

the **Stand** south side news

www.mysouthsidestand.com

Syracuse, NY

APRIL 2016

Issue 50 **FREE**

DIVA DANCERS

Boys and girls push
each other to excel in
class and competition

\$97 a week challenge

Community members pledge to live on minimum wage

college visit

High School students
spend a day at the
Newhouse School

**Historic
standing**
Land Bank seeks status
for Presbyterian church

‘REAL MEN’ MENTORING



2 EVENTS | APRIL

the
Stand

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STUDENTS AT THE
S.I. NEWHOUSE SCHOOL OF
PUBLIC COMMUNICATIONS

SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH

DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,
SHAWNA RABBAS, NICK LISI,
JEFFREY NEWELL

CONTACT US

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THE STAND IS BASED OUT OF THE
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DISCLAIMER

THE VIEWS EXPRESSED IN THE STAND ARE NOT
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THE STAND WELCOMES SUBMISSIONS FROM
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BUT RETAINS THE RIGHT TO PUBLISH ONLY
MATERIAL THE STAND DEEMS ACCEPTABLE TO
THE PUBLICATION'S EDITORIAL PURPOSE AND
IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.

What: South Side TNT Meeting
When: 6 p.m. Monday, April 4
Where: South Side Innovation Center,
2610 S. Salina St.
Cost: Free to attend
More details: Tomorrow's Neighborhoods
Today Area 3 South Side planning council meets
regularly on the first Monday of each month.
More Info.: Call coordinator Tina Zagya at (315)
488-8178 or email TZagya@SyrGov.net

What: Human Library Event
When: 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, April 16
Where: Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S.
Salina St.
Cost: Free
More details: A Human Library is a way for
people to reach out and connect with individuals
in their community with whom they might not
normally interact. Visitors to the library have
an opportunity during the event to borrow
and engage in conversation with a Human
Book, a person who has volunteered to tell
his or her story. Readers have the opportunity
to participate in one-on-one or small group
conversations with Human Books to learn about
another's experiences. Readers check out
Human Books for 30 minutes. Books can be
checked out at the event or in advance at the
front desk.
More Info.: Call the library for a list of available
books and to register at (315) 435-3395

What: Clean-Up Cuse and Syracuse Grows
Resource Drive
When: 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 23
Where: Rahma Edible Forest Snack Garden, 3100
S. Salina St.
More details: The Rahma Garden will host a
Clean-up Cuse event for the fifth year to clean
the garden space, work on South Salina Street,
West Newell Street and West Pleasant Avenue.
All are welcome and encouraged to bring a
group from your church, club and/or community
organization to volunteer. There also will be
mulch and compost to be shoveled.
To RSVP: Visit the group's Facebook page by
searching Rahma Edible Forest Snack Garden

What: The Sixth Annual Spring Syracuse Gospel
Music Concert
When: 7 p.m. Friday, April 8
Where: Hendricks Chapel at Syracuse University
Cost: Free to attend
More details: The program will consist of
gospel music from local choirs and artists,
dance, poetry and more. This year will feature a
spotlight on colleges and universities.
More Info.: Contact Dr. Joan Hillsman, director
of the Syracuse Gospel Music Workshop of
America, at (315) 299-4928 or email
jhillsman@twcny.rr.com

What: 18th Annual YWCA Day of Commitment
to Eliminate Racism and Promote Diversity
When: 8:30 a.m. to 1 p.m. Thursday, April 21
Where: SKY Armory, 351 S. Clinton St.
Cost: \$75 for the luncheon and workshops or
\$50 for luncheon only
More details: The event begins with
Community Advocacy and Diversity Workshop
Program and concludes with a noontime
luncheon and award presentation. The event's
theme is "A Real Conversation: Addressing
the Barriers to Progress in CNY." The keynote
speaker is Melanie Littlejohn, regional executive
at National Grid. Master of ceremonies is
Mark D. Muhammad, associate professor at
Onondaga Community College. The Champion
of Opportunity Award will recognize individuals,
institutions, companies and organizations
leading noteworthy efforts to promote diversity
and advance the elimination of racism at a local
level.
More Info.: Visit ywca-syracuse.org

What: Rotary Community Chat
When: 6 p.m. Monday, April 25
Where: Grace Episcopal Church, 819 Madison St.
Cost: Free to attend; donations appreciated
More details: Leola Rodgers, president and
CEO of Syracuse Community Health Center, will
speak on her perspective for the needs of the
Syracuse community
To RSVP: Contact City Rotary Club by the
preceding Friday at [RotaryCommunityChats@
gmail.com](mailto:RotaryCommunityChats@gmail.com) or call (315) 468-1025

■ Cover photography by Daniel Hinton of Nyasis Stenson, a captain with CUSE DIVAS majorette dance team

Last year at this time we had just finished celebrating our Five-Year Anniversary with a celebration looking back on five years of print success and projects accomplished with residents.

Print stories continue to thrive because of our partnership with reporting students at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications who join the paper each semester to cover the South Side community.

In this issue, student reporters have submitted a variety of stories, reflective of the positive work happening in the community.

Staff reporter Ashley McBride has been following the state's "Fight for \$15" minimum wage increase and followed along as several public leaders and supporters pledged to live on minimum wage for a week in March. Find out on Page 16 what participants found most challenging.

