and his wife considered moving there shortly after getting married in 2003. He had a job offer, but Alesia was accepted into law school, so they decided to stay in North Carolina.

"I still have Japan in my heart. I dream in Japanese," Vick said.

VICK'S RESUME

EDUCATION:

B.S. in elementary education, East Carolina University

M.S. in school administration, North Carolina Central University

EMPLOYMENT

Japan Exchange and Teaching Programme (1999-2001)

Fox Road Elementary School: 2001-2002

Dillard Drive Middle School: 2002-2004

Forestville Road Elementary School: 2004-2005

River Oaks Middle School: 2005-2010

East Wake Middle School: 2010-2011

Sherwood Githens Middle School: 2011-2012

Southside Academy Charter School: 2012-present

PERSONAL

Education blog
studentsfirst.edublogs.org

Fitness blog
eatplaysshake.com

> Portrait of Delvin Vick on opposite page. | Jessica Bidwell, Staff Photo

Continued on Page 8



SOUTHSIDE ACADEMY

Address: 2200 Onondaga Creek Blvd.
Phone: (315) 476-3019
Established: 2002
Grades: K-8
Enrollment: 682 students

School Board

President:
Kevin Walsh
Vice president:
Carol Hill
Treasurer:
Dr. Leonese Nelson
Director:
Dr. James Duah-Agyeman

Administration

Principal:
Delvin Vick
Deans:
Christine Mevec, Stan Ford, Erika Lovette

Continued from Page 7

Vick said he admired the style of education in Japan, where he says there is a greater emphasis on the quality of the material taught instead of the quantity. He has tried to bring this approach back home with him.

"In Japan, their work ethic is second to none. They teach less, but in more depth," he said. "We cover a lot of content, but they teach at a level that the kids really understand. That's what we're trying to do here."

Vick originally outlined his style and approach through his education blog, "Not so 'new' principal's post," where he discussed how he thinks schools should be run and how educators and parents should treat children. Although he hasn't updated the blog in nearly a year, Vick said the messages he wrote are still relevant and show others how he thinks.

"When you work with a group of people, you can't always sit down, tell them about yourselves," he said. "People say, 'It's not what you say, it's what you do.' But sometimes, it is what you say."

Vick said the blog helped especially because of his job as principal, which he said is lonely at times.

"It gives the job an added dimension. People don't know what I do all day long. The principal's job is to lead and set the culture of the school," he said.

Vick recently started blogging again, this time about fitness, with "Eat. Play. Shake." He writes about healthy food, fitness tips and "shakeology," a study of nutritious shakes.

This June, Vick and his wife will celebrate their 10th wedding anniversary in Buffalo, where the next day they will participate in a Color Me Rad 5K run along with some Southside faculty. The event adds a vibrant twist to running: Participants dress in white and are then hit with paint along the way.

Vick said he and his wife have been working out regularly since February. They've also been eating healthier. Vick gave up "Makudo," Japanese for McDonald's. In that time, Vick said he's lost 45 pounds. He weighed nearly 300 pounds when he started.

"I was tired of being tired," Vick said. "Now I like working out because it gives me energy to work here."

After returning home from Japan, Vick spent the next 10 years in the Wake County public school system. He began teaching third grade at Fox Road Elementary. When the school principal moved to Dillard Drive Middle School a year later, Vick followed him and taught social studies and drama while also coaching football for two years. But he missed teaching at the elementary level, so he landed at Forestville Road Elementary, where he taught fourth grade for a year.

He decided he wanted to transition from teaching to administration.

"My dream was to teach for the rest of my life and become the best in the world. But once I had a family, I

"I think academics has its place, but when you start looking at what these kids have to deal with, being smart only takes you so far."

— Delvin Vick

looked at the pay scale and decided to pursue a degree in administration."

He recalled what he went through while his wife completed law school. Vick worked multiple jobs, delivering newspapers, working in a liquor store, designing websites and selling insurance. Because of all the odd jobs he worked to make ends meet, he began calling himself a "teacher-preneur."

"After teaching, I'd work at Total Wine and Spirits," he said. "Then I'd go home, get some rest, and then at 3 in the morning I'd wake up and deliver newspapers until about 5:30. I'd come back, get a brief amount of sleep, get dressed, go to work, and do it all over again."

While obtaining his own degree, a master's in school administration from North Carolina Central University, Vick spent five years at River Oaks Middle School, designed for students with behavioral issues. He said he has a heart for people perceived as "different," something he learned as a student. Growing up, Vick participated in a summer youth program where he served as a custodian at local Knightdale Elementary. He got close to the administrators there, which he said had a strong influence on his decision to become a teacher.

Through one of the directors of the program, Vick got involved with the Special Olympics of North Carolina. During his four years with the organization, he helped out with and ultimately coached the basketball and track-and-field teams in local and state competitions. He said he believed the stereotypes of people with special

needs, but learned to let them go.

"I think what I liked most about the special needs kids is that they appreciated everything you gave them," he said. "They really enjoyed us."

Reggie said his brother always took the time to learn who people are, and it started with his experiences in the Special Olympics. "He met a lot of great people through that program, and his life really improved," Reggie said. "He became a lot more patient and learned to be attentive to other people."

