

the Stand

south side news

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Syracuse, NY

OCTOBER 2015 Issue 45 FREE

QUANTE WRIGHT

Former gang member tells story of his new life after troubled past

Father to father to son
Antwaun Dixon is featured in latest Fatherhood Q/A

tiny home

Meet Ted Bauer, an Army vet who plans to have his own space

Filming for history
Project will document local angle of Million Man March

HEALTHY STROLL IN PARK



INSIDE | OCTOBER

the
Stand

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SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH

DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,
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THE STAND IS BASED OUT OF THE
SOUTH SIDE COMMUNICATION CENTER
2331 SOUTH SALINA STREET
SYRACUSE, NY 13205

HEALTH | How to stay healthy? Community members learned about exercise and nutritious eating at a health fair and fitness walk around Kirk Park.

COMMUNITY | Meet Army veteran Ted Bauer, who has been living without a home, but who soon might have a place to call his own through A Tiny Home for Good program.

FATHERHOOD | Learn about Antwaun Dixon's relationship with his own father and how it has helped him to nurture the bond with his son, 6-year-old Antwaun Dixon II.

FEATURE | Former Brighton Brigade member Quante Wright and former gang leader General Davis share their stories about how each has moved forward.

COMMUNITY | Find out why Brenda Muhammad returned to school to be a filmmaker and how she plans to document the 20th anniversary of the Million Man March.

■ Cover photography of Quante Wright by Ben Cleeton

CALENDAR | OCTOBER

What: Workshop "The Calling of Delight: Gangs, Service and Kinship"
When: 9 a.m. to 3 p.m. Friday, Oct. 9
Where: The Bishop Harrison Community Center at All Saints Parish, 1342 Lancaster Ave.
Cost: Free
More details: Father Greg Boyle, an American Jesuit priest, founder and director of Homeboy Industries and author of "Tattoos on the Heart: The Power of Boundless Compassion," will visit Syracuse and make a presentation, along with others who have struggled with life within the gang culture. A panel will include members of the Trauma Response Team: Larry Williams (moderator), Tim Jennings Bey and Arnett Haygood-El.
To register: Call (315) 472-9934, ext. 4

What: 8th Annual Halloween Spooktacular
When: 4:30 to 7 p.m. Thursday, Oct. 29
Where: Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.
Cost: Free
More details: Join the library for a fun-filled night of games, crafts, food and activities for the entire family. Arrive in costume if you'd like!
More Info.: Call the library at (315) 435-3395 and ask for Christine

MEET OUR NEW STAFF REPORTER, ASHLEY McBRIDE

Ashley is a master's student studying Magazine, Newspaper and Online journalism at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications.

A Florida native, McBride earned her undergraduate degree in journalism at the University of Miami in 2015. She worked at various campus publications there. While reporting and writing for The Stand, McBride hopes to cover communities and people that do not receive extensive coverage in mainstream publications.



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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.

Last month you met Quante Wright in our collection of Fatherhood Q&As. You also might recognize his name from headlines on stories in The Post-Standard about how he earned an associate degree despite being a felon and on parole; how he subsequently was fired from his job at a car dealership; and how he violated parole and spent Father's Day weekend in jail.

Wright reached out to The Stand to share his story directly with his community. Read the feature about him starting on Page 10. You also can talk with Wright — along with General Davis, who is profiled in the piece — at our workshop this month.



We welcome new student reporters from an advanced reporting class who have begun a semester of reporting for The Stand. Four students will focus on the South Side neighborhood for their reporting beats. And a Newhouse Fellowship student joined us as staff reporter for the year. She will contribute to the print paper and also will cover local meetings and events, which will be featured online at mysouthsidestand.com.

We have a great pool of student talent, including photo student volunteers, to tell South Side residents' stories. In this month's issue, their first stories are featured.

Our staff reporter, Ashley McBride, profiles former community correspondent Brenda Muhammad, who is now a graduate student in the Newhouse School's Documentary Film & History program. Muhammad is working to complete a film based on local residents' experiences with the Million Man March, which will celebrate its 20th anniversary this month. Local organizers will take a bus to Washington, D.C., and there is still time to reserve a seat. Learn more on Page 18.

We also profile a future resident of A Tiny Home for Good, which is a project intended to build a collection of small homes for homeless veterans in two locations on the South Side. Reporter Kayli Thompson's story is on Page 6, and she plans to follow this story into November with a timeline of the project and a progress report from the program's director, Andrew Lunetta.

Lastly, meet this month's profiled father, Antwaun Dixon, on Page 8. If you have a father to nominate, send me a bit about him and how we can get in touch with him.

Ashley Kang

UPCOMING EVENTS

Oct. 10

Behind the Scenes with Quante Wright

When: 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 10

Where: South Side Communication Center, located at 2331 S. Salina St.

Details: Staff of The Stand and those featured in this issue's cover story will share a behind-the-scenes look at how the story developed. Readers will be able to ask Quante Wright and General Davis questions directly and learn more about how The Stand newspaper is produced. Readers can even share their own story ideas.

Cost: Free and open to all. Coffee and refreshments will be provided.

RSVP: Email The Stand's director, Ashley Kang, at ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

CALL FOR NEW BOARD MEMBERS

The Stand currently has openings for community members to join our Board of Directors.

Board members meet every other month for two hours on a Saturday morning. Members discuss story suggestions, events, advertising opportunities and workshop offerings.

The Board is searching for someone ready to become an

active member, suggest ideas and represent others in the South Side community. An ideal candidate will also have advertising experience and help boost the project's ad revenue.

If interested, submit a letter of interest along with a short bio and resume to The Stand's director by email to ashley@mysouthsidestand.com.

STAYING HEALTHY

What is Syracuse Healthy Start?

Syracuse Healthy Start is a team of community health workers, educators, medical providers and community agencies working to improve the lives of women, children and families in Syracuse.

Who has access?

Syracuse Healthy Start is available to pregnant women and families with a baby younger than 2 years old who live in the city of Syracuse.

What help is offered?