Ryan Raigrodski has learned that another historic property has fallen into the hands of the Greater Syracuse Land Bank due to unpaid taxes. The former South Presbyterian Church, located at the intersection of South Salina and West Colvin streets, may soon become listed on the National Register of Historic Places and be renovated. An application is in the works, and tax credits are being offered by the city to developers interested in purchasing the property. One challenge to its receiving recognition is the loss of its historic Tiffany windows, which were removed seven years ago. Learn more on Page 12.

Ari Gilberg reconnects with former gang leader General Davis and former drug dealer Greg Odom, who started Real Fathers/Real Men last year. The two have continued to grow their outreach program and are now regularly speaking at middle and high schools to encourage youth to stay away from the streets, drugs and violence. Get an update from them on Page 6.

Kayli Thompson has gotten to know CUSE DIVAS, a competitive dance squad open to youth ages 5 to 18. Her story is on Page 10.

Also in this issue, community members and city high school students have contributed. Tammy Reese highlights rapper and model Herizon and her work to promote local talent (Page 5). Reggie Seigler spotlights Charles Cannon from The Bells of Harmony who is set to retire after 50 years of performing gospel (Page 19). And media students from Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central share what they learned during their recent daylong visit to the Newhouse School (Page 8). Plus enjoy many more local stories inside and online at mysouthsidestand.com.

Ashley Kang



NOMINATE A FATHER

The Stand has been featuring a dad each month in its ongoing Fatherhood Q/A series.

We are eager to meet more fathers.

To submit a nomination for an outstanding father to be featured in a future issue of The Stand, send a short explanation with contact information to The Stand Director Ashley Kang by calling (315) 882-1054 or emailing ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

Lawrence D. Diamond-Walls

Nominated by Aldrine Ashong-Katai, coordinator for the Healthy Neighbors Partnership with Upstate Medical University

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

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

A: I didn't see my first child born. I was 17,000 miles away in another country serving in the Marines. I found out in the middle of an exercise that my daughter was born, and I was supposed to have been shipped home to see her. So I was quite upset I didn't get to see the birth of my child, until my second one, which was my first son. Then I missed my second son being born by 15 minutes because I had to go and collect the other kids and catch a bus to get to the hospital.

Q: What was it like the first time you saw your newborn?

A: Paternally, it's a rush of emotions on so many different levels. It was nice to see the continuation of the vine, which is 'you.' The macho side is like, you've accomplished; you have an heir. The other side is now you have responsibilities.

Q: What is your relationship like with your kids and family now?

A: Most all of them are grown and out now. Because a lot of relationships become fractured, doesn't mean that relationships can't be resolved or healed by someone else. In my family, we have always been supportive of other people's families even when our relationships deteriorate, disintegrate, crumble, crash and burn. But we still keep amicable relationships. A lot of times we come into the relationships when the children are babies, like with my stepsons and stepdaughters. I was with my wife when they were babies, and rather than not have a father or a male figure, I was there. So while it isn't something that you set out to do or be, it's just the idea for them to have someone they can turn to. What we are trying to do is heal the diseases of the relationships, so even though we didn't start with you, doesn't mean we can't finish with you and go the distance.

Q: You are now a single father to your youngest son. How is that going?

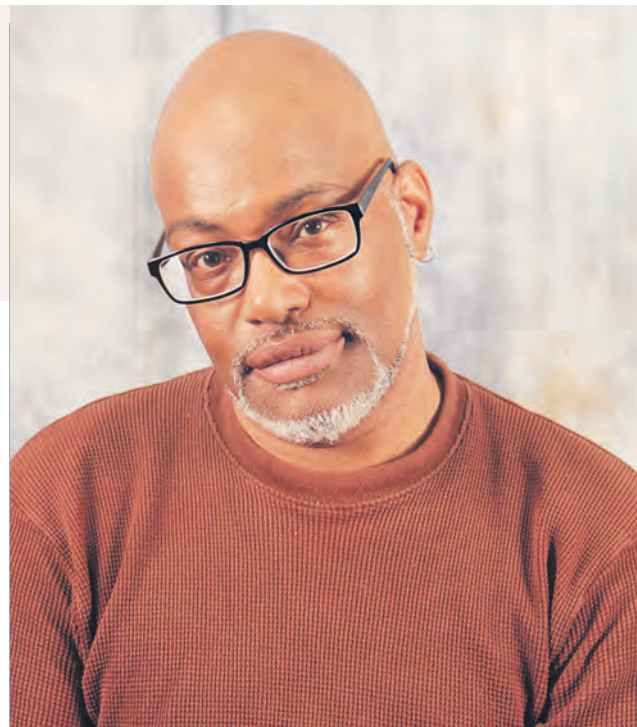
A: It was at the point where I wanted the relationship with my son. He's been with me since he was about 9 or 10 and is now a teenager. So I went to court and am now the primary. In the legal sense that is a capturing of him, (but) that doesn't mean inwardly it has taken. My son will come in and he's got two minutes. He ain't got time to listen and nor do the other children of this day. I worry about him very much.

Q: What was your relationship like with your father?

A: There was no relationship. Met him about three times in my life. The analogy is tight pipes burst. When male issues stem from fatherhood, that's a chip they (sons) carry. Until that is chipped away, dispelled, crushed, extinguished, however you want to do it other than just continue to carry it, it's going to continue on to the next person or the next child.