After earning his degree, Vick went back to his old middle school, East Wake, to be the assistant principal. Nancy Allen, the principal at East Wake, said she hadn't met Vick before hiring him, but trusted him because of his family. Vick's mother and aunt worked there previously, and his cousin still teaches there today.

"His family is huge in our part of Wake County. They're very respected," Allen said.

Vick worked at East Wake from spring 2010 until spring 2011, before serving as the principal at Sherwood Githens Middle School in the Durham public schools system for a year. After those first few years as an administrator, Vick said he was glad he made the switch.

"I thought I would miss the classroom, which I do from time to time," he said. "But as an administrator, it's amazing to see how large of an impact on the direction of a school I can have."

Growing up, Vick said he used education as an escape, knowing a college degree could get him out of his tough childhood and away from his stepfather, with whom he had a strained relationship. "I know the power of education," Vick said. "We didn't have a lot growing up. I saw getting smart and going to college as an opportunity to get away from home."

Vick said his goal is to develop well-rounded individuals both in and out of the classroom.

"I think academics has its place, but when you start looking at what these kids have to deal with, being smart only takes you so far," he said.

Dell said Vick has a vision of getting the community more involved with the school, something he is sure Vick can accomplish.

"In just the few months he's been here, he's boosted morale a thousand times over," Dell said. "He's very dedicated to this school."

Vick said he wants to establish an athletics program and student leadership opportunities, such as a student council.

"I want a group of students who can be leaders, and be adaptable," he said.

The message he's trying to instill in his students, he said, is to leave places better than how you found them.

"It's about more than passing a test," Vick said. "It's about life."

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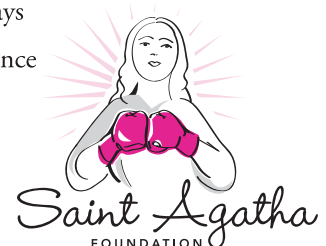
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TEACHER: **NICK LISI**

From newsroom to classroom, he fulfills his passion

“Never stops working”

By | Paige Sedgewick
Urban Affairs reporter

Between school, two growing boys and a love for his students, ITC teacher has little time left

Nick Lisi seems to have adapted to his first year in high school faster than most “freshmen.”

Maybe it’s the quarter-century he spent previously as a professional photographer at The Post-Standard, just a few blocks away, or his own experience being around other kids. His own.

Lisi is completing his first year as a full-time teacher at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, the downtown Syracuse high school that accepts students by application and has made a name for itself by helping more of them off to college.

That means more work by students — and teachers.

During a typical lunchtime, many students remain in Lisi’s classroom doing work. He stays right there with them.

“I say he is pretty well adapted to how the students are. I don’t know how he did it that fast,” said Kimber Emm, a junior in Lisi’s photography class.

Mikaela David, a senior, has learned new photography skills that have helped her get her work published in this newspaper, The Stand.

“I think that him teaching this year brought a lot of positive influences and connections to the school. Not through just The Post-Standard but OCC, SU and all the people he has met throughout the years,” David said.

Lisi worked for The Post-Standard for 26 years. He started as a photographer and in 2003 accepted the position of director of photography.

Lisi said teaching has always been his passion, and he pursued a teaching degree four years ago while he was still working at The Post-Standard. Lisi has taught photography or photojournalism for 22 years at the college level.

Lisi left the newspaper in August 2012 and started working full time at ITC in the fall.

“For me, the most rewarding (part) — and that’s why I am here — is to be able to help students learn and to become college-ready, to become ready to take that next step and also to become good people, good world citizens,” Lisi said.

The students have been learning to use Photoshop software to edit their photographs and to use lighting, both important to master as a photographer.

Students describe Lisi as caring, kind, patient and a mentor.

Cheyenne Perry is a junior who recalls an experience with Lisi on a field trip at the Auto Expo.

“I had some problems with my legs when I was little, so they bother me today still, so he was just understanding when I told him about it, that they were hurting that day. He took it slow when we were walking there because it was a walking field trip,” Perry said.

Between his school family and the one at home, Lisi says he has little time for hobbies.

“I don’t have many because I have two growing boys that take up every bit of my spare time and a wonderful wife. I support my two boys (14 and 10) in everything that they do. So honestly, that is my entire life, my family, and I love it. I am very happy about that,” Lisi said.

His wife, Kris, recalls one memorable time when they first started dating.

“A belt broke on his car. He had an extra belt and he was able to fix it on the spot. I was so impressed,” said Kris, who added how focused he is on any task.

That drive helped propel The Post-Standard into the digital future, ahead of the times compared to other newspapers. Charlie Miller, a longtime colleague and good friend of Lisi, said The Post-Standard wouldn’t be where it is right now without him.

“He brought us into the digital age, well in advance of any other newspaper. He saw this coming early on, to move away from film into digital,” Miller said.

Miller and Lisi worked together, side by side, for about 22 years. Miller was the police reporter for the early shift when he first started at The Post-Standard and Lisi was the photographer. Their relationship grew into a great friendship.

Miller still remembers his first impression of Lisi.

“The guy always beat me to work. My first impression was this guy never stops working,” Miller said.

Lisi said he has to remind himself that he is not working with paid professionals anymore and not everything is going to go according to plan.

But some students think he is doing as well as the seasoned teachers, and are more worried about losing him, if anything.

“I hope he comes back next year,” Emm said. “He is probably my favorite teacher, because he’s like so helpful, not just in media but like in lifewise and stuff like that. He is never stressed, he is never upset, he is always a happy teacher and we need that a lot here.”