- Finding housing
- Finding healthcare
- Applying for public assistance
- Learning how to stop smoking and stop using drugs and alcohol

ACTIVELY BONDING

Fitness walk features more activities and draws more participants



> The Syracuse Stroll attracted members of the community who called out chants as they walked and invited people they passed to join in the activities. | Jon Mettus, Staff Photo

By | Jon Mettus
Urban Affairs reporter

Syracuse Healthy Start promotes awareness of infant mortality by hosting a day of events

In a sign that South Siders are embracing the idea of good health, exercise and nutritious eating, about 75 people turned out in Kirk Park recently for the neighborhood's annual fitness walk.

Syracuse Healthy Start, a program run by the Onondaga County Health Department to promote healthy pregnancies, launched Syracuse Stroll five years ago. Since then, the walk and health fair have evolved into a local tradition — although one that organizers say has plenty of room to grow.

“My favorite part is seeing the babies,” said Selina Lazarus, Healthy Start’s consortium coordinator. “The moms coming out with their babies — the babies who have reached their first birthdays and the new moms coming out to join us.”

Part of the event’s mission is to increase awareness of infant mortality rates.

For every 1,000 babies born in the U.S., six die during their first year, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. In Syracuse, African-American infants die at a rate of 12.4 per 1,000 live births compared to 5.8 white babies per 1,000, according to an Onondaga County Health Department press release.

“It’s raising awareness,” said Onondaga County Health Commissioner Dr. Indu Gupta. “In this day and age, in the United States of America, we shouldn’t be talking about that. There is something at the social level. What kind of support systems can we provide?”

The health fair, held Sept. 12, started at 10:30 a.m. on the covered basketball courts in the park. A yoga demonstration began, and participants decorated their strollers with balloons and streamers. Most people in attendance wore black T-shirts that said “Moms & Dads & Babies & Families & Communities” on the front and “We’re all in this together” on the back.

Nine educational tables were set up in the area, representing groups such as: the Onondaga Health Department: REACH CNY, which stands for Resources, Education, Advocacy and Collaboration for Health Central New York; and Children’s Consortium.

At 11:20 a.m., participants began the roughly 1.4-mile walk around Kirk Park, which lasted about 37 minutes. Chants of “when I say Syracuse, you say stroll” and “when I say healthy, you say start” constantly erupted as the group walked down the road, escorted by two Syracuse Police Department cars.

Passers-by beeped their car horns, and people in their homes came outside to see what was happening.

“I think it’s amazing,” Syracuse resident Tamar Smithers said. “I can’t wait to see it grow in years.” Smithers’ favorite part was “the sense of community.

“We’re trying to build a ‘community feel’ around motherhood, around parenthood, around family development”

— Lisa GreenMills

Seeing people speak to people who were in houses and looking.”

When the walk ended, participants returned to the basketball courts to the sound of “We Are the Champions” by Queen playing.

The walk was followed by lunch and a mental and physical fitness group activity led by H2Fitness. Participants formed a large circle to complete group challenges. H2Fitness has been involved for the past three years.

“We’re trying to build a ‘community feel’ around motherhood, around parenthood, around family development,” said Lisa GreenMills, Healthy Start’s program coordinator.

Since the Syracuse Stroll began in 2010, more activities have been added. Yoga made its debut this year. The trails around Kirk Park have been improved, making the walk safer.

But the Syracuse Stroll struggles to attract the number of people that coordinators would like, said REACH CNY executive director Liz Crockett.

Syracuse Healthy Start’s Lazarus said the organization is considering moving the event to earlier in the summer because while September is Infant Mortality Awareness Month, there’s often poor weather.

Crockett added that the Syracuse Stroll could be combined with a Syracuse Department of Parks and Recreation summer festival in Kirk Park during July or August.

“We just would like 100 more families here and we do struggle to do that,” she said.

OCTOBER CALENDAR

HEALTHY START FAMILY EVENTS

Breastfeeding Cafe
Thursday, Oct. 8
11:30 a.m. to 1 p.m.
Reach CNY
1010 James St.

Fatherhood Committee
Monday, Oct. 12
3 to 4 p.m.
Southwest Community Center
401 South Ave.

Real Moms of Syracuse
Wednesday, Oct. 21
1 to 2 p.m.
Southwest Community Center
401 South Ave.



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PEDAL 2 POSSIBILITIES

The program is open 7:30 to 11 a.m., with the bike ride from 9 to 10 a.m. Monday, Wednesday, Friday

Meet at the center at 8:45 a.m. to ride. Bikes are provided. After 10 rides, cyclists get a free bike, helmet and lock.

VETERAN HOUSING

National hotline
1-877-4AID-VET
(877) 424-3838

Syracuse Homeless Veterans Program (315) 425-4400 x 54428

A SPACE OF HIS OWN

With the help of a community organization, a veteran will gain a home



> Ted Bauer, 59, a future resident of a tiny home, stands on the plot of land at South Salina and Glen Avenue, where A Tiny Home for Good plans to break ground and build its first set of homes. | Kayli Thompson, Staff Photo

By | Kayli Thompson
Urban Affairs reporter

Grateful for the assist, Ted Bauer says others will be helped, too — “It’s not just for me”

Ted Bauer, 59-year-old Army veteran, has no permanent home to call his own. He lacks a place to return to each night, put his feet up and rest in comfort. But that’s not what his friends say defines him. Nor, he said, does he let it stop him from doing the things he wants and feels he should be doing.

Bauer will be a resident of A Tiny Home for Good, said its executive director, Andrew Lunetta. The non-profit organization, dedicated to providing safe and affordable homes to the homeless, has proposed building on a plot of land at the corner of South Salina Street and East Glen Avenue. The first set of homes on this plot would be reserved for veterans.

“It’s not just for me, it’s for other people,” Bauer said. “It improves their lives, too.”

Bauer is originally from Denver, Colorado, but moved to Syracuse in 1992 after being in the Army for 10 years. He stayed in Syracuse because some of his friends were here, and he had gotten involved in some

church groups, specifically one at the Brady Faith Center, 404 South Ave. He got involved in the men’s Bible study group and Pedals 2 Possibilities, a program to promote individual well-being. He has been a member of the community ever since.

