

the Stand

south side news

www.mysouthsidestand.com

Syracuse, NY

MARCH 2015 Issue 41 FREE

FAVORITE COVERS

Our board members highlight their favorite issues from years past

On the hills and the hood
Commissioner Mark Muhammad speaks to The Stand

father figure
Fatherhood Initiative links single dads to community resources

the future
P-Tech program combines college and career skills

Pathway to

SYPHILIS: KNOW THE SIGNS

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Syracuse, NY
March 2010 Issue 1 FREE

MEET FRANK FOWLER
Syracuse's new Police Chief looks to improve minority recruitment

Young Environmentalists
Summer camps offer new perspectives on taking care of our planet

short census
Be counted. Take the Census in 10 minutes. Only 10 questions.

On Point for college
Students learn to write to impress

PARENTS PROMOTING DANCE



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October 2010 Issue 5 FREE

YOUNG EQUESTRIAN
Local teenager and avid horse rider looks to take the next step

SKY PAD
Recording label hopes to help local musicians hit it big

Fighting bullies
Students begin to offer classes and peer support

Creek Rats to the rescue
Volunteer group delivers in time to challenge gut-bombing Creek

LEGIONS NEED WAR VETS



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February 2011 Issue 8 FREE

PARKER THE PIONEER
Ann Parker was one of the first black women on Syracuse radio

CELEBRATE BLACK HISTORY

RACIAL PROFILING
The reality of racial profiling is not always what you see

snowy mess
Unhealed wounds have become a cause for concern

Jeramie White
Syracuse's first black mayor



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November 2011 Issue 14 FREE

THE BLUES MASTER
Stevie Wolf shares his natural Bluesman talent as a musician

MOBILE MARKET ON MOVE

Home HeadQuarters help
Sidekick Organizations reach up to speak to teens

p.c.p. risks
Seeding messages to kids about nutrition in food

Pumpkin Patch
Nonprofit revitalizes homes on South Side



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SEPTEMBER 2012 Issue 20 FREE

PHOTO WALK EVENT
Community members, professionals capture South Side community

STROLLING KIRK PARK

Now Coming to Your TV
The Stand to appear regularly on WCNY

'real talk'
Battle rapper Justin Makamshika explains what inspires him

Special Profiles
Four people are featured in an eight-page segment in this issue



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SUMMER 2013 Issue 27 FREE

READY TO SOAR
As Calmesha Givens pursues acting, she continues to give back

INSPIRATIONAL INSTRUCTOR
Media teacher Lita Lita shares her passion for sharing her experiences

soft heart
Principal Devin Vuk hands out ice cream to reward hard work

Searching for Hope
Center supports those struggling with bereavement

GWEN FAGAN A MOM TO ALL



HAPPY 5TH ANNIVERSARY

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NATHANIEL BROWN

TAJUANA CERUTTI

DALE HARP

**REPORTERS, EDITORS AND
PHOTOGRAPHERS**STUDENTS AT THE
S.I. NEWHOUSE SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS**SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH**DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,
ABBY LEGGE, NICK LISI,
VERNON MACKLIN**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

MEMORABLE COVERS

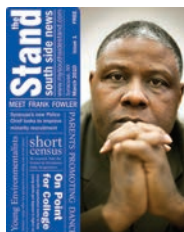
The Stand Board of Directors explain their favorite cover issue

**TAJUANA CERUTTI**

Tajuana Cerutti's interest in The Stand was sparked after she read the newspaper's summer issue. The cover story featured a staff member from On Point for College, an organization that provides assistance and support for students seeking higher education. Cerutti had a personal connection with the organization. This story, in particular, has stuck with her because she felt it was a "great piece about the power of education, determination, support and dreams."

**REGGIE SEIGLER**

Reggie Seigler told us one of his favorite covers featured Stevie Wolf, "The Blues Master." This issue's cover struck Seigler for two reasons: He was there when the picture of the musician was taken, and he thinks Wolf has such an authentic blues look. In Seigler's words, "Look up blues in the dictionary, and you will see a picture of (Wolf)."

**SHANTE HARRIS EL**

Shante Harris El's favorite cover story is "Meet Frank Fowler," featured on the publication's very first print issue. She compared the newspaper with Frank Fowler, the new police chief at the time. Like Fowler, The Stand was also new and had a lot to prove. Harris El is proud of the reputation The Stand has built. She credits each positive cover story, starting with the first one.

**CHARLES PIERCE-EL**

Charles Pierce-El had a difficult time narrowing down his favorite cover story to just one. He told us no one could question his love for the newspaper because he has so much pride in it. His favorite stories have involved the community's youth and elderly. The Stand's dedication to showing readers the positive side of the South Side was instrumental in Pierce-El's decision to become a board member.

— Compiled by Veronica Wheelock,
Staff reporter

CALENDAR | MARCH

What: St. Patrick's Parade**When:** Noon to 3 p.m. Saturday,
March 14**Where:** Downtown Syracuse**Cost:** Free**Contact:** Visit syracusestpatricksparade.org
or call (315) 569-9495**More Info.:** The 2015 Syracuse St.
Patrick's Parade is the 33rd annual
parade, saluting the changing seasons
that help define life in Central New York**What:** "Sizwe Banzi is Dead"**When:** 2 and 7 p.m. March 8; 7:30 p.m. March 10-12;
8 p.m. March 13; 3 and 8 p.m. March 14, and 2 p.m.
March 15**Where:** Syracuse Stage, 820 E. Genesee St**Cost:** \$30-\$52**Contact:** Visit syracusestage.org or call the box office at
(315) 443-3275**More Info.:** In this drama exploring the universal struggle
for human dignity, a black man in apartheid-era South Africa
tries to overcome oppressive work regulations to support
his family.**DISCLAIMER**

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE STAND ARE NOT
NECESSARILY THOSE OF THE ENTIRE STAFF.
THE STAND WELCOMES SUBMISSIONS FROM
ALL MEMBERS OF SYRACUSE'S SOUTH SIDE
BUT RETAINS THE RIGHT TO PUBLISH ONLY
MATERIAL THE STAND DEEMS ACCEPTABLE TO
THE PUBLICATION'S EDITORIAL PURPOSE AND
IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.

“I’m tired of hearing about this South Side newspaper,” Lorraine Branham half-teased me shortly after she took over the job as dean of the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications. “When are you going to do it?”

That was a half dozen years ago.

I’d been waiting and waiting to make sure everything was “perfect.” It had been almost two years since the idea was hatched by myself and another professor, who had since left.

So I set aside perfection, and we began, five years ago, with our first print edition. I got help from many, many others at Syracuse University’s Newhouse School, where I am chair of the Department of Newspaper and Online Journalism, and from a good number of South Siders as well.

Police Chief Frank Fowler agreed to an interview with me for the first edition, and we put his face on the cover. He provided a great start for us and a recognizable image for our first issue. Since then, however, there haven’t been too many stories about bureaucrats.

I often call The Stand the People Magazine of the South Side because we focus on faces — on people more than on programs and policies. We do not do a lot about crime and violence, though we don’t ignore them either. Our stories tend to be about the well-intentioned people fighting it, not committing it. Then there’s the range of topics that cover the other 99 percent of what happens in our lives, and that’s our “sweet spot.”

Speaking of 99 percent: That’s the amount of work done by other people who are involved in The Stand. I’m nominally in charge, but the cumulative contribution of many others has kept the idea alive.