Q: What is the dynamic between you and your son?

A: I was late in getting involved in his life as strongly as I wanted to. He's



MEET FATHER LAWRENCE: *Diamond-Walls, 57, lives in Pioneer Homes and volunteers there as a resident health advocate. He has been raising his youngest son as a single father for several years. He also has three grown children and four stepchildren. | Zau Nhkum, media student at Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central*

been inclusively locked away in his own world. That's another trait all my males share. We are solitary in our own, but we're expressive for others. He says he has plans to go to college, but in his brevity, and with me being a parent and wanting to know every little detail ... he just says: "I got it." So I am trying to direct him in the proper direction, and I have high hopes and ambitions for him. But he has to get there. As much as I want to push, it's on him. All I can do is continually repeat that I love him, want the best for him and continually ask about his world. I may not get a lot of input; it may be brief, but I'm trying to get closer to him.

Q: What is the biggest worry you have for your son?

A: Everything, only because at any place, there are issues that can happen. Even in your home, you are not safe from violation. If you're out on the street going to and fro, you can be violated any moment by anyone. So with him being out there, even if he was under my eyesight, other people have jurisdiction over me. So I still don't have his safety and welfare in my hands as fully as I believe I should. There are a whole lot of worries. Pick up a newspaper and you can read about all kinds of incidents. It's not just that they hang around him, but people have their moments so you never know when something will happen. There's a basketball court right there (as he points out his front door to Wilson Park's court). You can see 90 people down there, and all the sudden two people get upset and something breaks off. It wasn't the other 88 that had a problem; it was only those two, but they tainted the whole area. So I worry every day.

"I'm trying to get closer to (my son)"

KID POWER



By | Tammy Reese
Community contributor

Herizon, a Syracuse rapper and model, has grown her movement of empowerment by showcasing children in unique calendars — just as she has been showcasing women.

Since 2011, Herizon has given women the opportunity for their talents and accomplishments to be featured in a 12-month calendar called Upstate BossChicks. Now she is doing the same for children by creating Upstate BossKids calendars to spotlight the positive things they are doing.

When I asked Herizon what makes her a boss, she said: “Creating a lane for others to get future work from the calendar is what makes me a boss.”

A boss she is.

Starting from an idea, she has made the calendars a reality. The featured women are from all walks of life, races and sizes. The beauty and empowerment in the Upstate BossChicks calendar has set the bar, showing all women are beautiful.

Herizon released the kids’ version in February. Thirty-eight kids auditioned, and she featured all of them. Herizon says the reaction for the children’s calendar has been positive. By doing this diverse children’s calendar, she says the kids involved can inspire others.

Herizon has this advice for anyone who wants to turn a dream into a reality: Never give up and stay persistent.

To contact Herizon, email msherizon@gmail.com

To order calendars, visit upstatebosskids.bigcartel.com and upstatebosschicks.bigcartel.com

SYRACUSE UNIVERSITY



Do you have a high school diploma or GED, but no college?

You may qualify for the Arthur O. Eve Higher Education Opportunity Program (HEOP) for part-time students at Syracuse University.

HEOP helps with:

- » Tuition
- » Books
- » Academic guidance
- » Tutoring

Are you eligible?

Call **315-443-3261** for an appointment, or visit parttime.syr.edu/heop.

“This wonderful program benefits low-income students. It gave me the tools to complete my dream of a bachelor’s degree.”

Nancy Legra-Garcia
SU Class of 2015

HEOP and its activities are supported, in whole or in part, by the New York State Education Department.

**GO SU
part time!**

SERVICES OFFERED

Real Fathers/Real Men provides a number of benefits and services to children in the program, including:

- One-on-one counseling
- Tutoring
- Free haircuts
- Movie nights
- Ice skating
- Syracuse Crunch hockey games
- Use of an indoor basketball court
- Trips to Destiny USA mall

MENTORS MATTER

A local program inspires young men to succeed in all aspects of life



> General Davis, far left, and Greg Odom, far right, hold up their certificates of recognition while standing with four students from Danforth Middle School who participate in Real Fathers/Real Men. Clockwise from top left, they are: Nyhiem Huggins, Demetrey Spears, Chris Mays and Naquantae Bowman. | Ari Gilberg, Staff Photo

By | Ari Gilberg
Urban Affairs reporter

Real Fathers/Real Men volunteers shape a brighter future for Central New York kids

As a much younger and dangerous man, General Davis held the top spot in a criminal outfit called the South Side Corleones. The gang pulled off armed robberies, drug trafficking and shootings with similarly inclined young men. Davis took beatings, got shot, and did time in jail.

Now 57, Davis has channeled his energies into a different approach to his old neighborhood — offering companionship, direction and support for young men and boys growing up in families headed by single mothers. It has been nearly a year since Davis and Greg Odom, a former drug dealer, founded a program called Real Fathers/Real Men. The group's mission is to provide a father figure for those without one, and also to help educate children on the dangers of turning to gangs and drugs.

He does not want to see the South Side's children make the same mistakes he did, he says.

"If we give kids the love they need, then they'll give us their attention," Davis said. "When the streets raise a

child, they're raising a beast. ... They can't get out. It's like a vacuum that sucks them back in."

Since last spring, Davis and Odom have shared their concerns through talks to students in Syracuse's middle and high schools. Their message: Avoid drugs and walk away from gang recruiters.