However, he has lived without a home since 2011. Since then, he has spent his days at the Hazard Branch Library, 1620 W. Genesee St., and the Brady Faith Center. At night, he stays at friends’ homes or at shelters such as the Rescue Mission. He’s what the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development refers to as a couch-hopper. He’s not in the homeless category because he’s not on the streets or in shelters.

Shelters are difficult for a clean and sober person like Bauer because the majority of shelters are full of struggling individuals, and homelessness isn’t their only problem, said Kristen Kratzert, a physician at Women’s Wellness Place. She also is chair of the board of directors of A Tiny Home for Good and has known Bauer for more than two years. She considers him a good friend.

Bauer has been a driving force in her life, she said, because without him, she never would have gotten involved in half the things she does, such as CNY Tour de Cure, an annual fundraising bicycle ride to help find a cure for diabetes.

“Ted is always, always working to better other people, including himself,” she said.

Being without a place to call home is hard, but Bauer says he doesn't let it get the best of him. He spends much of his free time with friends and caring for others — whether that's in the form of fundraising or making someone feel better when they've had a bad day.

“The secret of life is helping someone else,” he said.

Lunetta describes him as an incredible individual who is sensitive, caring and dedicated.

“If you ask him to do something, it's going to be completed, no question about it,” Lunetta said.

Bauer has ridden his bicycle across the country four times, Lunetta said. The trip is with Cycle America, Bauer said, and cyclists ride from Seattle, Washington, to Gloucester, Massachusetts.

Brady Faith Center Coordinator Trevor Williams, who has known Bauer for four years, says Bauer has taken time to better himself by going back to school.

When Bauer found out that another friend of four years, Robert Walter, had Type 2 diabetes, he got involved with CNY Tour de Cure.

Bauer's friends are hoping that the tiny homes will be built and that Bauer will finally have a space to call his own. They want to help him just as much as he has helped them, especially since he has served the country.

“I know that Ted would do the same thing for me if I was in the same situation,” said Bob Mumm, who has

known Bauer for 20 years and has been a member of the Brady Faith Center since 1997. Moving into a tiny home, which is a total of 250 square feet, would give Bauer independence, he said.

Lunetta started A Tiny Home for Good in 2014 for this very reason. He first got the idea while volunteering at the Catholic Charities men's shelter. He saw men move from the shelter to permanent housing but have to return to the shelter because the housing wasn't actually affordable, it was infested with bed bugs or dangerous.

He realized there had to be a better way to help people facing homelessness. While trying to figure out the better way, he fell in love with the tiny home movement. That's when A Tiny Home for Good was born.

He said that interacting with and becoming close friends with the men at the Brady Faith Center who would truly benefit from the project is the reason he continues to pursue building the homes despite obstacles. At two community meetings recently, residents voiced their concerns about the homes and about the people who will live in them. It also has taken Lunetta time to find the right property on which to build the small homes while meeting zoning standards for multi-family homes.

Lunetta said he believes that it is the right thing to do and that there have to be better options rather than sleeping under a bridge.

“I find it very difficult to imagine that someone doesn't deserve a home,” he said.

ANDREW LUNETTA



He is the sole employee of A Tiny Home for Good, but he has the support of a 10-member board. He secured a small office in June on the second floor of the Westside Learning Center, 422 Gifford St.



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Antwaun Dixon

*Nominated by Rachel Levens from
Tucker Missionary Baptist Church*

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

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

A: It was the best feeling of my life. I always asked God if I could have my first child before I turned 30. I had my son when I was 27. He came right when I wanted him. He's everything to me.

Q: What can you share about your son?

A: It's ironic. He looks just like me and is named Antwaun Dixon II but acts just like his mother. I'm really quiet and calm, and his mother is animated and active. He attends Syracuse Latin School, plays Pop Warner football and is very intelligent. Some of his statements can be a little sarcastic, and I can be that way, too. We both like to laugh and play. He's a great guy.

Q: What was your relationship like with your father and what similarities and differences do you share?

A: My father was busy. He had a lot going on so I couldn't get a chance to see him as much as I would have liked. Similarities, he really expressed to me the things that it took to be a man. He wanted to make sure that I understood that sometimes, in particular with being a black male, that there are going to be hardships that I will need to overcome. Reminding me that I have to stay hard enough to deal with all of them, all the insecurities and all the obstructions that come up against you. Differences, even though I have a very busy schedule, I do everything that I can to make everything that my son does. He plays football. I try and make every practice and every game. If he wins awards at school, I try and make those presentations.

Q: Why are fathers important?

A: To set the groundwork and the framework — not so much just for being a man — but for being a good human being and a good citizen. Mothers do a lot with that, too, but it takes a man to raise a man. In order for him to endure some of the things that he's going to have to deal with — and in particular being a black man — he's going to have to see somebody overcome those obstacles.

Q: What priorities do you hold for your son?

A: I live by two things. Take care of home first. You always make sure friends and family, you're helping them. The other is follow the Golden Rule. Treat others like you want to be treated. Always making sure you give people the respect they deserve, to in return get respect. And if you don't, to do your best to turn the other cheek and learn from it.

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

A: I'm pretty transparent. I do the typical things. Play, wrestle, watch cartoons. I'm a goofball. Without a doubt, you could say my wife has two kids. But she joins in the fun, too.



MEET FATHER ANTWAUN: Dixon, 34, works as a math teacher at the Syracuse City School District's Middle School Alternative Program at Shea. He also is working on his doctorate in educational leadership at Syracuse University. Dixon is the father of a 6-year-old son, Antwaun Dixon II. | Jingyu Wan, Staff Photo

Q: Any advice for other dads?

A: Sometimes it's a struggle but the best bet is that all your decisions should be made with the thought of 'how is this helping out my family.' Sometimes I may look at something that I want, but I understand that their needs trump my wants. If you think about every decision you make with your family's best interest in mind, then you'll be OK.

Q: What is a favorite moment you've shared with your son?