DETAILS ABOUT ITC

- ITC is a career- and technical-education school. This lets the students pick a concentration and study courses they want to pursue in college. The purpose is to get the students college-ready. The students take traditional courses alongside their concentrations.
- Students have to apply and be accepted into ITC
- Some concentrations that ITC offers are media production, food science, biomedical technology, computer science, mechanical and electrical engineering and automotive technology
- The class of 2011 had a 75% graduation rate; the other city schools have a graduation rate around 50%.

Source: ITC

> Nick Lisi, opposite page, helps Cheyenne Perry, an 11th-grade student, go through her photos before class. | Glorianna Picini, Staff Photo



MENTOR: CALMESHA GIVENS

Plans to go back to school so she can soar as an actress

“I don’t want to be a face on TV”

By | Rebecca Petit
Urban Affairs reporter

Professional actress gives back to local students in special projects role at On Point for College

Actress Calmesha Givens sits in a room with three other people — waiting — anxious to hear who made the cut. The room is silent as the tension builds. Everyone in the room seems on edge, except Calmesha, better known as “Caly.” She looks confident, sitting up straight with her shoulders back. She has done this many times before.

You might guess this is a typical scene for an aspiring actress, but not in this case.

The difference: Givens is behind her desk in her office at On Point for College, where she handles special projects. Givens and On Point student Catri Stokes, along with Catri’s mother, have been placed on hold with Syracuse University admissions. Today they find out if Givens’ six months of helping Catri with college preparation has paid off. As Catri holds the phone nervously to her ear to find out if she’s been accepted into her first choice, Givens is relaxed. They’re missing some paperwork, Catri says as she hangs up the phone. Givens gets right on the computer and tells Catri the steps she needs to take moving forward.

On Point for College helps high school students to transition into, and graduate from, college. “From application to graduation” is the On Point motto. Givens is a full-time employee who says she’s wanted to help the youth.

“When I was young, I used to teach my younger cousins how to write, how to spell words. I was like a teacher at a very young age. I’ve always done this type of thing. This is just what I love. I do a lot of motivational speaking, mentoring. I really think it’s just part of my personality,” Givens said.

Catri’s mother, Demetria Gunn, said she would be lost without Givens. “She helped me with going through this whole process of getting her ready for college. I mean starting the financial aid process, applying for all the applications for Catri to go to college. Every stop sign, every problem that came up with all the schools, I came to her and she was right on it with me.”

Catri eventually received an acceptance to SU and will be majoring in criminal justice. “She made me feel better, more confident about me getting into the schools,” said a shy Catri.

Givens grew up on the South Side of Syracuse. After

graduating from Howard University, she moved to Los Angeles to pursue an acting career, but returned here to refocus her career path. She wanted to be closer to New York City, where she plans to go back to school and get a master’s degree in theater.

“I don’t want to be a face on TV. I want to be the best that I can be, and I feel the only way I can do that is to seek professional training in grad school,” she said.

Givens was a student at On Point for College, and she credits the program for helping her overcome many obstacles she faced growing up on the South Side. Because she has gone through the program herself, Givens feels especially qualified. “I feel like it’s more of an inspiration to the students to see that ‘OK, she’s gone through the program, now she’s here giving back.’ I think they’re also more open to taking (my) advice,” Givens said.

On Point for College Deputy Executive Director Samuel Rowser worked with Givens when she was in high school. Now being able to see Givens on the opposite side, working with young people, Rowser believes that Givens truly has a gift.

“It has to be something that is innate in you that you really want to do, and I see that in Calmesha. Without a lot of training and a lot of direction she’s able to talk to students where they’re at and help them get to where they need to be,” Rowser said.

Givens also needed guidance as a youth. At age 12, she and her friends decided to form a gang called 9-1-1 Quickness. She and her friends fought other female gangs.

“We really did not expect for it to become what it became and eventually the gang became well-known throughout the city,” Givens said. “Being one of those gang members I feel like it really made me a stronger person, and it also made me realize how much more is out here in life than what surrounded the streets of Syracuse.”

Both of her parents were incarcerated when she was young. “My father was a really big drug dealer, I guess you would label him a kingpin here in the Syracuse area. And when I was 5 years old my father went to prison, and my mother went a little bit after. Once they went off to prison my maternal grandmother raised me — it was probably about eight, nine of us in one house.”

Givens describes her grandmother as a strong, single parent who expected a lot from her and her siblings. She realizes her life could have been much worse if it hadn’t

WHAT IS ON POINT?

On Point for College, Inc., is a nonprofit organization that was founded in 1999 by Ginny Donohue.

On Point is dedicated to making higher education accessible to low-income youth who have the desire and the determination to continue their education, but who feel college is unattainable because of economic, academic and other obstacles.

The organization is funded through private donations and grants, and more than 4,100 young people actively participate in On Point for College.