Since Dean Branham offered that little nudge, I’ve heard a lot more questions, from the vaguely insulting, to the incredulous to the cynical to the curious.

Do you really send your students over there? Who reads it? What difference does it make? Does anybody care?

I let many of the questions slide. Some I don’t even know the answer to. Others I don’t care to think about. Some don’t really matter. What matters is that The Stand does make a difference and people do care.

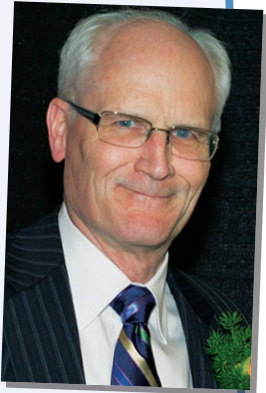
We did it. We did some good. When so many people are talking, we did something.

Reporter Jessica Iannetta recently returned from a visit to the Southwest Community Center, where she had been interviewing a number of men for a series of stories we plan to publish on fatherhood. When I asked her for an update on how her story was going, she didn’t start with those details. Rather, she told me: “They love The Stand.” People approached her with press releases and story ideas, and just to say “hello.”

We kicked off The Stand in February 2010 with a Valentine’s theme party: “Fall in love with The Stand.” It’s good to know that so many people did.

Reason enough to be proud. Reason enough to blow out some candles.

Steve Davis



UPCOMING
EVENT

March 21

The Stand’s Five-Year
Anniversary Celebration

Join us for this special event, featuring keynote speaker Sean Kirst, an award-winning columnist for Syracuse Media Group and a reader of The Stand.

The celebration will feature a short program about the success of The Stand newspaper over the past five years, tables with information on how to get involved, a cake and snacks. The event is **free** and **open to the public**.

When: 10 a.m. to noon
Saturday, March 21

Where: South Side Innovation
Center, 2610 S. Salina St.

To RSVP: Contact The Stand
Director Ashley Kang at
(315) 882-1054 or
ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

CONTRIBUTORS' MEMORIES

Former Newhouse School reporters recall what they learned during their time writing for The Stand



CHRISTINE MEHTA

Contributor 2010-2011

My favorite contribution was a six-part series on racial profiling in response to a study that was released Nov. 15, 2010.

The study was controversial and hotly contested by the Syracuse Police Department. But rather than just report what the bureaucrats and police department said, I wanted to hear what the people living on the South Side, the people in the middle of the conflict, had to say about racial profiling. Have they been victims of racial profiling? Is racial profiling even an issue at the forefront of their minds, or have more pressing problems taken precedence?

The reporting I did for The Stand was an important foundation on which I built an understanding of what it means to be a human rights advocate. In many ways, it was a precursor for the work that I do now.



ALISON (BRYANT) HENRY

Contributor 2010

My favorite contribution to The Stand was a story about a chess club at Southside Charter Academy.

I went down to the classroom and witnessed a room full of elementary school students focused, engaged and thoroughly enjoying the game of chess. I handed out a questionnaire to all the kids, asking what they learned from chess that they apply outside of the classroom. I was later moved to read the responses; many discussed how the game taught them to think through decisions and control their emotions. Another mentioned it taught him about consequences. The entire reporting process for the story was a lesson in how perceptive and dedicated young people are.

The Stand taught me how to report, edit and work with my peers. But it also taught me how to embed myself in a new community and find beauty in the details. Syracuse's South Side is home to countless inspiring people and organizations finding a way to make the world a little better. The Stand allows the community to explore and comprehend the tiny tragedies and victories of each day. The community can now amplify its own voice.



SAVE THE DATE
5 YEARS OF THE STAND
Saturday
March 21



Anniversary Party



JENNIFER CHENG

Contributor 2010-2011

My favorite contribution was an article on grandparents raising grandchildren.

I had learned from the 2000 U.S. Census that there were a rising number of grandparents raising their grandchildren and this was a growing trend, and that 19 percent of such families were living below the poverty line. I set off looking for such a family, and was introduced to the Williams family on my first visit to the South Side.

Reporting for The Stand was one of my favorite experiences in college, and it played a big role in influencing the types of stories and communities I wanted to report on as a journalist in Hong Kong. Meeting the Williams family was the best part about my visits to the South Side. They were so generous in opening their home to me on many occasions, sharing hilarious and heartbreaking stories that have made them who they are.

I saw how even though there are so many odds stacked against those living in the neighborhood, the Williams' attitude, as a family, was never "that's just the way it is," but it was always "it doesn't have to be this way." It was their love and respect for each other and their neighbors that has made them so resilient.

Reporting in the South Side has also influenced the work I've chosen to do outside of reporting. Many of the families I support at church are new immigrants who face discrimination and poverty, and sometimes I recognize in them the same resilience that I saw in the Williams family.

Now works as a freelance journalist in Hong Kong and volunteers with a non-profit helping pregnant teens in crisis situations



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Call 315.443.3261, email heop@uc.syr.edu, or visit us online at uc.syr.edu/stand.

"I never thought that going to college was within my reach."

Krystal Jones,
University College
part-time student

FEATURES

ON THE SIDE

WILLIAMS' WORDS OF WISDOM

ON BUILDING

HOW TO DRESS

ON HOUSE GUESTS

ON PARENTING

ON HOUSEKEEPING

ON LIFE

MOST IMPORTANT

Grand(Parents)

Local grandparents raising grandchildren part of a national trend

By Jennifer Cheng

Photo: William S. Smith

It's a scene that's become a familiar sight in many neighborhoods across the country: a group of grandparents sitting around a table, talking and laughing. In the Williams family, this scene is a daily occurrence. The family is a mix of grandparents and grandchildren, and they are all part of a larger trend. According to a recent report from the U.S. Census Bureau, the number of grandparents raising grandchildren has increased significantly in the past few years. The Williams family is one of many such families in the South Side. They are a close-knit family, and they are all part of a larger trend. The Williams family is one of many such families in the South Side. They are a close-knit family, and they are all part of a larger trend.

ON THE SIDE

OBTAINING CUSTODY

ON THE SIDE



MORE VOICES

Go online to mysouthsidestand.com to hear from additional past students who have contributed over the past five years

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY
University College

University College's HEOP project and its activities are supported, in whole or in part, by a grant from the New York State Education Department.

THE PRICE OF SPEED

BEST TV-INTERNET PACKAGES

• **Time Warner Cable in Syracuse.** More than 200 channels, including HD and DVR, and Internet with speeds up to 50Mbps is \$144.99 per month.

• **EPB in Chattanooga.** More than 200 channels, including HD and DVR, and Internet with speeds up to 1,000 Mbps is \$137.32 per month.

• **Greenlight in Wilson.** Nearly 300 channels, including HD and DVR, and Internet with speeds up to 1,000 Mbps is \$182.85 per month.

CHEAPEST INTERNET-ONLY PACKAGES

• **Time Warner Cable in Syracuse.** Speeds of 15 Mbps costs \$34.99 per month.

• **EPB in Chattanooga.** Speeds of 100 Mbps costs \$57.99 per month.

• **Greenlight in Wilson.** Speeds of 40 Mbps costs \$34.95 per month.