A: This summer we went to Disney World. We had a special time as a family, and it was his first chance to ride some of the rides. Seeing the look on his face and his excitement for being tall enough to ride. It was great.

Q: Final thoughts?

A: I appreciate this. When you work hard as a father and then get that noticed, it feels good. There's a lot of effort and energy that goes into it and to hear my family say thank you or have it recognized is a blessing.

"It takes a man to raise a man"

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Moving Forward

> Quante Wright walks to class at Bryant & Stratton College recently. After earning an associate degree in April, he began taking courses for a business degree in September. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

Two former gang members discuss how the lure of fast cash and notoriety led them to make decisions — before they were even teenagers — that affected their lives for decades.

Now both share their stories openly, in an effort to sway at-risk youth from landing behind bars. Both are also fathers. One is at a pivotal point to find ways to prevent his sons from following in his footsteps, while the other watched his oldest son repeat his mistakes.

Our special package features them.



QUANTE WRIGHT spent nearly six years in federal prison, then made headlines this summer when he was fired. The firing came after he was featured in a front-page newspaper story about his success in achieving a degree, despite his past in a gang.



GENERAL DAVIS became a gang leader in his teens and now is a published author and outreach speaker. He has worked for the past two decades to guide at-risk youth away from the lure of the streets.

What would have kept you from joining a gang? “Move.” Quante Wright says it’s the only thing his mom could have done to prevent him from joining Brighton Brigade.

“Move me out of that environment. When I came off my porch,” he said, “all I saw was drug dealers.”

Looking back, Wright notes three catalysts that propelled him into gang life. No. 1: Finding 15 dime bags of crack cocaine at the age of 13. No. 2: The money and prestige that followed. No. 3: Earning his first war wound when a rival gang member stabbed him.

Now at age 30 as a convicted felon, he continues to search for a secure job while wearing an ankle-monitoring bracelet. He’s on parole until 2017. He’s also in debt with credit card bills and school loans, behind on child support and struggling to cover his monthly rent.

HOW IT ALL STARTED

The “pre-gang” activity, as Wright refers to it, began in Clary Middle School.

“We started these cliques,” he said. “The 111, 222 and so on.” The school had four major hallways and each clique controlled a certain one. “You got caught in the wrong hallway, you got jumped,” Wright said, but then quickly interjects, “playfully jumped.”

“It was all play, but if someone would have taken notice, the path I took may have been different.” Wright said.

“Seventh-grade was pre-gang. By eighth-grade, I was repping (representing) Matson ADs” he said, “Matson” in honor of his street address and “AD” meaning adolescents. Though he still considered his clique all play, the nature of the group had elevated from the hallway to the street corner, only a few steps from his front door at the



> Quante Wright checks his watch as he heads to a monthly Intensive Re-Entry Court meeting at the James M. Hanley Federal Building downtown. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

corner of South Salina Street and Matson Avenue.

Recounting his story during his first formal outreach speech given Aug. 1 at the Save Our Sons Empowerment Workshop, Wright shared how he divvied up the 15 dime bags of crack cocaine he found at Cannon Street and West Pleasant Avenue. He said using his good math skills, he quickly figured each bag at \$10 apiece equaled \$150.

He continued, saying at age 13 drugs were difficult

“All I saw was drug dealers.”

— Quante Wright

to sell. “I was about my son’s size then,” he said, pointing to the back of the room where one of his two boys sat. Dealers on the street first told him to head home, saying, ‘Boy, you too small.’

But he says he kept dealing over the next five years and turned those dime bags into quarter-ounces, then to ounces and eventually bricks, meaning one full kilogram of pure cocaine.

Wright blames growing up without a father, lack of supervision and a mother who basically condoned his activity.

His sister, who is two years younger, says she eventually figured out he was a drug dealer.

“He got the new Jordans every time a pair came out,” said his sister, Cierra Wright, 28, with a sort of laugh. “That’s when I knew.”

His peers at this time would say: “He getting money,” explained Wright’s close friend, Rick Parks, who was a part of the Matson ADs but never joined a gang. “He was getting attention from females, he had cars, designer clothes. People would say he was a flashy guy,” Parks added.

Wright describes himself in his early teens. “I saw myself as a hustler. I was out making money, trying to look fly. I didn’t yet think of myself as a gang member.”

Then in summer 1999 at the age of 14, he got into an altercation with a rival gang member outside Central Tech Vocational Center and was slashed in the chest with a six-inch folding knife. With eight stitches, he left the hospital and went directly back to the street. After the incident, which involved 15 youths, the school stepped up security by installing metal detectors.

“The stabbing gave me more street cred and more recognition,” he said. “It solidified me as a gang member.”

ABOUT WRIGHT

- Throughout his youth, attended Gethsemane Holiness Church on Gifford Street every Sunday with his sister and aunt
- One of 20 former gang members required to participate in Syracuse Truce, an anti-gang program funded by a \$300,000 federal grant, launched in 2013
- Acted in “Self-Made” a Syracuse Urban Indie movie produced in 2014 by Shamroc Dancil and Nykeace Bachus
- This past July, launched New Black Wall Street, a company offering services such as public speaking, business consulting and marketing

ABOUT RICO ACT

RICO stands for the **Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act**. It was a

groundbreaking piece of legislation passed in 1970 with the goal of financially crippling the Mafia. However, it evolved to have a variety of applications against identified street gangs. Targeted activity may include illegal gambling, bribery, kidnapping, murder, money laundering, counterfeiting, drug trafficking and a host of other unsavory business practices.

To convict a defendant under RICO, the government must prove that the defendant engaged in two or more instances of racketeering activity and that the defendant directly invested in, maintained an interest in or participated in a criminal enterprise affecting interstate or foreign commerce.

— Source: *nolo.com*



> Quante Wright picks up his daughter after her dance practice. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

The incident also made him a target to rival gangs. In preparation, he purchased his first gun to retaliate.

By this point, he says his mom — “really no one” — could have made him leave the gang.

“She didn’t want me selling drugs, but at that age, there wasn’t nothing she could do. My needs — or rather let’s say my wants — became more than she could handle. My sneakers, my clothes — all were more expensive. She didn’t want me to, but there was no way to stop me.”