On Point generally targets:

- Teens who are the first in their families to go to college (98% of all students)
- Low-income students who assume that college is unaffordable
- Teens from single-parent homes
- Students who fall through the cracks, including GED recipients
- Young adults who have no parent in their life to provide guidance (over 30% of all participants), including those who are homeless, aging out of foster care, or refugees

> Portrait of Calmesha Givens on opposite page. | Alyssa Greenberg, Staff Photo

Continued on Page 14

ABOUT CHILDREN OF PRISONERS

- More than 1.7 million children in the US have an incarcerated parent (The Sentencing Project/Research and Advocacy for Reform, February 2009).
- Some 10 million young people in the US have had a mother or father spend time behind bars (Partnerships between Corrections and Child Welfare, The Annie E. Casey Foundation, 2007).
- Having an incarcerated parent often results in school behavior and performance problems (Vulnerability of Children of Incarcerated Addict Mothers: Implications for Preventive Intervention, Children and Youth Services Review, 2005).
- Evidence shows that maintaining the child-parent relationship improves a child's emotional response to the incarceration and encourages parent-child attachment (Examining the Effect of Incarceration and In-Prison Family Contact on Prisoners' Family Relationships, Journal of Contemporary Criminal Justice, 2005).



> Calmesha Givens sits in her office at On Point for College, with a list of past students spread across her desk. Even after Givens goes back to school to pursue her acting career, she plans to continue to give back. | Alyssa Greenberg, Staff Photo

Continued from Page 13

been for her grandma. "I'm very thankful that she was in my life and thankful that she took both my brother and my sister and I in," she said.

Rosalie Bailey, Givens' grandmother, is proud of her. "She's done very good, she surprised me. I prayed the Lord for her, and I'm glad I lived to see it."

Both of Givens' parents are out of prison and live in the Syracuse area. She has built a close relationship with them over the years, especially with her mother.

In 2008, Givens graduated from Howard University, where she minored in theatre arts and received a bachelor's degree in administration of justice. She was in her final semester of undergrad when she decided she would seriously pursue acting as a career. Since graduating, Givens said she has landed various roles, including Shaqueeta, a lead character in the play "Invisible Women Melting," by Jessica Ann Mitchell. She starred in the short film "Venus Jungle Jig," and played a role in the independent film "Black Butterfly." In Los Angeles, she landed roles for television shows such as "Glee."

Now, Givens is a member of the Southside Commu-

nity Coalition. "Their mission is to revitalize, rejuvenate and restore the South Side area, so that's another organization that I'm a part of, as well as the Kirk Park Colts. I used to be a cheerleader for them. I usually go back and coach. ... And of course the Paul Robeson Performing Arts Company."

Givens is the new director of development there. It is where she landed her first major role, in the play "Invisible Women Melting." Ryan Johnson-Travis, artistic director of the arts company, speaks highly of Givens.

"Caly is great. She works hard, and she is an incredible resource not just for PRPAC but for the entire Syracuse community. I've seen the people that have been affected by her inspiration, and I'm really thankful to say that I know her. Because in time, we're going to look back and say 'Oh my God remember those days?' Because she's going to 'blow up,'" Johnson-Travis said.

Givens says she plans to continue to give back.

"I'm always going to be a part of On Point, even once I have soared and I'm at that place where I want to be. I always think about what size my first check would be, and I always say, 'Such and such is going to On Point for College.'"

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LET IT GROW



A community garden was inaugurated at Syracuse Housing Authority's Pioneer Homes on Saturday, April 20. The garden was brought about through a partnership with SUNY Upstate Medical University and the neighborhood as part of an initiative to promote healthy living through sustainable practices. The hope is to teach residents, particularly at a young age, that planting their own food is not only effortless, but it's something everyone can do.

"The mission is to focus on building a healthy living relationship with Upstate Medical's closest neighbors," said Mozart Guerrier, 26, the community engagement specialist for SUNY Upstate Medical University.

"It enforces the idea that addressing health concerns starts with the community and building relationships over time."

What's the Future of I-81?

I-81 represents one of the most important projects in Central New York history. Before the environmental review phase begins, our community — and you — have another opportunity to offer input. Meeting participants will have the chance to learn which strategies will progress to the next phase of analysis, view conceptual drawings and cost estimates, review initial traffic analysis and learn about how the public will be involved going forward. Come to the May 21st public meeting at the OnCenter.

You have a stake in your community. Share your thoughts. Be part of the process of deciding the future of I-81 in Central New York.

Public Meeting

Tuesday, May 21

3:30 pm to 8 pm—Drop in anytime... stay as long as you like.

OnCenter Ballroom / Downtown Syracuse

Free Parking or Two Single-Use Transit Passes Available at the Meeting.



Engaging the community in the future of I-81.

The I-81 Challenge is the joint effort of the Syracuse Metropolitan Transportation Council and the New York State Department of Transportation to plan the future of Interstate 81.

The meeting facility is accessible to people with disabilities. Spanish and ASL interpreters will be provided. To request special accommodations, please contact the SMTC at 422-5716 or contactus@thei81challenge.org.

For directions and additional information, visit www.thei81challenge.org/meeting

Can't make a meeting in person? Participate online after May 21 in our virtual meeting at www.thei81challenge.org/virtual2013

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





ENFORCER: **GWENDOLYN FAGAN**

Community leader and business owner is a mother figure to all

"My heart is with the youth"

By | Cassandra Sweetman
Urban Affairs reporter

'If your child's here, I'm going to discipline him,' she says about her philosophy of caring

Gwendolyn Fagan was going to church one day when she passed a little boy, about 4 or so, sitting out front and munching on a snack. Fagan knew his grandmother from church, though the youngster didn't know her. She watched as he tossed the scraps of his snack on the ground.