FUTURE ACCESS

Syracuse considers how to provide better Internet in the digital age



> Nathan Mills, 20, goes to the Beauchamp Branch Library every day to use the Internet to study for his GED. His family recently had to shut off its Internet. Many Syracuse residents rely on libraries for Internet access. | Jake Cappuccino, Staff Photo

By | Jake Cappuccino
Urban Affairs reporter

As Internet need rises, city officials contemplate creating a broadband fiber optics network

Nathan Mills spends as much time as he can every day at Beauchamp Branch Library. But Mills does not come for the books; he comes for the Internet.

Mills, 20, lives at home and his family recently had to shut off its Internet and cable. So every day he goes to the library to do what most 20-year-olds do: listen to music, play games online, surf the Internet and entertain himself.

But it's more than that. He's studying for his GED, and Internet access is crucial.

"I know that many people rely on public Wi-Fi," Mills said. "There's few who do have (Internet access) at home. Those who do, have it under lock and key," he added.

Mills is one of many Syracuse residents who rely on the city branch libraries for Internet and who don't have access to it at home. In 2014, the computers at Beauchamp Branch Library alone had 25,271 sessions.

A session is defined as use of a computer for a half hour or more. On average, that's 81 sessions a day, six days a week. (The library is closed Sundays.) It can be especially important for the African-American community, where Internet penetration is catching up via mobile, but still substantially lagging for broadband.

With so many people like Mills clamoring for what has become as much a public utility as the telephone, and with Verizon's decision not to install its uber-speed FiOS service in most of the city, Syracuse city hall is considering doing it itself.

It is critical for those who seek education and provide it, for those who buy goods and services, and for those who provide them. Most agree it's a win-win, if the city can pull it off.

Syracuse Mayor Stephanie Miner first mentioned the idea of the city as provider in August 2014, and she made the point again in her January 2015 State of the City address. She's hiring a consultant to complete a feasibility assessment for a city-owned broadband fiber optics network.

Why fiber over cable? It's faster and tends to be cheaper to install and maintain.

These advantages all stem from the cable used in fiber optics, which is made from glass. Data moves through the glass cable in the form of pulses of light. That, combined with much less interference, makes fiber outrun traditional cable Internet, which travels through a copper wire. Fiber also offers equal upload and download speeds, frequently not the case with cable.

“(Fiber) is superior in every way,” said Christopher Mitchell, the director of the Community Broadband Networks Initiative with the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. “It has much higher capacity connections, it’s cheaper to run and more reliable with tremendous benefits.”

Businesses, schools and citizens would benefit from fiber optics.

El-Java Abdul-Qadir, manager of the South Side Innovation Center, said there’s no argument about that. It’s all good, in his view. At the center, just a few blocks south of the library where Mills studies, businesses are trying to chart a beginning, much as Mills is. If he gets that GED, the center could be home to his small office of the future, or to his employer. The center already is home to about 20 small businesses that might not otherwise be able to access critical start-up resources such as costly office space — or the ultimate-speed Internet.

“Technology is very important, and for a small busi-

ness, that access — and having faster access — it’s obviously going to benefit their business,” Abdul-Qadir said. “A lot of businesses and small businesses are looking to automate services, (and) technology and speed of that technology are important for that.”

Outside of Syracuse, a few U.S. cities have already implemented plans similar to Miner’s, and the return on the investment has been huge. In Tennessee, Chattanooga’s city-owned Electric Power Board, or EPB, is the most widely known example — and for good reason. Today, consumers and businesses there have Internet speeds among the fastest in the United States, receiving speeds as high as 1,000 Mbps (with the lowest around 100 Mbps). Consumers can watch their Netflix faster, sure, but this kind of reliable high-speed service offers big incentives to businesses to grow, relocate and develop in Chattanooga. For those reasons, reception has been very positive, said Danna Bailey, EPB’s vice president of corporate communications.

Another city, Wilson, North Carolina, did the same thing as Chattanooga. The city developed its own cable, phone and Internet company called Greenlight. Because of Greenlight’s ultra-fast Internet speeds, it is experiencing the same benefits that Chattanooga experienced, said Jennifer J. Lantz, executive director of the Wilson Economic Development Council.

PUBLIC HEARING

What: CENTRO Public Hearing on the organization’s plan to make cuts to services

Why: The bus organization is facing a \$5-million budget gap and needs to balance the books. It has proposed to cut late-night, Sunday and holiday service throughout its four-county service area.

When: 4 to 7 p.m.
Wednesday, March 11

Where: Oncenter, 800 S. State St.

Can’t Make Meeting:
Visit centro.org/CustomerFeedback.aspx to share comments

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THE RIGHT TO ACCESS

As **Internet access** becomes more important and is viewed more as a “right” or a **vital service**, such as the phone, that everyone should have **equal access** to, policymakers weigh whether they can make sure all populations get the **same access**, and the best — whether at **home, school or work**.

For the South Side, the question is particularly relevant. The South Side is **74 percent African-American**, according to the latest Census data. Yet according to the Pew Research Center, in almost every age group, **blacks have less access to broadband than whites**, and blacks also use the Internet less for every age group.

In 2014, Pew said, “Today, African-Americans trail whites by seven percentage points when it comes to **overall Internet use** (87 percent of whites and 80 percent of blacks are Internet users), and by 12 percentage points when it comes to **home broadband adoption** (74 percent of whites and 62

“It’s one of the quietest things you can do that has tremendous impact. Schools, churches, hospitals, business, government, people at home, everybody is impacted by it,” she said.

C. Bruce Rose, the mayor of Wilson, said he’s thankful for how well the project turned out and that he wouldn’t change a thing if he were to do it again.

“If (cities) want to attract industry and business to their community, they need this. People are looking for it. It’s fast and it’s good and it drew business and industry to our community,” he said. Not only that, but more and more of the city’s consumers and infrastructure, like hospitals, offices, businesses and 26 schools, are switching to Greenlight because of the high speeds. “We got about 8,000 customers now and they’re growing every day and more and more people are clamoring for it,” he said.

But then there’s the money. The plans for both cities cost a lot.

Chattanooga paid for its plan with municipal bonds costing about \$229 million and a loan from its electrical division for about \$50 million. The city also used a grant from the Department of Energy for \$111 million to update its power grid, about \$390 million in total. Wilson, a smaller city by population than Chattanooga and Syracuse, borrowed \$35 million from local banks to

pay for its plan.

A city-owned fiber optics network would cost Syracuse at least as much as Wilson’s network, and the money just might not be there. In a Feb. 4 visit to Syracuse, Gov. Andrew Cuomo said he would not use state money to fix Syracuse’s aging infrastructure and that Syracuse needed to develop its economy first, according to Syracuse.com. Miner had asked for about \$850 million.

If Syracuse tackles fiber, it could roll the service out over time and spread the cost over six to eight years. A faster debut, in half the time, would cost a little more, said Stacy Mitchell, the co-director at the Institute for Local Self-Reliance. He acknowledged that from the customer’s perspective, the bill for super-fast fiber might well be a few dollars higher. In the end, the provider can’t lose money, whether it’s the city or a corporate giant. And if Syracuse jumps in, the network is going to run at a loss the first few years, Mitchell added.

But, he reminded: “The real benefit is better environment for business and higher quality of life.”

It would be a large undertaking and a large investment from the city, but officials in Wilson and Chattanooga say their networks are enrolling more people than they need to manage their loans.

Chattanooga’s Bailey concludes: “If Chattanooga can do it, other communities can do it.”