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

Wright names a few things that could have prevented his leap into street life: A gang prevention curriculum at school; guest speakers who spoke honestly about the consequences of such a lifestyle; and a staff person who monitored individual behavior, addressing the red flags as they popped up, such as flashing the signs of the clique, gambling and repeated expulsions.

“Maybe there were efforts and I was just blind to it,” Wright said about programs or community initiatives at the time.

One effort in place in 1999 — the same year Wright’s gang membership was solidified — was the Syracuse Partnership to Reduce Gun Violence, a federally funded grassroots program with which General Davis worked. Davis was a former gang member from the 1970s doing outreach on the South Side.

That year Wright started 10th grade at Nottingham High School — one of the schools where Davis spoke. But Wright never heard Davis’ anti-gang speech. Instead, after one month at the school, he found himself locked up at Hillbrook Juvenile Detention Center.

This was just the start. Future criminal charges Wright would face included: possession of controlled substances, robbery, burglary, criminal use of a firearm, criminal mischief, reckless endangerment and assault.

SYSTEMATIC FAILINGS

At age 15, Wright was moved from Hillbrook to a group home near Albany for rehabilitation.

The state-licensed LaSalle School states that its mission is to “provide therapeutic, educational and supportive services designed to accomplish positive, personal growth and lasting change in the lives of youth and families in need.”

But Wright feels the center propelled him further into criminal activity. “It made me a smarter criminal,” he said of the experience.

Research indicates that youth who have been placed with the New York State Office of Children and Family Services, which includes LaSalle, have unacceptably high recidivism rates. A 2009 Division of Criminal Justice Services plan reported that by age 28, 89 percent of males and 81 percent of females who had served time in the office’s custody were rearrested.



> Quante Wright's daughter and son enjoy Slurpees at 7-Eleven after their extracurricular activities. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

BEING STUCK

After several run-ins with police and time in and out of jail before he was 19, Wright says he wanted out.

"It was all too much. I was living with so much remorse and regret. I called my father, believing he could be a way out."

Lying in bed, he remembers making the call to his dad, who was living in the South at the time. Wright asked if he could move down there, and if his father would help him to get on his feet in a new location.

"I asked him, 'Can I just come down there and you show me the ropes? I don't need you financially,'" Wright recalled. "To my surprise, he told me 'No.'"

His father said he was busy supporting Wright's half sister, who had started college.

"I never called you asking for nothing," Wright said he thought at the time. "It was a knife to my heart."

With aspirations to stop his criminal behavior but no support, Wright gravitated back to the street. Criminal charges continued to pile up until officers went to his mother's home in 2006. The officer who escorted a handcuffed Wright outside told him: "Quante Wright this is the RICO and now it's Brighton Brigade's turn (to be busted)."

Along with 13 others, Wright faced charges of violating the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, known as RICO. The indictment listed 82 overt acts—including drug trafficking, attempted murder,

robbery and witness tampering — as evidence the young men were acting as a criminal enterprise.

Five days after his daughter was born, Wright was sent to federal prison to serve at USP Big Sandy in eastern Kentucky. The distance made it impossible for his family to visit. He did not see his daughter again, or his two sons, until she was 5 years old.

PAYING FOR HIS MISTAKES

"When the feds locked me up," Wright said, "I cried in jail."

Others at the high-security penitentiary asked if he was part of the Cartel or the Bloods or Crips.

He responded: "No. I'm a Christian."

He vowed to walk with God and no longer run with a gang. In prison, he was baptized, studied the Bible and went on to lead Bible study groups.

After spending nearly one-third of his life behind bars, he chose to give up the gang life. During his speech in August at the Save Our Sons Empowerment Workshop, he credited God for helping him to share his story.

Some 75 men registered for the workshop, which was attended by Syracuse Police Chief Frank Fowler. It was held to raise awareness about issues that affect boys and men, including the role of the black male in the family and how to deal with law enforcement.

Co-organizer Rhea Parks says the event was planned because she "strongly believes it takes a village to raise a

LOCAL ACTIONS

Six Syracuse street gangs have been involved in RICO prosecutions:

In 2003, **Boot Camp**, based at Midland Avenue and Colvin Street

- 24 members charged

In 2005, **Elk Block**, centered on Elk Street, between South Salina Street and Interstate 81

- 16 members charged

In 2006, **Brighton Brigade**, centered on Brighton Avenue and South Salina Street

- 14 members charged

In 2009, **110**, multi-block area with borders of Tallman Street to the north, Onondaga Avenue to the west, Centennial Drive to the South and South and Lincoln avenues to the east

- 12 members charged

In 2011, **Bricktown**, centered from Burt on the north to East Colvin on the south, and from South State on the west to Interstate 81 on the east

- 13 members charged

In 2012, **V-Not**, Valley area into the South Side with West Newell Street as the northern border

- 11 members charged

— Source: compiled from news accounts and indictments

MENTOR PROGRAMS

Currently there are no gang preventive programs offered at Syracuse City School District middle schools. To help at-risk youth, the district does recommend local mentoring programs, such as 100 Black Men and the Building Men Program, said Karin Davenport, a communications specialist with the school district.

GOOD LIFE YOUTH FOUNDATION

Mission: Cultivate a movement of entrepreneurial thinking among at-risk youth by combining life coaching, personal finance skills and entrepreneurial training

Target ages: 13 to 24

Contact: Hasan Stephens at hstephens@agoodlifefound.org or (315) 443-8792

100 BLACK MEN OF SYRACUSE

Mission: Improve the quality of life within their community and enhance educational and economic opportunities for all African-Americans

Target ages: Elementary to high school youth

Contact: Email 100bkmsyr@gmail.com or call (315) 443-8749

child. I have four little boys and while their father and I are together and they have a male in the house, they can only benefit from more role models. I thought Quante's speech was excellent because he shared a personal experience that could resonate with the youth who attended."

Hasan Stephens, executive director of A Good Life Foundation, which works with at-risk youth, also participated on the panel.