Real Fathers/Real Men has worked with nearby Danforth Middle School since November. Dr. Ronardo Reeves, principal of the school, said he already has seen a change in his students' behaviors.

"There have been some positive impacts," Reeves said. "I'm hearing from teachers some of the things that the students have learned. You know, they're able to practice some self-restraint. I think they talked about hitting women, and men are not supposed to put their hands on women, and things like that last week. And one of the students actually was hit by a girl — like they do in middle school — and he came and told the teacher what they've learned and why he didn't hit the young lady back. So, they're making some positive gains."

Besides his work with Danforth Middle School, Davis will host a workshop to be held within the next month for four other schools in Syracuse: Westside Academy at Blodgett, Henninger High School, Fowler High School and Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central.

The workshop will take place at The Determination Center, which provides services for at-risk youth.

The two will utilize three main props: a casket, a mock jail cell and a wheelchair. These props symbolize where young men most likely will end up if they decide to turn to gangs, drugs or other forms of street crime, Davis said.

Real Fathers/Real Men also serves as an after-school program, in which Davis, Odom and a few volunteers act as fathers to participating children. The Determination Center is usually where the group holds meetings and also where children can relax and engage in fun activities, such as playing basketball and video games.

Davis said it's important that the mentors do everything they believe a father is supposed to do — whether that means helping youth with their homework, watching a movie or just going out to eat at McDonalds.

Bettie Graham, who runs The Determination Center and also grew up with General Davis, described Real Fathers/Real Men as a rewarding program that can help accomplish her goal of providing a safe haven for as many kids as possible. She said that Davis' past involvement with gangs and crime allows him to share his story and establish a unique connection with youth.

"Trying to get these kids out of the streets — that's my main focus," Graham said. "I've opened up the

center, you know, trying to make a difference in the community. But there are some things I can do; there are some things I can't do. So why not reach out to somebody that has the experience and the knowledge?"

Davis and Odom say they believe that if they had a father figure in their own lives growing up, then they most likely wouldn't have turned to gangs and selling drugs.

"We're trying to fill that gap — that bridge — where there is no father in that single-parent home," Odom said.

One of the most memorable experiences Davis has of Real Fathers/Real Men came during a trip out to eat with a group of kids in the program.

"I remember we were going to ... get some food. And we got up to go inside and one of the kids turns around and says, 'Can we sit down like a family and eat our food,'" Davis said. "Can we sit down like a family — a 12-year-old boy asked that question. So the thing they're missing at home is sitting down, a father sitting down at the kitchen table. Something as simple as that means a whole lot. It's big to a baby, big to a child."

Nyhiem Huggins can attest to that. Huggins has participated in the program since last October.

"They treat us well. They got our grades up, our behavior up," Huggins said. "They want us to not do the bad stuff that they chose to do. They want us to do good."

MORE INFO

For more information about working as a **volunteer for Real Fathers/Real Men**, or to **enroll a child** in the program, call:

General Davis
(315) 876-4577
or Greg Odom
(315) 290-2663

If you would like to **volunteer for other programs** at The Determination Center, located at 1654 W. Onondaga St., call:

Bettie Graham
(315) 396-0148



Become A Housing Tester

Make a difference AND make extra \$\$\$

April trainings:

Tues. April 5th from 9:30 a.m. to Noon

Wed. April 13th from 5:30 to 8 p.m.

CNY Fair Housing, 731 James Street, Suite 200

*Eligible candidates need English writing skills,
a telephone and can't have a real estate license.*

Be part of the solution!

To register or for more info:

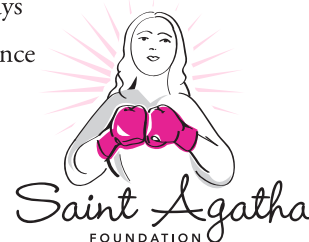
(315) 471-0420 • cnyfairhousing.org • info@cnyfairhousing.org

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.

The following costs can be covered:

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



We can help you.

www.saintagathafoundation.org | (888) 878-7900

PUBLISHED WORK

Junior media student **Zau Nhkum** approached The Stand's director Ashley Kang during his visit to the Newhouse School to volunteer as a photographer for the newspaper. View his first published portrait for The Stand in this issue as the featured image for our Fatherhood Q&A.



To see his photo of Father Lawrence Diamond-Walls, turn to Page 4.

A CAMPUS WELCOME

High school juniors spend time at Newhouse School on Journalism Day



> Gregory Heisler, widely known for his portrait photography and more than 50 Time magazine covers, shares his experiences with ITC students during Journalism Day at the Newhouse School. | Jeffrey Newell, ITC Teacher

By | Ashley Kang
The Stand director

Syracuse city media students explore options for careers in a daylong visit with professors

Twelve high school juniors in the Media Track at Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central spent a day at the Newhouse School last month to see whether they are “Newhouse ready” and to get energized about a future in journalism.

Professor Steve Davis, chair of the Department of Newspaper and Online Journalism and founder of The Stand, created Journalism Day as a way for the students at Syracuse City School District’s technical institute to engage with the journalism program only a few blocks away.