FULL SPEED AHEAD

Companies often sell their Internet packages by indicating the maximum speed attainable. In other words, buy this package and receive a speed up to 10 Mbps. To download at a speed of 1 MB/s (1 megabyte per second), you need a connection speed of 8 Mbps (megabits per second).

Anyone who has downloaded an album, a movie or any large file knows that download speeds are almost never the maximum speed. Assuming absolute maximum download speeds, these are reasonable time expectations for downloading common files:

- At speeds of 10 Mbps or 1.25 MB/s, you could download a 100 MB album in one to two minutes. At the same speed, you could download a standard definition (SD) movie (1.4-2.0 GB) in about 18 to 27 minutes and a 720p high-definition (HD) movie (3.7-5.0 GB) in about 50 to 66 minutes.
- At speeds of 50 Mbps or 6.25 MB/s, you could download the same album in less than 20 seconds, an SD movie in four to six minutes and an HD movie in 10 to 14 minutes. Note that 50 Mbps is the maximum speed offered by service providers in Syracuse to consumers.
- At speeds of 100 Mbps or 12.5 MB/s, you could download the same album in about 10 seconds, an SD movie in about two to three minutes and an HD movie in about five to seven minutes.
- At speeds of 1000 Mbps or 125 MB/s, you could download 10 albums worth of data in about 10 seconds, an SD movie in 11 to 16 seconds and an HD movie in 30 to 40 seconds.
- According to Internet speed tests from testmy.net, Syracuse averages 17.7 Mbps or 2.2 MB/s, and Chattanooga averages 21.1 Mbps or 2.6 MB/s.

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> Mark Muhammad, 54, was sworn in to the Syracuse City School District Board of Education in January. Muhammad’s appointment gained attention, as many online commenters made racist and hateful comments about him and his religion. Muhammad is a minister in the Nation of Islam. | Lateshia Beachum, Staff Photo

By | Lateshia Beachum
Urban Affairs reporter

Syracuse City School District board member reflects on his faith, involvement in community

Mark Muhammad guards himself as if he were his own personal Queen’s guard. He is hesitant about showing emotion, explaining who he is and expressing his beliefs. But once he is willing to speak, he opens up about who he is, like the call to the altar. He has a lot to say, and his words envelop the ears, suggesting the guidance of a wise uncle paired with the elocutionary prod of a minister.

Muhammad, 54, was sworn in to the Syracuse City School District Board of Education in January, named by Mayor Stephanie Miner after another board member resigned to move to Boston. The appointment has resulted in the comments section of Syracuse.com being littered with sometimes-racist and hateful statements

about him and his religion. The news has gained national notice from Fox News, which said it was troubling that Muhammad had not distanced himself from Minister Louis Farrakhan.

Muhammad is a minister in the Nation of Islam, an Islamic religion that started in the 1930s in Detroit, Michigan, touting the worthiness of black people and encouraging them to improve their own lot. Although the religion has been credited with improving the communities of black people throughout the years, it also has been accused of teaching hatred.

What is most troubling to some supporters and those who know Muhammad is that his faith can be what most often is discussed, accessorized with a few quotes from him and about him. Yes, he is a minister in the Nation of Islam, which holds study groups regularly on the South Side, meeting near the corner of East Kennedy Street. But he also is a tenured professor in the department of English, Reading and Communication at Onondaga

Community College, they point out. And he is one of the longest-standing adjunct seminar professors in Syracuse University's Renee Crown University Honors Program, where he receives rave reviews from his students, according to Hanna Richardson, an associate deputy director of the program.

FAMILY MAN

Muhammad is a husband, married to his wife, Sharon, for 26 years. He is a father of a young man and a young woman. He is the son of a devout Christian woman. He is a brother, biologically, through marriage, spirituality, and black acknowledgment.

Muhammad is a well-dressed man, photographed in suits that appear to be made only for him to wear, routinely adorned with a fashionable, crisply placed tie around his neck and matched with neatly waved hair and glasses that give him his scholarly appearance.

He is, indeed, a scholar — not just of academics, but also of Syracuse.

"I'm out on the corners with gang bangers and drug dealers and prostitutes, and bums. Out on the street with them, glad to be there," he said about comments on Syracuse.com in which he has been called a street preacher. "My experiences, sister, has been, as I like to say, 'In the streets and the suites. On the hills and in the hood.'"

Although the asphalt of Syracuse's streets runs through his veins, that close relationship hasn't been enough to stop criticism. But that doesn't worry him much.

"My mother prepared me for this (criticism), and I don't know how she knew. She said, 'Don't worry about what people say.' She said, 'They talked about Jesus, and he was a good man,'" he said of his mother's prescient words from years ago. "They killed him for no reason. So, listen, if they talk about me, who am I?"

That's what some have been wondering, those who have jumped on the sensational reaction of Muhammad's newfound headline fame.

Muhammad is a true son of the city, born and raised here, a witness to its most difficult times — including, he recalls — school integration. Unlike many people who have lived in one place all their lives, Muhammad has lived most of his life in different parts of the same place, learning how differently they worked then and being mindful of how they operate now through his community service.

Daniel Drashinsky, a Marlboro, New Jersey, native and a sophomore at Syracuse University studying health and physical education, has taken two classes with Muhammad. "If you want to know about the city, you just go to him because he has it all," Drashinsky said.

Muhammad's past is similar to the present of many children in Syracuse, where 46.9 percent live in poverty. His beginnings are comparable to many black children across the nation, where one in two black babies are

born poor, according to a recent report by the Children's Defense Fund about ending poverty.

"From what I was told, we were right down the hill in Radisson Court," Muhammad said of his early years. Just a year after he was born, his parents divorced. He lived with his older brother and church-going mother for most of his life while his father, who remarried and had five children, remained a constant presence.

Another thread was school and public housing.

"I was always a good student. My mother has all my report cards from kindergarten all the way up," he said, smirking at her collection chronicling his achievement. "School was good for me, important to me."

Muhammad said his relationship with education began to change when he attended Nichols Elementary School in the fourth grade. He began to do upper-level work in both English and math, achievements that he carried with him to other schools and in higher grades.

***"School was good
for me, important
to me."
— Mark Muhammad***

While Muhammad was excelling in school, he was moving around from various parts of the city that included James Geddes Rowhouses, referred to as the James Geddes Housing Project at that time, and Eastwood Homes. He casually calls himself "a kid of the projects." By the time he graduated from Henninger High School in 1978, he had attended about five different schools and lived in three different city housing projects before his mother bought a house on the South Side near Manley Field House.

Although his mother did not have a lot, she found other ways to give back.

And between both of his parents, who worked at major plants, Muhammad was pushed like a baby duck into the turbulent streets of Syracuse to be a servant.

"My father was very into the community. He was active at work. He was involved in the union. He worked for General Electric and then he worked for Chrysler. So, he was very much into trying to get the union to represent black people," he said.

His father also got Muhammad and his siblings involved in the YTT (Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow) Society, where they would clean up the South Side and organize weekend events for young people so they'd have something to do.

HEAD OF THE CLASS

With all of the attention surrounding Mark Muhammad's appointment to the Syracuse City School District Board of Education, you might be wondering exactly what a school board member does.

According to the New York State School Boards Association, board members are responsible for representing the community they serve, organizing district resources and being an advocate for public education.