"I think a strong point Quante made was that he stayed in too long, but I teach that even one day in the streets is too long," Stephens said. "I think he could have done a better job of making the life sound less enticing."

Stephens said he strongly feels the goal of these events should be to ensure the consequences of actions are understood. In the future, Stephens said, "He should stress the time away that he missed from his family being locked up and chances he lost in his education."

INTERRUPTING THE CYCLE

Now Wright worries about the future of his own sons, who are a month apart — one who turned 13 in September, and the other who will turn 13 this month.

"With everything going on in my life, and the fact that there are different mothers and relationships that I'm no longer involved with, it's hard. But I know now is the time that I have to pay my kids more attention," Wright said.

Thinking about his sons' home life, Wright believes their environments are nothing like his growing up.

Rick Parks agrees. "For me and Wright, we weren't guided right. There was no structure for us. Basically we were free to do as we wanted. We were able to come in and leave as we pleased. That's basically where things go left sometimes, when the mother is busy working to support the family and her sons lack structure in the home."

As a father, Wright knows he is not physically in the household, but says he's accessible any time he's needed.

Last school year was one of those times. The Syracuse Academy of Science Charter School called Wright into the office, saying his son was in danger of being expelled because of his performance and behavior.

In cooperation with school officials, Wright, his son and the administration discussed the concerns and signed an agreement that his son would get on track. "His behavior and his grades improved," Wright said.

The experience reminded Wright of his freshman year at Corcoran High School. He was expelled, he says, after the school learned he had been arrested. "Unlike my son, I was never given a second chance," he said.

Even with the school's and his disapproval of emulating thug-like behavior, Wright says he sees that his sons find his former gang life appealing.

Wright's sister, Cierra, explains: "They grew up hearing about him and in some ways they think that side of him is cool. But Quante teaches them to do better."



> Each night, Quante Wright must walk his dog, Fendi, before a 9 p.m. curfew, monitored by an ankle bracelet. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

He brought both sons to his speech but has told them little specifics about life after prosecution or the consequences he still faces. He is starting to navigate that path now as he hears, specifically his older son, recite rap lyrics or imitate street slang and emulate that 'play' behavior familiar to Wright.

Parks, who has five sons, advises that Wright needs to convey the severity of the consequences that come with being a gang member.

"He needs to have a real sit-down with them, letting them know what he went through, not just say to not act like a gangster," Parks said. "He needs to tell them the ins and outs of what can happen and what did happen. The deaths he saw, the number of funerals of our friends he's attended."

CONTINUED CONSEQUENCES

This year, Wright became a father for the fourth time, completed an associate degree, was sentenced to spend two months at a halfway house for a parole violation and shared his story on the cover of the Sunday Post-Standard. That story sparked a week of life-changing events.

The day after publication, he was fired from his dream job as a car salesman at Lowery Bros. Chrysler Jeep. Wright believes he was fired because of details

shared in the article. Steve Spector, hiring manager, offered no comment when reached by phone last month.

Then Wright violated parole when he failed to report directly back to the halfway house after being fired. He spent Father's Day weekend in jail. Working with lawyers, he struck a deal and was enrolled in Intensive Re-Entry Court.

Each month Wright must attend Intensive Re-Entry Court with a team of legal professionals consisting of U.S. Magistrate Judge Andrew Baxter, Assistant U.S. Attorney Tamara Thomson, Assistant Federal Public Defender Randi Bianco and Senior Federal Probation Officer Liana Snyder.

Conditions of his parole include paying the \$80 monthly service fee for the ankle bracelet, responding to call-in drug checks, surprise visits by his parole officer and a curfew, which is 9 p. m.

During his August re-entry court hearing, out of seven participants, Wright was called up fifth to hear updates on his progress that month. Before the judge, Snyder reported Wright was seeking employment but hadn't landed a job, had three missed calls to the drug program and failed to provide a copy of a key to his apartment, which had been court ordered.

Thomson next spoke. "It is clear that you would like a particular job, a particular salary, but you also must be realistic," she said. "It seems like you want to get to your end game by skipping several steps."

Both Snyder and Thomson encouraged Wright to be practical about job prospects, noting he may have to start off lower and then work his way up the ladder.

Participants in the Intensive Re-Entry Court program are in supervised release from prison; they sign a contract with the legal team agreeing to work to meet the expectations agreed upon each month. If goals are met, the participant receives a "reward" somewhat like a pass/fail. Twelve rewards are needed to complete Phase I. Since the program's launch in 2010, the team said only

one participant has completed Phase I in 12 months.

Additional requirements must be met to complete Phase I: the participant must be drug/alcohol free, gainfully employed or enrolled full time in school, have no pending criminal charges and be current on any court-ordered financial obligations, including child support.

In August, Wright did not receive a reward.

Instead the judge told him, "Nobody here wants to stand between a participant and their dreams. We are not trying to discourage you ... but ... what is the cliché? 'Don't give up the good waiting for the perfect.' If you have the gifts you think you have, once you get your foot in the door, then you'll be able to move up."

Wright was given a chance to respond and told the judge of three job interviews he had completed and that he was hopeful a job would come through the next week.

Later, sitting at his kitchen table, he says after nearly three years out of prison he is still in a mode to reinvent himself. "I got to figure this out," he said. "I sit here twiddling my thumbs with no income. I'm not selling drugs no more, so I got to do something."

After Wright got out of prison, Parks recalled Wright telling him: "I'm going to make an empire out of my situation."

MOVING FORWARD

Since 2012, Wright has tried his hand at various business launches, music and even movie releases and 9 to 5s but yet to find his niche. He feels he is a superstar waiting for his big break.

During his most lucrative weeks selling crack cocaine, he was pulling in nearly \$10,000. Since late August, he has been working part time with GMR Marketing making \$18 an hour.

"I like nice things and I want financial freedom," he said. "I don't want my kids to even think about having to go to the streets. Instead of calling a drug dealer, they should think, 'I can just call my daddy.'"