"I said, 'Get that watermelon up.' First thing he said, he looked at me, 'Do you go to this church?' " Fagan, too startled at the back talk to think faster, said, "Yes I do," an answer that prompted the boy to clean up after himself.

"But now I'm thinking I should have said 'no' to see what he was going to do," Fagan said, recalling the day. "He picked it up and took it inside, saying, 'I better, since you go to my grandmother's church.' " She laughed, recalling the comedy of the situation. Then, more seriously, she added: "You know, you gotta watch them."

With a slight graying at her roots, 61-year-old Gwendolyn Fagan has a soft, thoughtful gaze that splits into familiar creases of laughter as she talks. Nothing about her appearance says "menacing." But in her family and her community, those who know her, particularly the children, realize she is not to be trifled with.

These days, she says, a lot of parents don't reprimand their children for one reason or another, and won't let anyone else do it, either. But that's not how it was when she was younger, and it's still not in some places, such as her church.

"I'm like, 'You know what? If your child's here I'm going to discipline him,' " she said. "I'm not going to whip no kids, nothing like that, but I am going to tell them when they're wrong."

This isn't because she's mean. Rather, she cares a great deal for the children.

"My heart is with the youth here, more so because they're making so many bad decisions. I was a young mother, but I had a real supportive family even though we lived in the Bronx. A lot of these kids don't have the support, and so that's kind of why my heart is with helping them out and trying to get them going the right way."

Fagan is the owner of a women's apparel and accessories store, Suit U Now, on South Salina Street on Syracuse's South Side. The two-year-old store is her first

endeavor into entrepreneurship. But most of her involvement in the community comes from her work with youth programs.

Fagan is also the director of the NAACP's ACT-SO, or Afro-Academic, Cultural Technological and Scientific Olympics in Syracuse. The program affords African-American and Latino youth in Syracuse the opportunity to exhibit their talents and vie for a chance at the national competition. High school students compete in 24 categories, including business/entrepreneurship, painting, chemistry, and filmmaking/video. The awards ceremony was held April 14; winners go on to compete in Orlando, Fla., in July.

From behind the sales desk at her store this spring, Fagan carefully unwrapped medals that were to be presented to the winners, runners-up and honorable mentions at the awards ceremony. As she folded them into envelopes, she recalled a life of unintentional devotion to youth.

"I had a big family, so I had a lot of nieces and nephews. I still have good contact, a good rapport with them. If they have a problem they call me ... because I never made them feel like they were dumb or didn't know what they were talking about. Kind of let them figure it out for themselves."

She herself had five kids and for her, being a good mother was "a knack" for her. Fagan's stepdaughter, also Gwendolyn Fagan, attests to that.

"She's a good listener, and I think she understands the trouble that kids have or teenagers have or youth have," Gwen said. "And she doesn't look at you like you're bad, you're in the bad crowd. She tries to redirect that negative energy into something positive."

Gwen said while her stepmother "spoiled" them, making sure they had everything they needed and got everywhere they needed to go, she also helped them study and instilled the importance of education. When Gwen was in high school, struggling to understand Shakespeare's "Romeo and Juliet," Fagan took the time to read it to her and explain as she went along.

Fagan's friend and fellow ACT-SO board member, Pat Odom, said Fagan looks out for everyone.

"I think we were in Atlanta with the ACT-SO program," Odom said. "She knows I'm afraid of heights and we had to walk across some bridge and she kept talking to me and saying, 'Look at me when I'm talking to you,' " and she walked me across the bridge. I didn't even

HOW THEY SEE GWEN

Gwendolyn Fagan's colleagues on the ACT-SO board share some thoughts about her:

"There's just some people that love children, and she's the person. Any time she can help out a child, their parents, she's there. She's one of a kind."

— Pat Odom

"She's a very outgoing person, and she gets along with everybody."

— Dorothy Williamson

"She's just a very classy person, I think — down-to-earth, friendly, and good people."

— Tracy Sims

"She's a very caring person. She has a lot of interest in what she's doing when it comes to kids and when it comes to staying on top of us and making sure we do what we need to do."

— Helen Norvel

> Portrait of Gwendolyn Fagan on opposite page. | Joshua J. Wahl, Staff Photo

Continued on Page 18

VOLUNTEER FOR ACT-SO

The ACT-SO program is always looking for volunteers to help coach individuals or categories, or to judge (with the required credentials), to help with the committee, organize and fund raise. The program is also always looking for the next round of high school competitors.

If you are interested in getting involved or you know a student who may be eligible for next year, ACT-SO would like to hear from you.

Contact Gwendolyn Fagan at (315) 314-6824 between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m. Or, you can reach her at her store, Suit U Now, 2315 S. Salina St.



> Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics committee member Gwendolyn Fagan hands out awards to students during a formal ceremony sponsored by the Onondaga County NAACP. The ACT-SO program centers on the dedication and commitment of community volunteers and business leaders to serve as mentors and coaches to promote academic and artistic excellence among high school students. | Joshua J. Wahl, Staff Photo

Continued from Page 17

know I had gone across the bridge. She’s that type of a person, she always looks out for other people.”

Fagan’s family and friends say she was always there to push them on.

“She kind of understood,” Gwen said. “Like, even though my dad would say something like, ‘Oh you’re playing around, not paying attention in class,’ she understood that you can do your homework, you can study and still fail. She understood where I was coming from.”