Along with their media teachers — Jeffrey Newell and Nick Lisi — students toured Newhouse on March 7 and met with Newhouse Ambassadors. Current undergraduates who serve as ambassadors are models for prospective students, especially those who are members of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

After the tour, students split into two groups with the option of visiting Newhouse’s broadcast studio with

Chris Tuohey, chair of Broadcast and Digital Journalism, or the school’s photography studio with Gregory Heisler. He is best known for his portrait photography, including more than 50 Time magazine covers. During both visits, students were able to get in front of cameras, either anchoring a newscast or serving as portrait models for Heisler.

Before lunch, the two groups came together and shared what they had learned. Next students met with Ashley Kang, director of The Stand, to hear about ways they can contribute to our community newspaper and digital site, mysouthsidestand.com. Past published work by ITC students was shown and discussed to encourage them to get involved. Zau Nhkum volunteered on the spot and received an assignment the next day.

During lunch, Dean Lorraine Branham spent an hour with students describing all of the programs that Newhouse offers and answering their questions. As students introduced themselves, she asked what fields they were interested in, and most of them said photography after meeting Heisler.

Before concluding their visit, students sat in on a session of Diversity and Media with professor Charisse L’Pree to observe a college-level course.

STUDENTS' FINAL THOUGHTS, PHOTOS FROM THEIR DAY



> Professor Steve Davis, founder of The Stand and chair of the Department of Newspaper and Online Journalism, speaks with ITC students. | Jeffrey Newell, ITC Teacher

DEJANERA SHARP

"This field trip has inspired me for college because I now know how it feels to be in a college class and how professors may teach."

EMANI ADAMS

"Greg Heisler was a great man to meet, and his career inspired me to become a photographer because he met a lot of famous people and traveled to a lot of places."

JAYLA GARCEAU

"We got a chance to record in the broadcasting studio as an anchor and to run the teleprompter."

KALA STOKES

"Meeting with Dean Branham gave me a chance to explain my passion with media."

MALIK CLARKE

"Knowing that all the equipment at Newhouse is the exact same as the equipment I use every day is very reassuring."

DEANNA HAWKINS

"The programs and equipment at Newhouse and at our school are similar in many ways like setup, soundboard, editing software and mics plus cameras for photo and videos."

RODJON ROBINSON

"This field trip inspired me to pursue a college degree to be successful."

MARCUS JACOBS

"Newhouse is very professional and unique, and it made you feel like it was a whole community. This trip inspired me to pursue more into digital design and to make video games."

MIKEM SIMPSON

"It was great to see a real college classroom and experience it as a student and not just an observer."

ZAU NHKUM

"The Dean of Newhouse, Dean Branham, was nice enough to take the time to talk with us and answer any questions that we had."

ADASTEE GRANT

"I got the chance to meet Greg Heisler. He helped me figure out what I want to do with my career and what I want to study."



> ITC students Zau Nhkum and Jayla Garceau sit at the NCC News desk in the Newhouse School. | Nick Lisi, ITC Teacher



> ITC student Kala Stokes, who is interested in photography as a career, poses for a portrait taken by Gregory Heisler. | Jeffrey Newell, ITC Teacher

HOW TO JOIN

If you would like to join the dance team:

- You must be between the ages of 5 and 18
- No prior dancing experience required
- Girls and boys are welcome; there are teams for both

Call (315) 400-1225 or email Dance4lyfe2013@gmail.com

Visit the studio at 4141 S. Salina St.

PUSHING FORWARD

Majorette dance squad CUSE DIVAS leads young girls to exceed



> Dejuan Hightower, co-founder of Dance 4 Lyfe Studios, instructs members of the CUSE DIVAS majorette dance team during a practice in Syracuse Feb. 25. | Daniel Hinton, Staff Photo

By | Kayli Thompson
Urban Affairs reporter

Dance team's co-owners expect the competitors to push hard toward all-around excellence

Outside the studio — where black curtains are drawn over the windows and the sounds of music and talking are muffled — one might not guess there are members of a hard-working majorette dance team inside, pushing themselves.

Girls ages 5 to 18 are doing crunches and push-ups, warming up for their practice. It's mostly quiet except for the few groans of that last crunch.

It's the week before competition, and Dejuan Hightower, 28-year-old co-owner and coach of CUSE DIVAS, expects his dancers to go hard.

Hightower brings order and quiet by saying "listen." He and Tierr Rivera, 29, co-owner and director, expect the girls to be respectful and not to talk over one another.

The junior division, 5- to 11-year-olds, is about to

start one of its routines for competition.

"Everything today needs to be full out," Hightower says as he walks around the studio dance floor, evaluating the girls in their beginning stances.

He and Rivera started the group in October 2014 as an outlet for youth in the community. Hightower said they saw there was nothing for the kids and wanted to do something about it. He wants to ensure the girls on the team know they can do anything.

"We wanted to push them and let them know that they can be whatever they want to be in life," he said.

The team, a majorette dance competition group, has already won more than 50 trophies at competitions, including in Mississippi, Ohio, South Carolina and, most recently, Pennsylvania, where they placed first in the senior division of the field show.

"It's been a lot, but well worth it," Hightower said.

Each age group, including the boys dance team CUSE KINGZ, practices for an hour and a half every weeknight and sometimes Saturdays.

When they're approaching a competition weekend,



View more
photos online at
mysouthsidestand.com

the dancers put in more hours, with everyone staying at the studio from 5:30 to 8:30 p.m., Rivera said.

Hightower does not hesitate to stop the music and review the step that needs work. He walks through the dances with the girls.