WRIGHT'S TAKE ON HIS EDUCATION: 'SCHOOL GAVE ME BALANCE'

Growing up, Quante Wright's mother always stressed the importance of education. "I told him, you get up and go to school, no matter what," Annie Wright said.

Wright earned his GED in 2004 while serving time in Jamesville Correctional Facility. Next he began to take classes at Onondaga Community College from 2004 to 2006.

"School gave me balance," he said. "But when I left school, it was back to the war zone. It's kind of strange when I think back on it. How was I able to partake in all this other activity

and still be good in school? I was going to OCC and at nights have gun shootouts."

His time at OCC was cut short when he was one of 14 indicted by way of the federal Racketeer Influenced and Corrupt Organizations Act, or RICO, in August 2006.

After serving 70 months in federal prison, he was released in 2012.

In April 2015, Wright graduated with an associate degree from Bryant & Stratton College. He returned there in September to start work on another business degree.

BUILDING MEN PROGRAM

Mission: Support young men in their journey toward becoming men of character by helping them develop their purpose and passion, instilling integrity in their leadership and providing them with opportunities to build healthy relationships

Target ages: Middle school youth at select schools in the Syracuse district

Contact: Joe Horan at jhoran@scsd.us or (315) 435-4404

SCSD MENTORING PROGRAM

Mission: Offer a unique blend of mentoring opportunities through established collaborations with a variety of agencies

Target ages: Middle school youth

Contact: Tonja Wade at towade00@scsd.us or call (315) 435-4655

SUPPORT FOR YOUTH

General Davis and Greg Odom say their Real Fathers/Real Men program plans to: Ensure teens are staying in school, support young men with job readiness, and if they are on parole or in family court, help make an agreement with the court to allow Real Fathers/Real Men a chance to work with youth before they are sent to a juvenile detention center.

“We will tell the court or PO (parole officer), ‘This child does not have a father in the home and that is the problem,’” Davis said. “But we are here to fill that void. We are going to be that daddy to them. If we get a call, 24/7, we will be available for what they need if they are in trouble.”

Mission: Designed to put the father or a male figure back in the homes of the children without such a role model. The group will work one-on-one and do larger outreach by making alliances with other groups.

Target ages: 13 to 21

Location: The group meets Thursday evenings at The Determination Center, located on West Onondaga Street, and also makes house calls



> General Davis, co-founder of the Real Fathers/Real Men program, drives through his old neighborhood, “The Bricks.” The neighborhood is part of public housing provided by Syracuse Housing Authority. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

Former gang member is now father figure to at-risk teens

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

General Davis, who in the 1970s created and ran the South Side Corleones gang at age 15, was born and raised in Syracuse’s Brick City in a single-parent household.

Now 56, he believes he was a product of his environment.

“It was no big deal to walk out of your home and see a fistfight or a gun shootout or a gambling game over here or drugs being sold over there,” he said. “That’s what you get in the hood.”

Since the late 1990s, after having more than 50 arrests since his criminal career began at age 9, he has worked to share his personal story to mentor youth. He is also co-founder of a newly launched program, Real Fathers/Real Men, with Greg Odom, 55, a former drug dealer.

Both believe the combination of the environment they grew up in and lack of a father figure led to their delinquency.

Davis says he had committed various crimes and been in and out of juvenile court. “The judge had gotten tired of seeing me and ordered me to a school outside of Rochester.” Davis was sent to Industry Residential Center and says instead of being rehabilitated, it taught

him all he needed to know to run a gang.

Davis spent 17 months at the facility, which aims “to ensure juveniles avoid the pipeline to adult criminality,” according to its stated goal.

“While there, I learned through stories from other boys how to kill, how to do drive-bys,” he said. He also met future connections from which he would later buy guns.

It was at Industry that Davis decided to start his gang.

“This is my calling,” he remembers thinking while there.

“I think if there would have been a father present, we would have gone down different paths,” Davis said. “A father would have been more disciplined with us and showed us a better way.”

His mom worked two jobs and raised seven kids with little support. This left no one to watch over him.

Families on the South Side are 70 percent to 80 percent single households, and a single mother heads nearly all of those, Odom says. In Syracuse’s 13205 ZIP code, there are 2,906 single-parent households, and of those, 2,561 are headed by women, according to City-Data.com. Davis said that from what he sees in his experience, “Usually there’s no male role model at all. No uncle. No big brother. No male present to help out.”



> General Davis gives a presentation to youth the evening of Sept. 17 at The Determination Center. He stressed that they stay away from violence, drugs and gangs or they will find themselves in jail, injured or dead. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

Both have witnessed mothers or parents who look the other way when their children start to sell drugs. “We have mothers ... who may condone the lifestyle of her son because he’s bringing in drugs and money and she gets the excess,” Davis said.

Odom, who began to sell weed at age 14 after sneaking joints from his stepfather’s supply, adds: “When your mother is working two jobs or has her own vices, it’s almost impossible for her to provide stability. Kids are home alone and his idol and hero are those guys he sees on the street as soon as he steps out his door.”

Davis not only grew up with an absentee father, he became one.

He did not stay with his oldest son’s mother. He adds that his namesake was witness to the same dysfunction of his youth. “He saw me beat up his mom,” Davis said. “He saw me leave and not come around again.”

While his son General Davis Jr. grew up, Davis was still active in the gang life.

“I wasn’t spending no time with him,” Davis recalled, “and he got caught up in the streets.

Stories of Davis’ legend-like status also affected Davis Jr.’s outcome.

“He’d hear: ‘Oh man, your father was this and he was that ... your father was a bad mother (expletive). Then he thought he had a reputation and like a prophecy to fulfill,” Davis said. “When I tried to step in, it was too late.”

Added Odom: “Once they get a taste of that street life, they can become addicted to the money and excitement. So if he’s bringing in thousands of dollars



> General Davis’ Real Fathers/Real Men badge. The group is currently housed at The Determination Center, located at 1654 W. Onondaga St., as part of programs run by Bettie Graham, the center’s founder. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

a night, (his father) can’t tell him nothing. ‘What can he tell me. I’m my own man,’ is what he’s thinking.”