Fagan’s husband, Preston, said the two of them were opposites when it came to disciplining the kids. Where he would lose his temper, she would do the opposite.

“She doesn’t scream,” he said. “She has a way of reasoning and trying to make sense of what they do. ... Gwen will make a wrong a right in some kind of way. If anything is a negative she will make it a positive.”

Her understanding and generosity yielded a home packed with kids — often more than her own. She did not turn away kids who did not have somewhere else to go for one reason or another, whether their family was out of town or they were just plain kicked out.

“She took them in, made sure they had dinner, made sure they had clean clothes to wear,” Gwen said. “She did all of that. There was always an extra kid around.”

While she is nurturing, she is also no-nonsense, and it was important to her that her kids understand the value of working for what they want.

“Kids seem like they want things so fast, they don’t

want to work for it. And we tend to spoil them.”

When they were younger, she says her kids could buy \$100 sneakers, but they had to raise half the money on their own, with jobs, doing chores or babysitting. “So it’s not like they didn’t have, but they had to learn to work for it.”

Fagan says too often she sees parents spoiling their kids with material things because they want them to have what the parents missed out on growing up, and it becomes excessive. In her own family she finds herself reminding her children to reel it in when it comes to spending on their families.

“One young fella was upset because he told me his mama, he said, ‘She don’t give me nothing.’ I said, ‘What’s wrong with you?’ He said, ‘She won’t let me have nothing.’ I said, ‘You know what, I agree with that. So take off that gold chain and take those sneakers off because I know she didn’t give them to you if she don’t give you nothing, and you don’t want nothing from her!’

“He had to laugh and say, ‘OK, I got it.’ ‘Now go apologize!’ So there’s a way you can get around to kids and make it click, you know, without yelling and screaming at them.”

She also sees a lot of parents who are afraid of their kids when they’re involved in drugs or gangs. She believes instilling respect for their parents and elders needs to be done at a young age, a belief from her own experience as a mother and her long history of working with kids.

Until a few years ago, Fagan had a career of jobs in insurance. The last time she was laid off she decided she was through with the industry. Around that time she had a dream in which the spirit of God gave her a vision to start her business, even giving her the name, Suit U Now. With an MBA under her belt, she started the new endeavor. But working and taking care of her family was never all she devoted her time to in the community.

For 26 years, after moving to Syracuse, Fagan was a cheerleader coordinator for the Pop Warner Sherman Park Football Association. When she started, she knew nothing about cheerleading, so she read up on it in books and employed the help of adult cheerleaders she knew.

"She always says where there's a will there's a way," Odom said. "I think that's part of her philosophy. If somebody's got a problem and she can work it out she'll try to do the best she can or she'll try to find someone who can do that."

For years she developed different age groups of cheerleaders for the extracurricular football program for kids and teens, and by the time she retired there were 4-year-olds on the sidelines cheering on their preschool counterparts.

During that time she also became the director of the Syracuse NAACP's Youth Chapter and was on the board

for ACT-SO. When the previous director of ACT-SO retired from the position, Fagan took over, and then started to plan and launch Suit U Now.

She remains as busy as ever, between her NAACP work, her business, and singing for the choir and praise team at the People's A.M.E. Zion Church. Instead of five kids at home, she and her husband have the occasional grandchildren stay over, and their newest baby, Bu-buh, a 6-month-old dog.

Fagan is always in touch with her kids and grand-kids, staying as close and involved as possible. In terms of following in her footsteps she says her kids haven't quite reached her level yet.

"They don't do a lot of volunteering and stuff like that. ... They work and they're good and they take care of their family, but I don't think, they're not like how I want or think they should do, give back. I don't think it's hit them yet."

Volunteering, helping people, is not something she thinks can or should be forced. Not for herself, anyway.

"I never thought about going into a profession with kids, you know. I think maybe I should have gone into teaching or something like that. But I don't know if I'd like doing it for a job. I think I like doing it because I want to do it."



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- Use an effective method of contraception correctly and consistently to prevent unplanned pregnancy

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Funding provided by the NYS Dept. of Health, Div. of Family Health, and Health Research Incorporated (HRI) through grant funds from the US Dept. of Health and Human Services, Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA), First Time Motherhood/New Parents Initiative, grant # H5MMC202770203. Contents are solely the responsibility of REACH CNY, Inc. and do not necessarily represent the official views of NYSDOH, HRI or HRSA.

SUPPORT GROUPS

Here are a few of the support offerings. For a full listing, visit hopeforbereaved.com or call the helpline at (315) 475-HOPE

Meet 6:30 to 8:30 p.m.