Along with pushing the girls in the studio, the owners put a high priority on education. Neither wants to see the girls compromise their studies. So they've instituted a rule: Anyone who is failing must sit out during practice — come to the studio, but sit and watch.

"Education is important to us," Rivera said.

Rivera sees how this has affected others on the team, not just the member who is failing. It makes the others work harder so they don't have to sit out, and it motivates them to help one another with homework and studying. It has happened only twice.

The girls must finish their homework before practice starts, and they can get help from the owners and other girls at the studio. Progress reports must be handed in, and occasionally the owners will do school check-ins, especially if a parent asks them.

Hightower and Rivera have established a family atmosphere on the team and at the studio. They ensure the girls not only have finished homework but also have eaten dinner and properly worked out.

Hightower said he wants the girls to learn how to balance school and the team and to understand that being on the dance team is a privilege, not a right.

Kenziia Rudolph, Leasia Pinckney and Princess Yeboah, all 14, are captains who joined as beginner dancers and have been on the team for about a year.

The captains are there to be role models and help keep the younger dancers in line.

"We have to make sure everybody is getting along with everybody and not split in groups," Rudolph said.

The captains help maintain for others and themselves what Hightower and Rivera have set in motion.

"I think it's kind of hard because you gotta make sure you're a role model, and you gotta keep on pushing yourself," Pinckney said.

The captains enjoy being on the team, going to competitions and helping foster bonds.

Rudolph said she loved being a role model for the kids and leading them to make sure they're doing the right thing. Rivera said she feels they are helping the community by what they've done with the dance team, which already has outgrown its second studio space.

"One less older girl that's not running the streets, that's not getting into trouble," Rivera said. "I just want them to be above what's expected of them. And I want them to have that experience that some of their parents aren't able to give them."



> Sovaaji Bailey, 10, a member of the CUSE DIVAS majorette dance team, looks on as her teammates practice a routine at the Dance 4 Lyfe studio in Syracuse on March 9. | Daniel Hinton, Staff Photo



> Dejuan Hightower, co-founder of Dance 4 Lyfe studios, talks to members of the CUSE DIVAS before they performed in the "Bring it to the Burg" dance competition March 5 at Barack Obama Academy of International Studies in Pittsburgh. | Daniel Hinton, Staff Photo



> Cheonnie Mathis, 12, a member of the CUSE DIVAS, holds the team's first-place trophy as she walks off a charter bus in Syracuse on March 6. | Daniel Hinton, Staff Photo

ABOUT HARVEY

The man who will have the important task of writing the National Register nomination for the South Presbyterian Church says his day-to-day responsibilities usually relate to municipal planning, environmental review and contracts like the one with the Land Bank.

"I work in basically three different contexts," Harvey said. "I help cities and counties identify significant historic properties. The second context is environmental review. So when different agencies or federal licensees have to comply with environmental regulations. And I help those agencies or private licensees work through it. The third one is contracts with individuals or agencies."

Harvey says writing a nomination is not something he usually does.

"More often I am called in to evaluate whether a property may be eligible for the National Register. In my consulting practice, I do much more of that evaluation than I do following through on a nomination."

His reaction to writing the church nomination: "I'm enthused about it because it's a really good building and it needs some recognition."

'COMMUNITY ASSET'

South Presbyterian Church could be getting closer to gaining new use



> An inside view of the South Presbyterian Church looking toward the front. | Photo provided by Bruce Harvey

By | Ryan Raigrodski
Urban Affairs reporter

Land Bank works toward adding church to historic register to entice building developers

One of Syracuse's historic church buildings, once a bulwark in its South Side neighborhood, may be a step closer to being sold, renovated and put to a new use, city officials say.

The Greater Syracuse Land Bank announced at its monthly meeting in February that it would contract with Harvey Research and Consulting in an effort to get the historic South Presbyterian Church at 112 W. Colvin St. listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

Such recognition would allow a developer to receive tax credits in renovating the church building. Officials said they hope the move would attract as many developers as possible when they issue a formal request for proposals later this year.

"We are looking to try and turn that into a real community asset," said Vito Sciscioli, who serves as chair of the Greater Syracuse Property Development Corpora-

tion. "It's not direct cash from us, but it does enhance the bottom line of the operating costs of a facility, because any tax liability the development occurs is mitigated somewhat by the credits they receive."

Bruce Harvey, who runs Harvey Research and Consulting and has been selected to write the formal nomination of the church as a historic building, said the South Presbyterian Church was built in 1906.

Officials of both the Land Bank and the development corporation said they believe a designation on the historic places list would make the property much more attractive. But Land Bank Executive Director Katelyn Wright said she also hoped that a developer who wanted the tax credits would still be subject to review by local preservation authorities.

"If a developer comes in and they don't want to be subject to the state historic preservation commission's review for their renovation, they don't have to take the tax credits," Wright said at the meeting. "But if you take the tax credits, then you are subject to their review."

Wright and others on the development corporation appeared to voice a belief that getting a listing would be

relatively straightforward; others indicated that the process might be more challenging — the result of changes to the church building, such as removal of historic windows seven years ago.

In 2009, a collector purchased and removed the church's valuable Tiffany stained-glass windows and some other artifacts from the church, according to news reports from the time. The integrity of the original historical property is vital to securing a nomination, Harvey said.