At 17, Davis Jr. was sentenced to state prison for a pair of felony drug convictions. “My son was basically a product of his environment,” Davis said.

During the sentencing, Davis stood next to his son. Davis says in the courtroom he felt ashamed, helpless, sad and bitter all at once.

“Part of me felt that I failed him,” Davis said. “Another part of me felt it was a wake-up call for me to get more involved with those kids who didn’t make it that far yet.”

MORE INFO

To enroll or volunteer in the **Real Fathers/Real Men** program:

Call (315) 876-4577 or (315) 290-2663

Visit GeneralDavis.com

Men with criminal records will be considered on a case-by-case basis as volunteers, except for sex offenders, who are not eligible.

IF YOU GO

Behind the Scenes Workshop

When: 10:30 a.m. to 12:30 p.m. Saturday, Oct. 10

Where: South Side Communication Center, 2331 S. Salina St.

Details: Staff of The Stand and those featured in this cover story will share a behind-the-scenes look at how the story developed. Readers will be able to ask Quante Wright and General Davis questions directly.

Cost: Free and open to all. Coffee and refreshments will be provided.

RSVP: Email The Stand’s director, Ashley Kang, at ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

JOIN THE MARCH

If you would like to attend the Justice or Else march and ride on the buses leaving from Syracuse, call the local organizing committee at (315) 399-7060

JUSTICE OR ELSE

National Mall
Washington, D.C.
Oct. 10, 2015

justiceorelse.com

SHARE YOUR VIEW

Interested in filming or sharing your story? Call Brenda Muhammad at (315) 677-1664

RECORDING HISTORY

How a master's student plans to use filmmaking as a tool for activism



> Brenda Muhammad makes an appeal to Dr. Rick Wright's "Old Skool Sunday" radio audience Sept. 13 at the Power 620 radio station. She asked for content contributors and also shared details about her documentary. | Kathy Hua, Staff Photo

By | Ashley McBride
Staff reporter

Brenda Muhammad is going to school so she can tell stories through lens of a video camera

When South Side resident Brenda Muhammad enrolled in the Documentary Film & History graduate program at Syracuse University, her goal wasn't to obtain a job in the field or increase her chances of advancing her career.

At 52, Muhammad does not fit the traditional profile of a master's student in the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications, where many students are fresh out of undergrad. For her culminating project in the program, Muhammad is documenting the 20th anniversary of the Million Man March taking place this month in Washington, D.C. She plans to give it a local spin by profiling local individuals who attended the original march or are traveling to the event taking place Oct. 10.

"I'm into preserving stories, events, locations and things that have to do with cultural heritage preservation," she said. "This fits that. It's a historical event, a cultural event and it's needed."

Muhammad also has a few personal connections to the march: her husband, Keith Muhammad, attended

the original event Oct. 16, 1995, and the couple is involved with the local organizing committee gearing up to send buses to the event. As members of the Nation of Islam, the couple is answering the call to convene that was made by Minister Louis Farrakhan, the leader of the movement.

In the Documentary Film & History program, Muhammad is part of a small, five-student cohort. Her classmates say that as an older student, she brings a mindset that others don't possess.

"She adds an element of wisdom but she's unassuming, she doesn't talk down to anybody," said Irene Domenico, a student in the program. Domenico added that as a 29-year-old, she and Muhammad bond over being the older students in class.

Professor Richard Breyer, the co-director of the program, has witnessed how Muhammad has progressed in her technical ability and in her understanding of the filmmaking business.

"She appreciates all of the skills it takes to produce a documentary or just to tell an effective story," Breyer said. "She brought the maturity to collaborate with others, but I think she now has a better sense of how you collaborate in this environment."

Once her film is complete, Muhammad said she

hopes it can be used as a teaching tool in activist organizations and in workshops about social justice. She is looking for individuals who attended the original Million Man March and who are willing to share their stories for the film. She is also seeking volunteers attending this year's gathering who can help film and produce footage. Muhammad is optimistic that with help, she can cover more ground.

"There's going to be such a mass of people there that it's better to have many different points of view captured through the lens of others, so that's a relief to know that I don't have to catch all that footage myself," she said.

When her husband reminisces about his time at the Million Man March in 1995, what he recalls most vividly is the atmosphere of unity among the million men who showed up. He remembers seeing hundreds of thousands of black men convening on the National Mall to contradict the stereotypical view of black men as well as to bring attention to injustices affecting the black community.

"It was a sense of peace and a sense of calm and a sense of brotherhood that I've never experienced before in my life," he said. "I remember saying to myself, 'if I die today, it would be all right.'"

Farrakhan called for the initial march in 1995 to address inequality plaguing the black community and to compel politicians to address race issues. The Nation of

Islam, the NAACP, which is the nation's oldest civil rights organization, and the National African American Leadership Summit collaborated to plan the event.

Named Justice or Else, this year's event will demand justice and accountability for racism and police brutality afflicting the black community today. According to the Justice or Else website, organizers are fighting for justice for all groups of people, including women, the poor and veterans.

Muhammad emphasized the necessity of the annual gathering. "We want people to think about the need for justice here in America," she said. "There are so many people being mistreated and killed, so it's time for us to go together in unity, to the government and let them know we need justice."

As co-chair of the local organizing committee for Justice or Else, Muhammad is working on multiple fronts: to get the word out about the October gathering and also about her project. She said she plans to visit barbershops, churches and community groups to locate people who could share their experiences.

However, she also points out that it is the collective responsibility of black people to record their history and perspectives for future generations. She ultimately took on this project to contribute to that.

"Learning how to make this film or how to capture our stories can help make us whole and can help fill in some of our gaps," she said.

HISTORY OF THE MARCH

The Million Man March surpassed Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I Have A Dream" speech by 600,000 people.

In the year after the march, more than 1.5 million black men registered to vote for the first time.

NOTABLE SPEAKERS

In 1995, the following spoke at the first march: Minister Louis Farrakhan, Maya Angelou, Jesse Jackson, Benjamin Chavis and Rosa Parks. Stevie Wonder performed.

— Source: blackpast.org

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