"Our job is to get community input, have public meetings, and sort of oversee the direction, create the vision and the mission for the district and the goals. That's what we do," Muhammad said. "There are seven of us on the board. We work together to do that to the benefit of the children of this district and this city."

LEADING THE WAY

Another Nation of Islam minister was appointed to a school board in the past year.

He is Wasim Muhammad, and he was appointed last spring by the mayor in Camden, New Jersey, according to The Philadelphia Inquirer.

According to The Inquirer, Wasim Muhammad (like Mark Muhammad) was a graduate of local schools. Wasim Muhammad was a basketball star locally, and he also played for the University of New Mexico.

Reporter Julia Terruso wrote for Philly.com that Wasim Muhammad is a full-time minister who runs the University of Islam, a private K-12 school in Camden with about 50 students. She quoted Wasim Muhammad as saying:

“I am very interested in children who are not in our private school because it’s the neighborly thing to do. It’s kind of like raising your children in your household. You have to also be concerned with the community and the neighborhood your children have to go play with. I’m concerned with public education in Camden because it’s our community and it educated me.”

His mother, a Hopps Memorial C.M.E. Church member since she was 13, helped run the church soup kitchen and furniture donation efforts and was involved in other ministries as well.

“She’ll be 83 this year, still at the church, still going to meetings every Sunday, counting the money. Everything. Still getting furniture from other people and giving it away. Delivering it,” Muhammad said, grinning widely at her spunk. “That’s her. Right? That’s what I grew up around. When I went to Cornell, it was just the natural thing to do. So, I did.”

At Cornell University, where he studied industrial and labor relations, Muhammad was active on his campus concerning race issues. He became a resident director of a dorm that focused on Third World issues. He also served as a chairperson for the dorm’s film and lecture committee, which brought speakers and films to the school.

“It was, one, part of the times. It’s a time where people were really active, black people in particular,” he said of his campus involvement. “But two, I think my father and my mother prepared me to be involved with community issues.”

A NEW PERSPECTIVE

Being an active social leader fueled Muhammad and consumed his time. So much so that he ended up on academic probation and was asked to leave the school by the end of his first semester in his junior year.

He was out for five years. He started his own home improvement business, worked for Sears, and had a son, Marquith, in 1984.

“I ended up in a life that I didn’t want to live and I had a baby,” he said, now completely relaxed, leaning back in his chair with his hands alternating between clutching his arms and spiking them up in emphasis to drive home a point. “So, I think the combination of those two things made me say, ‘It’s time. I’m ready.’”

After receiving his degree from Cornell, Muhammad landed a job in State College, Pennsylvania, where he worked at a small paper as a human resources director. Part of his job was to renegotiate contracts for the workers at that paper since the now defunct Knight Ridder had bought it out.

“I didn’t feel comfortable. I’m from a union background, blue collar,” he said. “I had to make a decision: Do I stay and do what I felt was morally wrong, or do I leave and just sacrifice? So, I left. I believed that God would take care of me, and he has.”

He found himself back in the same spot of working odd jobs, such as selling Kirby vacuum cleaners. In the process of finding himself, he married his longtime girlfriend in 1988 and joined the Nation of Islam in 1989. After three years of studying, he became a minister.

He said studying Louis Farrakhan’s “Self-Improvement: The Basis for Community Development” helped him accept that faith.

“That course of study helped me to understand myself, helped me understand scripture from the Bible and the Holy Quran, and gave me a different perspective about what it meant to be Christian and about what it

“I believed that God would take care of me, and he has.”

— Mark Muhammad

meant to be a Muslim,” he said, fondly reflecting on his study. “Where I thought they were very different, they were not. It was that understanding that allowed me to then become a part of the Nation of Islam because there wasn’t a contradiction or a conflict.”

Heidi Holtz is the director of research and projects at the Gifford Foundation, a community grant organization that helps improve programs and communities in the area. It is also an organization where Muhammad served 12 years as a board member, until 2012.

“I know there are people who believe his religion to be a barrier,” Holtz said. “I know there were people who believed that John F. Kennedy’s religion was a barrier in his becoming president. While I think his faith is important to him, I think his faith forms a lot of his thinking. But faith informs a lot of our thinking.”

KEEPING THE FAITH

Faith formed Muhammad’s beliefs that the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University was — and then was not — the right fit for him when he decided that he wanted to get a master’s degree. He thought Maxwell aligned with his interest in people and his affiliation with the Nation. Yet when he walked into Maxwell to get program information, it didn’t feel right. He recalls a terrible headache, and walking right out. He took it as a sign. As he walked to the quad on the campus, he said it came to him that speech communication was where he needed to be.

By happenstance, when he walked into Sims Hall, the department chair happened to be at the main desk while the secretary had stepped away. From that meeting, he enrolled as a graduate student at Syracuse University, and he graduated in 1999 with his M.A. in speech communication.

That chance encounter led him to being the adjunct professor he is today at the university, where he teaches

courses such as “Exploring Your Skin from Without and Within” and “From the Hill to the Hood: To the Community and Beyond,” where he takes students out into the community to meet residents and to learn how to get involved in it.

Drashinsky, the student, says, “It definitely changed the way I see Syracuse because I really never left campus before I went to his class, and it just really opened my eyes to see what more this is besides the university.”

That’s exactly what Muhammad wants to continue to do with his life: make an impact on people.

“I’m like the dude on the beach with starfish,” he said, picking up an imaginary starfish and throwing it in an ocean that only he can see, retelling the story of a guy who keeps picking up starfish and throwing them in the ocean so they wouldn’t die.

“Can I make a difference to everything? I don’t know. But, I can make a difference to that one,” Muhammad said, pointing to a starfish that is on the beach only he sees.



> Mark Muhammad is also a Syracuse University adjunct professor and teaches students about their community. | Lateshia Beachum, Staff Photo

BRIEF TIMELINE OF THE NATION OF ISLAM

July 4, 1930: Wallace D. Fard Muhammad founded NOI in Detroit, Michigan

1934: Elijah Muhammad takes leadership of NOI after W.D. Fard Muhammad’s disappearance. Elijah was chosen by W.D. Fard Muhammad as his successor and had studied under him for three and a half years.

1942: Elijah Muhammad is jailed for not going into the draft, which went against his beliefs.

1946-1952: Malcolm Little is serving time for burglary. He becomes attracted to the Nation during his time. He later changes his last name to X and becomes one of the Nation’s most prominent and charismatic leaders.

1955: Louis Walcott joins the Nation and studies under Malcolm X.

1965: Malcolm X is assassinated in New York while trying to give a speech to the Organization of Afro-American Unity.

1975: Elijah Muhammad dies and his son, Warith Deen Mohammed, takes leadership of NOI.

Mohammed eschews many of his father’s views by welcoming all races to the faith, proclaiming that W.D. Fard Muhammad was not divine and that his father was not a prophet and by transitioning the beliefs of the faith to align more with Sunni Islam.

1977: Louis Farrakhan departs from Mohammed’s American Society of Muslims and wants to rebuild what Elijah Muhammad taught. He extensively travels across the country to gain supporters.

1995: Farrakhan’s leadership combines with the success of the “Million Man March” in Washington, D.C., which promotes the unification of the black race and the black family structure.

2000: Farrakhan and W. Deen Mohammed at a Nation of Islam convention where they put aside their differences and call for unity among all Muslims.