HOPE FOR YOUTH

Death of a Parent/
Caregiver
Meets 3rd Tuesday

Death of a Sibling
Meets 3rd Wednesday

HOPE FOR BEREAVED PARENTS

Whose child of any age died by accident or illness
Meets 3rd Wednesday

HOPE FOR BEREAVED PARENT OF INFANT

Whose infant died by miscarriage, stillbirth or newborn death
Meets 3rd Wednesday

HOPE FOR SURVIVORS

Those whom suicide leaves behind
Meets 2nd & 4th Wednesday

HOPE FOR BEREAVED

Whose parent, relative or friend died
Meets 2nd Tuesday

HOPE FOR BEREAVED DUE TO DRUG OVERDOSE

Whose family member/friend died of drugs
Meets 1st Tuesday

CAREGIVERS SUPPORT GROUP

Whose family member or friend is dying of a chronic degenerative and/or terminal illness
Meets 4th Thursday

LIVING AFTER LOSS

Syracuse's HOPE for Bereaved provides comfort for the grieving



> Michael Bratton, who lost his son, found support from HOPE for Bereaved, based at 4500 Onondaga Blvd. | Ruth Li, Staff Photo

By | Ruth Li
Staff reporter

With more than 10,000 helped last year, the center hopes to help even more in the future

April 9, 2011, is a day that Michael Bratton will never forget. He lost his youngest child, a 27-year-old son.

It was a normal, quiet Sunday morning for Bratton, until he got a call from his ex-wife who told him their son, Michael Bratton II, had a headache the night before, laid down on the couch and never woke up.

"I was 58 years old, and I have been through a lot of lives," said Bratton in a deep, shaky voice recalling the experience. He grasped tissues firmly in his hand, slowly rolled up his dim, watery eyes and took a deep breath before he continued. "Crying doesn't seem to be the first thing I get to do. But I just couldn't help it, and I could not cry. I was hurting. After two years, I still miss my son."

After receiving a degree in biology and African-American history, the younger Bratton, a big lover of animals, left the world too soon. Even after a police investigation and medical examination, the cause of death has not been determined.

On May 2, 2011, Michael Bratton II's 28th birthday, his father tried to work through his pain. He kept telling himself, "I can do this," but it turned out to be a mistake.

"I woke up in the morning, and I was such a mess," Bratton said. "I was back to work way too soon."

In extreme pain, he dialed the number of HOPE for Bereaved.

HOPE is an independent nonprofit organization that gives support to individuals and families who suffer loss of their loved ones. They provide one-on-one counseling, group support, telephone support and other types of grief services.

And an ongoing goal of the center is to expand HOPE's outreach services to more people and provide programs for grieving children and teens.

Pictures, love notes and poems pile up on six colorful bulletin boards hanging in the hallway of the HOPE office. Each holds deep love and priceless memories toward the beloved. At the end of the hallway, there is a room fully decorated with teddy bears of all sizes. The teddy-bear space serves as a counseling room for children. After each visit, a child can bring a bear back home to speak to and hold.

Most people who work for HOPE have suffered loss of their own. This is why HOPE can provide a comfortable, open place and treats everyone who walks in with respect, understanding and love. Bratton is just one of 10,000 people that HOPE has helped in the past year.

Working with Donna Kalb, counselor and community outreach coordinator, Bratton thanks HOPE for helping him go through all the anger, confusion and pain

he suffered.

A lot of things that people say to comfort people with loss may not be the right thing to say or do, even with good intentions, Bratton shared.

“People always tell me. He is up in heaven with angels. But it doesn’t make me feel better. I don’t care if he is up in heaven. He is not here with me. I can’t talk to him, be with him, walk with him,” Bratton explained. But HOPE let him understand and helped him go over the grief process.

“They feel abandoned. Sometimes it is anger, especially when someone died suddenly,” said Walt Stein, director of public relations and development of the center. “By working here, I can help people who are going through the same thing. Because I know what it is like.”

Stein first went to HOPE as a client after he lost his father and best friend.

“The most important thing about losing someone is when you start to think, ‘Am I crazy? What’s wrong with me?’ When you come to HOPE and sit down, someone tells you that you are not crazy, and it is a part of the grief process,” Stein said. Being open is the very beginning part of grief. But still some people feel hesitant to put the step forward.

Christine Beattie, a counselor and facilitator for the suicide program, has worked for HOPE for 34 years.

“Grief is a real thing. It is so important to do your work,” Beattie said. “You have to work through grief.”



> Counselor Christine Beattie has been helping people grieving over loss at HOPE for Bereaved on West Onondaga Boulevard for 34 of the 35 years the center has been open. | Maddy Jones, Staff Photo

BUTTERFLY GARDEN

The Butterfly Garden of HOPE is a memorial to those who have died and a symbol of hope and a place of comfort for the grieving located on the lawn between Onondaga Lake and the Parkway in Liverpool.

Proceeds from the memorial garden enable HOPE to provide free services for grieving people.

The Garden and Gazebo may be reserved for special events for \$50 an hour. Contact the HOPE office at (315) 475-9675 or hopeforbereaved@cnymail.com.

“It’s a nice way to get information about local events and news that typically don’t get broadcast on the news.”

— Dylan Gwilt, Senior at Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central and The Stand reader

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ON THE SIDE

ON TO THE NATIONALS

The ACT-SO participants are traveling to the sunny state of Florida for the national competition this year. They are dependent upon the support of donations and sponsors to offset the costs of travel and lodging.

To donate, send contributions to:

NAACP ACT-SO
c/o Gwendolyn Fagan,
Local ACT-SO Director
PO Box 397 Colvin
Station
Syracuse, NY 13205

For more details, contact Gwendolyn Fagan by email at suitunow@hotmail.com or call (315) 314-6824 between 11 a.m. and 6 p.m.