"Eligibility for the National Register is generally determined by its historical significance and its integrity," Harvey said. "How much of the original resource is still remaining. And so the resource has to have a very high level of integrity, and it also has to be significant according to some criteria, whether it's local, state or national level of significance."

Because of this, Harvey said he had concerns that the removal of the Tiffany windows could make application to the historic listings more of a challenge.

"The only possible issue, the original Tiffany windows were removed a number of years ago," Harvey said. "That hurts the integrity of the building because it takes away a part of its original design."

After the removal of the Tiffany windows, the Onondaga Valley Church merged in 2011 with the South Presbyterian Church to form the South Valley Presbyterian Church, according to the Rev. Steve Plank, who serves as the stated clerk/communicator of the Presbytery of Cayuga-Syracuse.

Although there may be concerns regarding the Tiffany windows, Harvey said that nearly every property he has evaluated also had integrity issues, suggesting that the windows' removal may not be a deal-breaking issue.

"The thing is, all of the properties that I evaluate and I write National Register nominations, they all have some integrity issues," Harvey said. "Things always happen. Buildings always change. There are always some integrity issues that have to be dealt with."

Harvey will write the nomination with Samuel Gruber, another independent consultant based in Syracuse.

Harvey said he has written about eight to 10 National Register nominations that, in the parlance of the process, "have reached the keep" of the National



> A view of the outside of the church. | File Photo

Register. All have been ultimately approved, he said.

But Harvey said the main reason he chose to take on writing this nomination was not because of its chances of success, but because of how important he believes the property is to the city of Syracuse.

"It's a great building. Religious properties in general are important buildings for healthy living communities. Architecturally, it's a terrific building both interior and exterior. And it's an important part of the fabric of that part of the city," Harvey said. "Those are the reasons why I'm enthused to work on this National Register nomination."

Land Bank officials said they hoped getting the property listed onto the national and state registers would attract more developers.

"The hope is that when it's on the register or if it is eligible to be on the register," said Daniel Barnaba, treasurer of the Greater Syracuse Property Development Corporation. "That a re-development opportunity that would include a grant would bring some people out of the woodwork."

LAND BANK EXPLAINED

When properties become tax delinquent, the city takes ownership and sells them to the Greater Syracuse Land Bank, which was created in 2012 to return properties to productive use and build up Syracuse's tax base.

Two historic properties have been lost this year due to back taxes and decay.

In February, the Land Bank contracted work to demolish a South Side landmark at 1631 S. Salina St. known as the Gothic Cottage for its winding staircase and arched windows.

The Land Bank next razed the former New Jerusalem Church of God in Christ at 1641 S. Salina St. next door.

By removing the deteriorating properties, the hope is to open up a large lot creating space for low-income housing.

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BY THE NUMBERS

87 The number of properties in the Greater Syracuse Land Bank's inventory, as of March 1, that are on the South Side

97 The number of demolitions, as of March 8, that the Greater Syracuse Land Bank has completed since its inception four years ago

— Source: Greater Syracuse Land Bank

MONTHLY MEETINGS

The monthly meetings of the Greater Syracuse Land Bank are open to the public.

When: 8 a.m. on the third Tuesday of each month

Where: 431 E. Fayette St.

More Info.: Call (315) 422-2301 or visit syracuselandbank.org

LAND BANK DISPUTE

Common Council criticizes agency's power to buy abandoned homes



> This property on West Beard Avenue is one of the 87 Land Bank properties on the South Side. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo

By | Justin Mattingly
Urban Affairs reporter

Some councilors are concerned how process can add a complication for interested buyers

The Greater Syracuse Land Bank, the public agency designed to take over abandoned residential properties and turn them over to a nonprofit renovator, will acquire 600 homes this year and next. But now, four years after the agency began its work, some members of the city's Common Council are criticizing the Land Bank as stifling local initiative by barring residents from buying abandoned properties themselves.

"This administration, for whatever reason, decided not to do the tax trust and to only sell properties to the Land Bank," said Councilor Nader Maroun, who represents the city's Fifth District. "That was an administrative policy decision that some of us on the council disagreed with." When the Land Bank was first formed, buyers could enter a trust agreement with the city where they would have payment plans and have the opportunity to buy property, Maroun said. The policy was changed about a year and a half ago, he said.

Since starting operations in 2012, the Land Bank — an autonomous public entity — has moved aggressively to combat the urban blight of decaying housing in Syracuse's neighborhoods. It acquired more than 900 proper-

ties, Mayor Stephanie Miner said at her 2016 State of the City Address, in which she also said she expected the agency would acquire 600 more — many of which are on the South Side — through December 2017.

Prior to the Land Bank selling properties, developers and other possible buyers were able to purchase the properties — most of them tax-delinquent — directly from the city. Miner's administration has since stopped those sales so that now the city designates the Land Bank as handling all such transactions.

A few years ago, Maroun said he had a vacant property near his house that had been tax delinquent and he wanted to try to buy it. "Today, I wouldn't be able to do that ... It all goes to the Land Bank," he said. Maroun didn't end up buying the property.

Alexander Marion, the mayor's press secretary, referred specific Land Bank and demolition questions to Katelyn Wright, the agency's executive director; attempts to reach Wright for this story were unsuccessful.