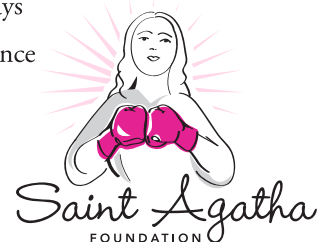
2010: Farrakhan embraces the Scientology practice of dianetics, which examines how the mind affects the body.

Do you need help with your breast cancer bills?

The Saint Agatha Foundation has established funds at area hospitals and medical providers to provide financial support for breast cancer patients in Onondaga, Cortland, Cayuga, Madison, Oneida, and Oswego Counties, New York.

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- ▶ Transportation to and from treatment, child care
- ▶ Prescription and procedural co-pays
- ▶ Medication not covered by insurance
- ▶ Wound care systems
- ▶ Breast reconstruction
- ▶ Lymphedema sleeves



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WHAT TO KNOW

Onondaga Community College typically costs \$6,114 per year for Onondaga County residents and \$10,414 for non-residents. With P-Tech, classes are free for at least two years.

P-Tech graduates receive a NYS Regents Diploma, a Technical Endorsement and a no-cost Associate in Applied Science Degree from OCC in Electrical Engineering Technology or Mechanical Technology.

Partners: Syracuse City School District, The Manufacturers Association of Central New York and Onondaga Community College

P-Tech programs around the state **prepare students** for **technology, manufacturing, healthcare and engineering jobs.**

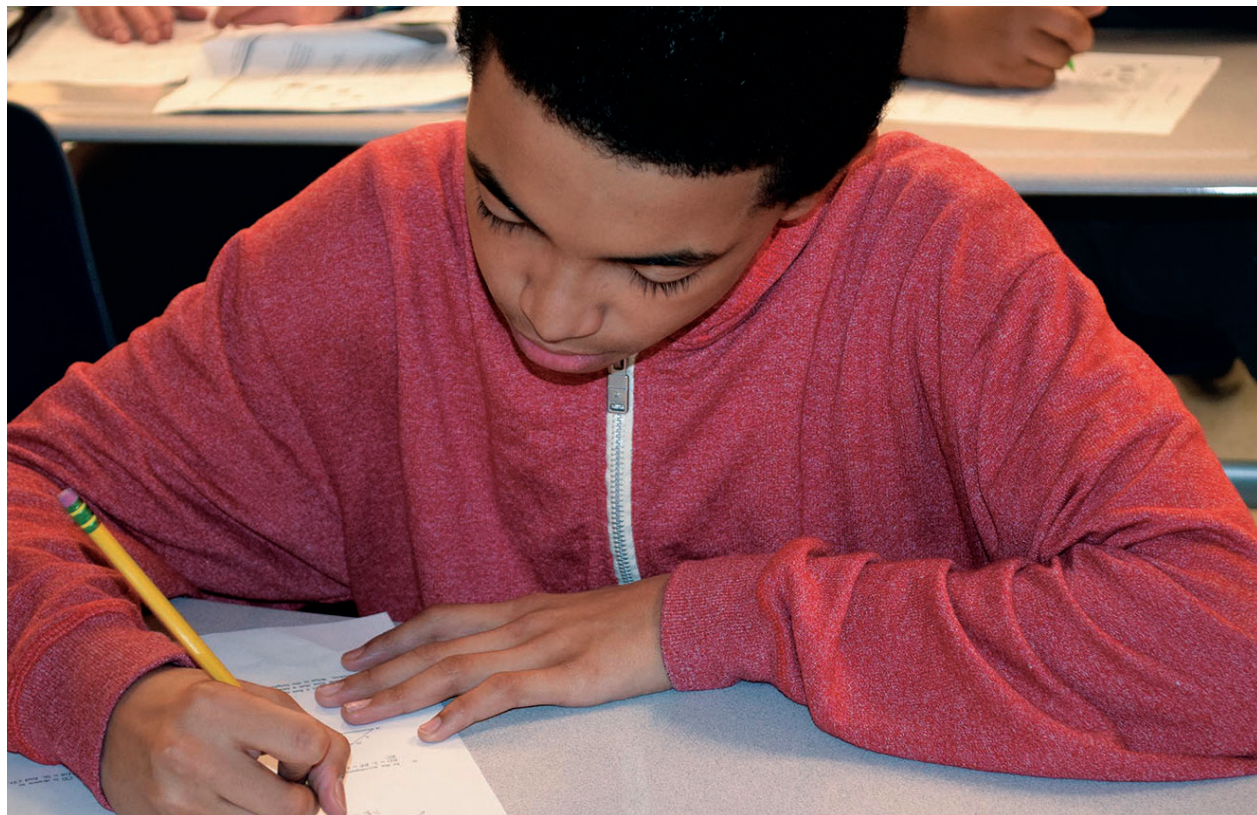
The organizations received the grant in September 2013. The students started the program in September 2014.

OCC OPEN HOUSE

OCC has Spring Open House set for Friday, April 10. Visit sunyocc.edu or call (315) 498-2000

GETTING TECHNICAL

P-Tech gives students opportunities in higher education, professional fields



> ITC freshman Andru Skinkle, who is in the P-Tech program, completes a worksheet. | Dante Geddes, ITC media student

By | Trevor Hass
Urban Affairs reporter

Program combines high school, college and real-world training for technology careers

Whenever Jo'sada Pacheco's grandmother gets a new phone, she goes straight to Jo'sada for advice. The buttons and features confuse her, but Jo'sada is there to help.

Recently her grandmother's computer broke, and Jo'sada was there to delete the unnecessary files and get the device up and running.

"I played with toys, but then when I hit a certain age I didn't want to play with toys anymore," Jo'sada said. "I got a phone, and I wanted to learn more about it."

Jo'sada's passion for fixing things has stemmed into a career goal of becoming an electrical engineer. She is now a freshman in the first class of the Pathways in Technology Early College High School program, known as P-Tech, which is located at Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central, known as ITC.

P-Tech is a six-year program that combines high school, college and career training. Each student, upon getting accepted, has a chance to attend Onondaga

Community College for free and graduate with an associate level degree.

On Jan. 20, in his State of the Union address, President Barack Obama called for free community college for all qualified, interested students. New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo believes the P-Tech programs will prepare more than 10,000 students, including those in Syracuse, for "high-skills jobs."

"It's brand new," ITC Principal Donna Formica said. "We're getting our feet wet."

Jo'sada and her classmate, Andru Skinkle, are two of 47 students in ITC's first P-Tech class, which Cuomo introduced in September 2013 as one of 16 such state-wide programs. The Syracuse City School District, the Manufacturers Association of Central New York and OCC formed a partnership, and Cuomo granted the three partners a total of \$2.4 million over seven years.

The backbone of the program is the relationship students build with mentors. Andru, a freshman from Utica, has worked alongside three professionals at National Grid. After taking a tour of National Grid and learning about the company, Andru and his peers created a Prezi to show what they learned.

His mentors critiqued the Prezi, praising elements



> Jo'sada Pacheco, who is interested in technology, works alongside a classmate. | Davon Bacon, ITC media student

they enjoyed and offering constructive feedback on other parts of the presentation.

"To see freshmen in high school working shoulder to shoulder with professionals is outstanding," P-Tech coordinator Nick Lisi said.

Andru, who in eighth grade attended a seminar, interviewed and accepted an offer to join P-Tech, hopes to become an electrical engineer. While many of his peers are unsure which professional route to take, he's already gaining practical experience in his field at age 15.