ACT-SO HIGHLIGHTS

Syracuse youth to showcase their talents at national competition



> Left: Justin Tanksley received a certificate during the ACT-SO awards ceremony sponsored by the Onondaga County NAACP on April 14. Right: Kierrah Titus received a first-place award for vocals. The ACT-SO program centers on the dedication and commitment of community volunteers and business leaders to serve as mentors and coaches to promote academic and artistic excellence among high school students. | Joshua J. Wahl, Staff Photo

By | Reggie Seigler
A Friendly Five columnist

Saxophonist, vocalists catch attention with their strong musical performances

I ran into Pat Odom about a month or so ago in the supermarket. Pat was my daughter Maricia Danielle’s chaperone back in 2003 when she won first place in the local ACT-SO competition in the vocal music category. The win allowed her to travel to a national competition in Miami.

Pat told me that she was still very much involved with ACT-SO and invited me to attend their upcoming banquet. ACT-SO is an acronym for Afro-Academic, Cultural and Technological & Scientific Olympics. It is sponsored by the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People, better known as the NAACP.

The ACT-SO program recruits African-American and Hispanic high school students to encourage and reward excellence in the areas of humanities, science and business and visual and performing arts. Those disciplines are further broken down into 26 sub-categories, some of which are biology/microbiology, mathematics, dance, original essay and filmmaking.

Annually, the local ACT-SO program holds competitions in the categories in which they have students enrolled. The students receive coaching and are judged by professionals who are adept in the respective disciplines. This year’s competition yielded a host of winners. The winners were selected according to the scores they received from the judges. The system doesn’t always provide for a first-, second- or third-place winner. But the ACT-SO mantra is that “All are winners.”

The winners are awarded their medals and certificates at a banquet held in their honor. This year’s banquet was held April 14 in Cicero at the American Legion Hall, Post 787 on Legionnaire Drive.

Dr. Dick Ford, founder and director of Signature Syracuse, provided musical entertainment. Ford’s program provides weekly lessons to scores of youngsters within the city of Syracuse. Many would not be able to afford private lessons be it not for a program like his. The ensemble he presented consisted of high school and college students from his program.

One of the Signature Syracuse’s performers commanded my attention. His name is Dequan Groover. Dequan, 21, is a former Henninger High School student who now studies music at Onondaga Community Col-

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.

lege. He also takes weekly lessons at Signature Syracuse. Dequan played the tenor sax for the evening's performance.

"I've been playing the alto and tenor sax for about two and a half years, but I started out on the drums about seven years ago," he said.

Ford described Dequan's musical talents. "Dequan is a very sensitive player. He's very expressive on the drums, and he listens. Sensitivity with expression and good listening skills are a commodity for drummers."

He added: "Dequan is a natural musician."

Dequan impressed me in our conversation with his answer to one of my questions: "What does he like most about music?"

Dequan spoke his answer with confidence and sincerity. "I like the way it touches people. People can come together around music. I like being a part of that joy."

I also spoke with two of the ACT-SO winners, Kierrah Titus and Justin Tanksley.

Kierrah is a 17-year-old Cicero-North Syracuse High School student with a very promising voice. She has traveled with her family to New Jersey on two occasions to compete for a spot on the popular television show, "The Voice." Following the award banquet, she was planning to travel to Long Island to audition for the "X Factor."

Kierrah was very well-mannered and a bit subdued during our interview, so I asked her if she is shy about singing.

"I am a little," she said. However, a little while later her mother, Latrice Titus, asked if she would sing the song that earned her first place in the competition. She immediately jumped up and started to bellow out "Halo" by her favorite singer, Beyonce.

I was floored.

There was no hesitation in her actions at all. She got up like a pro and sang it with precision and style. Her pitch was great, and her control and range were really good.

She plans to go to college after graduation in June.

"I was accepted at SUNY Cortland," she said. So I mentioned to her that the director of the SUNY Cortland Gospel Choir and I played in a band together and that I would tell him about her.

Justin Tanksley — home schooled and sharp as a



> Performer Dequan Groover | Joshua J. Wahl, Staff Photo

pin — likes to sing and writes songs and poetry. He takes vocal lessons from Ronnie Leigh, who has been performing in the Syracuse area for a number of years and is one of my mentors. Justin took home an honorable mention in ACT-SO's vocal music category.

"I have to be emotionally invested in a song before I can sing it," he said. "I sang the song 'Someday We'll All be Free' by Donnie Hathaway when I auditioned for 'The Voice.' I made the top 200," he said. Justin also plays the drums.

The banquet's mistress of ceremonies, Tiffany Henderson, had some words of encouragement for all the ACT-SO contestants. Tiffany started with Ford and eventually went on to compete in 2003 in ACT-SO's local vocal music category.

"I didn't have a lot of belief in myself, so I never felt like I could win," she said. "I didn't get the first-place medal but the person who actually did made me feel like if she could do it, so could I. She was very talented but she always encouraged me. She helped me to know that I was a winner, too.

"This year, I am standing before you as the keynote speaker. We are all winners."

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

UPCOMING CONCERT

What: Benefit Concert for Eagle Wings Academy

When: 7 p.m. Friday, May 17

Where: Grace Baptist Church, 423 Valley Dr.

More Details: The fundraising event will feature country Gospel music by The Puffers (thepuffers.com), EWA testimonials and refreshments

Cost: Donations will be received at the door in support of Eagle Wings Academy and no tickets are necessary to attend

More Info.: Visit eaglewingsacademy.org or call (315) 396-0024

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