He's also a member of the National Society of Black Engineers. Last year he helped his team to third place in a national Mathnasium TriMathlon competition in Tennessee, and this March he and his team will venture to California for another competition.

Before the competition, Andru has to continue to hone his skills in school.

The P-Tech students' day is structured like that of a typical high school student, but they have an additional Introduction to Engineering and Design class. Once they get older, they start taking classes at OCC.

Andru has no problem reading "Fences" by August Wilson in English class, but his true interest lies in engineering, and he appreciates how much he's able to learn in a program that's tailored to people like him. His eyes light up as he talks about his engineering class.

"Most of the program is decided out for you," Andru said. "It helps you get started."

He recently toured Ephesus Lighting, Inc., on East Jefferson Street, and learned about spotlights in sporting facilities. Now he knows what companies do to help arenas use minimal energy.

Formica, in her first year as ITC's principal, helped launch the P-Tech program. She hopes to increase the number of P-Tech students from 47 to 55 next year, and she expects the program will continue to improve.

"We've seen some things we'd like to do a little bit better," Formica said. "We're in the process right now of developing the six-year scope and sequence. What do students truly need when they come into ninth grade?"

Formica noted how taking classes on a college campus gives students a chance to learn from terrific educators. Many of these students would otherwise not have an opportunity to go to college, but P-Tech enables them to do so.

Right now, P-Tech has more than 20 business partners, ranging from Lockheed Martin, to United Radio, to Tech Bridge International. Lisi, the P-Tech coordinator, lists each organization with enthusiasm. When he reaches the bottom of the spreadsheet on his computer, he looks up and smiles, clasping his hands.

"And we just started!" he says with a grin.

Sally Whitney, director of Enrollment Development at OCC, is involved with the OCC side of P-Tech. She noted that while Obama's initiative is a new idea, significant steps already have been taken toward emphasizing and bettering community college education.

Programs such as P-Tech benefit students because they are exposed to fields they will be working in just a few years later as professionals, Whitney said. One class in particular, Computer Aided Design, gives students a chance to work with advanced software.

"There's been research that shows when students are engaged in a technical program they're more likely to graduate," Whitney said. "I think opening up more programs like P-Tech will continue to expand opportunities for students."

Jo'sada knows the majority of people working with computers professionally are male. That doesn't deter her. If anything, it inspires her.

"When I was little I always wanted to work with phones and computers and electric and stuff like that," Jo'sada said. "I was like, 'This is what I want to do when I get older.'"

"Now, with P-Tech, that's what I've been doing."

POLITICAL INITIATIVE

One of President Barack Obama's goals is to produce an additional 5 million community college graduates by 2020.

New York Gov. Andrew Cuomo, in line with Obama's goal, allocated \$56 million in new state funding over eight years to open 16 P-Tech programs.

ON THE SIDE

FREE TESTING

The Onondaga County Health Department provides free and confidential testing and treatment for sexually transmitted infections, or STI. Visit the center at 421 Montgomery St. on the basement level in Room 80; no appointment is needed.

Hours:

Mondays: 9 to 10:30 a.m., 1 to 3 p.m.

Tuesdays: 12:30 to 4:30 p.m.

Wednesdays: Closed

Thursdays: 1 to 3 p.m.

Fridays: 9 to 10:30 a.m.

Call (315) 435-3236

NUMBER OF CASES

Cases of syphilis in Onondaga County:

2008: 3 Cases

2011: 14 Cases

2014: 56 Cases

PREVENTION TIPS

Awareness can lower one's risk for an initial infection or re-infection with syphilis or other STIs: abstaining from sex; practicing safer sex by using a condom or dental dam during vaginal, anal and oral sex; knowing and limiting one's sex partners; knowing if one's partner(s) engages in risky sexual behaviors; getting tested.

KNOW THE SYMPTOMS

Number of syphilis cases increases significantly in Onondaga County

By | Shante Harris El
FNPC and The Stand board member

It is important to know the signs of syphilis, how it's diagnosed and how it's treated

Between the years 2008 and 2014, the number of syphilis cases in Onondaga County has increased more than 1,800 percent.

Dr. Indu Gupta, the Onondaga County Health Commissioner, and other health officials reported on the implications of the rise in syphilis cases at a press conference in February at ACR Health in Syracuse. State health officials say in 2014 Onondaga County had the highest rates of syphilis cases in all of Central New York. Over the past seven years, the number of cases has risen each year. This surge has public health officials worried. According to Gupta, syphilis was considered nearly eliminated in the United States in 2000. Health officials are urging awareness, testing, treatment and prevention.

WHAT IS SYPHILIS?

Syphilis is an infection caused by bacteria that is spread from one person to another primarily through unprotected vaginal, anal and oral sex. The exact origin of syphilis is unknown, but it was first reported in Europe in 1494 among soldiers (and their followers) involved in a war between France and Naples. Syphilis infections may also be spread from mother to infant through the placenta or during childbirth. This is known as congenital syphilis.

WHAT ARE THE SYMPTOMS?

Syphilis develops in stages, and symptoms vary with each stage. The stages may overlap, and symptoms don't always occur in the same order. Syphilis infection can go undetected and without any symptoms for years. Syphilis has four stages: primary, secondary, latent and tertiary.

Each stage can last for several years, but syphilis is most infectious in the first two stages.

During the first or primary stage of syphilis, one may or may not notice a single sore, called a chancre, but there may be multiple sores. The sore is the location where syphilis entered the body. The sore is usually firm, round and painless. Because the sore is painless, it can easily go unnoticed.

In the secondary stage, the bacteria spreads through the blood to the skin, liver, joints, lymph nodes, muscles and brain. A rash frequently appears about six weeks to three months after the original chancre has healed. The

rash may cover any part of the body, but tends to erupt on the palms or soles of the feet.

If syphilis is not treated during the primary or secondary stages, the infection moves to the latent or hidden stage. This happens after the primary and secondary symptoms have disappeared, and there are no symptoms.

About 15 to 30 percent of people infected with syphilis who don't get treatment will develop complications known as tertiary or late syphilis. In the late stage, the disease may damage the brain, nerves, eyes, heart, blood vessels, liver, bones and joints. These problems may occur three to 15 years after the original, untreated infection.

If untreated or treated in the late stage, syphilis causes irreversible neurological and cardiovascular damage.

Most newborns with congenital syphilis have no symptoms, although some experience a rash on the palms of their hands and the soles of their feet. Later, symptoms may include deafness, teeth deformities and saddle nose — where the bridge of the nose collapses.

HOW IS SYPHILIS DIAGNOSED?

The diagnosis of syphilis is most commonly made by blood testing. Some health care providers will diagnose syphilis by testing fluid from a syphilis sore.

The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention has issued a screening and treatment guideline for syphilis and other sexually transmitted infections, or STI.

According to these guidelines, a non-pregnant woman should be tested for syphilis based on her risk: if she is positive for other STI; has a bisexual male partner; is a commercial sex worker; is incarcerated or her male partner is incarcerated; or she uses intravenous illicit drugs.

A heterosexual man should be tested also based on his risk: if he is positive for other STI; has commercial sex worker exposure; is incarcerated; or uses intravenous illicit drugs.

A homosexual man should be tested every year and more frequently based upon his risk: if he has multiple or anonymous partners; has sex in conjunction with illicit drug use; has sex partner(s) who participate in these activities.

HOW IS SYPHILIS TREATED?

Penicillin antibiotic is the treatment of choice for treating syphilis. If detected early, syphilis may be cured with a single dose of penicillin. The antibiotic is also fairly effective in treating the later stages of the infection.



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HOW TO GET INVOLVED

Fathers who want to be in the case-management part of the program can get a referral from a doctor's office or other local agency that works with Healthy Families.

Fathers can also enroll directly by calling (315) 435-2000.

Fathers not interested in case management but who want to be part of the support groups should contact John Akins at (315) 671-5821.

Fathers can also attend Fatherhood Committee meetings. These meetings take place on the second Monday of each month at 3 p.m. at the Southwest Community Center's Power Room, 401 South Ave.

SUPPORT FOR DADS

As their population grows, single fathers need help as much as ever



> John Akins, the director of the Fatherhood Initiative, says the biggest concerns for local fathers are economic and legal issues. | Jessica Iannetta, Staff Photo

By | Jessica Iannetta
Urban Affairs reporter

A new program called the Fatherhood Initiative helps with support groups, case management

As a single father for the past two years, Anthony Pitts relies on the resources of the Southwest Community Center to help raise his 10-year-old son, Amarri.

Pitts, a community outreach worker for Syracuse Save Our Youth, works at the center, and Amarri is there almost every day after school. Amarri does his homework there, participates in programs and is even a peer educator, helping other kids with their homework. The two sometimes don't leave the center until 8:30 at night.

But not all fathers have access to this same support system. While many resources available to single mothers are also available to single fathers, Pitts said he doesn't think most fathers in Syracuse are aware of them.

"Someone is always willing to help a woman," he said. "Whereas a man, they feel he should be able to do it on his own."

The Fatherhood Initiative, a new program started in September by Syracuse Healthy Start, hopes to change this by supporting fathers and encouraging them to be a part of their children's lives. The initiative is part of a nationwide push by Healthy Start to make sure fathers have the same resources available to them as mothers do, said Lisa GreenMills, program coordinator for Syracuse Healthy Start.

The launch of the Fatherhood Initiative comes at a



> Anthony Pitts and his son, Amarri, 10, at the Southwest Community Center. | Jessica Iannetta, Staff Photo

time when the role of a father is being redefined. A June 2013 Pew Research Center study found that Americans now expect fathers to be more of a moral teacher and emotional comforter than a breadwinner or disciplinarian. Fathers are spending more time with their kids, too — three times the number of hours they were spending in 1965, according to the study. That's a good sign, since the study found that 69 percent of Americans say having a father in the home is essential to a child's happiness.

There has also been a rise in the number of single fathers nationally, according to a July 2013 Pew study. Single fathers make up 24 percent of single-parent households today, compared with just 14 percent in 1960. White single fathers make up 56 percent of this number, and 15 percent are black, according to the study. These numbers are small compared with single mothers. In 2011, there were 8.6 million single-mother households, compared with just 2.6 million single-father households.

Local trends are similar, GreenMills said, and the initiative is designed to help fathers be more involved in their children's lives. The initiative, which is open to all fathers in Onondaga County, has two main parts. The first is a case management program where fathers can get one-on-one help with legal, educational and financial problems, finding a job and any other personal issues. The second part, which will launch soon, involves support and educational groups for fathers, GreenMills said.

Another important part of the program is the Fatherhood Committee, which brings together different local groups that provide services for fathers. This includes groups that help with men's health, provide parenting

classes, or that help with legal problems, GreenMills said.

“There’s a lot of programs in Syracuse that can support men but they may not know about them,” she said. “So we’re bringing together all these services and trying to make men aware, making them available, making them more accessible so people can be successful.”

Even though the initiative just started accepting cases in late November, there are already five fathers in the initiative’s case management program, said John Akins, a community health worker for Syracuse Healthy Start who runs the initiative.

Akins conducted a community assessment prior to the start of the initiative to better understand the needs and concerns of fathers in the area. Some of the main concerns expressed by fathers were economic and legal issues, he said. But Akins was also pleasantly surprised to see how many fathers said they wanted a good relationship with their children’s mother so they can be a better co-parent.

This last concern hit home for Akins. His two biological children live in North Carolina with their mother, whom Akins did not have a good relationship with initially. But then Akins’ mother gave him some advice: “Persistence overcomes resistance.”

“My relationship with my biological children and their mother now is the result of persistence. I cared enough to keep trying,” Akins said. “When the door got closed, I cared enough to keep going back. When the phone got hung up, I cared to keep calling. After a while, things just kind of started to fall in place.”

Akins’ two daughters, now 19 and 21, are both in college. He still has a good relationship with them and their mother. Akins also has stepchildren, who call him DASH (short for Dads Are Sweet Hearts). Through the Fatherhood Initiative, Akins hopes to help other fathers dealing with similar issues get where he is today.

“My daughters didn’t have a chance to grow up in my home, but I was still able to have a level of success that I’m really, really proud of,” he said. “So maybe, just maybe I can help someone else with their children out of the home. Maybe I can give a little bit back.”



“I cared enough to keep trying.”

— John Akins

FATHERHOOD SERIES

In this new series, we will honor fathers. Recent studies found African-American fathers are more involved with their children on a daily basis than dads from other racial groups and much more involved than fathers from a decade ago. Thus, The Stand’s new Fatherhood Series will share touching, enlightening and encouraging stories from South Side fathers.

| Alexandra Hootnick, Staff Photo

KNOW A FATHER TO SPOTLIGHT?

To nominate a father, send a short explanation with contact information to The Stand Director Ashley Kang by calling (315) 882-1054 or emailing ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

OPEN DISCUSSION

Three South Side fathers discuss misconceptions and stereotypes they hear about African-American dads.

TIMOTHY JENNINGS-BEY

Trauma response director at Save Our Youth

“They portray it as if there was absence. Like, there’s no good fathers among so-called African-American people and that’s not the case. Every home, every child is not fatherless. Every family doesn’t have a dad that’s in prison or the graveyard or you know, using substances. The proof is right here. The three of us right here. We already beat the odds. So that’s the biggest challenge, the stereotypes that come along with us for being fathers. Now if you flip the coin to a so-called white neighborhood, fatherhood is celebrated on many different levels. Now, don’t get me wrong, we don’t expect anyone outside of us, we celebrate each other in our own way, but the broader society, it’s always a fight for us.”

ANTHONY PITTS

Outreach worker at Syracuse Save Our Youth

“I was thinking along the same lines, the low expectations. They don’t expect our kids to do well. They don’t expect us to support our kids. So, it’s like, are you really looking? A lot of us are supporting our kids, and our kids are doing well but they don’t really celebrate that. They would rather tell the horror story instead of the long road that some kid is taking to achieve success without any accolades.”

LAWRENCE WILLIAMS

Program Director of Syracuse Save Our Youth

“You know one of the most beautiful times of the day is this time of the day when the kids are here and seeing how many of these kids, their fathers are involved. That never gets highlighted. I mean, we’ve got to celebrate our queens, which are the mothers, but we’ve got fathers that are here, that are intricately involved any time of the day, with homework, with aftercare, with the whole nine yards. And that’s a wonderful thing, that’s a gift, that’s a celebration.”

WANDA SYKES

SATURDAY, APRIL 18



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