Marion did say that it's "important to note that the Land Bank is not a city department so they, under the guidance of their board of directors, set the policies and decide to whom they sell properties."

As of Jan. 29, the Land Bank had sold 250 properties and had garnered \$8.2 million in private investment, the mayor said in her speech. The sales generate about \$400,000 in local property taxes each year, she said. Some properties are demolished, and a majority of the



> Katelyn Wright, far right, talks to the community about the Land Bank during a meeting of Syracuse United Neighbors held in 2013. | File Photo

council supports more demolitions, councilors said.

Maroun isn't alone in the belief that outside developers and local residents should be able to buy the abandoned properties before they're acquired by the Land Bank. Councilor Chad Ryan, who represents the city's Second District, said he doesn't like the policy.

"I'm a city councilor and my job is to get funds for the city," Ryan said. "If there's a project coming in and I think it's a home run application that's really good for the neighborhood, why wouldn't we sell some of these?"

At the Feb. 8 council meeting, Councilor At-Large Jean Kessner brought forth 61 properties to be sold to the Land Bank. Forty-six passed, all unanimously, while the others weren't voted on.

Kessner said she favors people being able to come and buy the properties from the city and added that the city should be able to recoup the money spent on maintenance of the properties, which, she said, is why some councilors support demolitions in order to help clean up the city. The demolitions are in addition to processing the houses through the Land Bank.

"We can't stop doing these demos because these properties are hurting these neighborhoods," Ryan said. "They attract drug dealers, they attract all these different acts so it's a difficult situation."

Independent studies, including one in Cleveland, Ohio, have shown there's an economic gain when properties like the ones the Land Bank acquires are demolished.

Ryan said the council is fighting for as much demolition to the properties as possible. Funding for the demolitions — which costs about \$15,000 for a single-family house — comes from the city, the Land Bank and the New York state attorney general. A call to the attorney general's press office went unreturned.

Maroun, who led the charge to support demolitions, said about 150 properties have already been demolished, starting in March 2014. "I would argue that there's at least that number, if not more, that still need to come down and we're trying to figure out how we finance to be able to do that. Something needs to be done instead of them just being in a limbo status."

While there is controversy over the demolitions and the Land Bank's sales policy, Maroun said in the end, the goal should be to not have a permanent Land Bank.

"Ultimately, the Land Bank should be working itself out of business, because there's only so many properties the city can transfer," Maroun said. "Once the volume of properties has been addressed, we would get to a point where the city itself would have minimal numbers of properties that would be tax delinquent and eligible for seizure."

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ON THE SIDE

CHALLENGE RULES

Budget \$97 per week or \$19 per day for all expenses — excluding housing, car payments, credit card bills and childcare

Stick to this budget for all other expenses during the five days of the challenge

Participate in one task per day

Post on social media daily to describe your experience and challenges using these hashtags:

#CNYfor15

#Fightfor15

WAGE CHALLENGE

CNY community members make an attempt to live on \$97 a week



> Pastor James Mathews of St. Lucy's Church urges the crowd to think about whether Jesus would be in favor of or against raising the minimum wage. He spoke at a press conference announcing the minimum wage challenge Sunday, March 6, at St. Lucy's Church. | Ashley McBride, Staff Photo

By | Ashley McBride
Staff reporter

Challenge participants share their experiences in their struggle to live up to their pledge

In an effort to raise awareness about the plight of the working class, Central New York’s Fight for \$15 Coalition organized a “minimum wage challenge.” For March 7 through 11, about two dozen people pledged to live on the minimum wage for their daily expenses, from transportation to food. After taking out money for constants such as housing, car payments and bills, participants were left with \$97 for the week, or about \$19 a day.

The coalition hoped the challenge would encourage greater support for raising the minimum wage to \$15 an hour, up from New York’s current \$9 an hour.

After the challenge ended, the group traveled to Albany on March 15 for a rally at the state capitol. Gov. Andrew Cuomo has been outspoken in his support of raising the minimum wage.

“The folks opposed to a minimum wage of 15 dollars, they haven’t had to live on the wage,” said Common Councilor Helen Hudson during the March 6 press

conference announcing the challenge. She also participated in the challenge. “I was one of the minimum wage workers, raising a son, running a household, and it’s a little tough when you have to make a decision to feed your kids or pay your bills.”

Other cities, like San Francisco and Seattle, have already passed laws to eventually raise their minimum wage to \$15.

At a rally in Syracuse on Feb. 5, Syracuse leaders, including Mayor Stephanie Miner and Common Councilors Hudson and Khalid Bey, spoke in favor of the idea. In New York state, however, the minimum wage is set by state lawmakers.

Recently, state Sen. John DeFrancisco, who represents areas of Central New York, spoke out against the wage increase. During his press conference, he encouraged business owners to talk about how the increase in minimum wage would adversely affect their businesses. Jerry Lotierzo, the chairman of the coalition, responded to DeFrancisco’s comments.

“I was shocked by the fact that he didn’t have any low-wage workers,” Lotierzo said. “He didn’t have anyone there who could speak about how difficult it is to live below that 15 dollars an hour living wage.”

Q&A WITH CHALLENGE PARTICIPANTS



ANDREA WANDERSEE
MANAGING
DIRECTOR OF OPEN
HAND THEATER

Q: What was the most difficult aspect of the challenge?

A: Much of my lifestyle is designed around eating out. I have social engagements, business

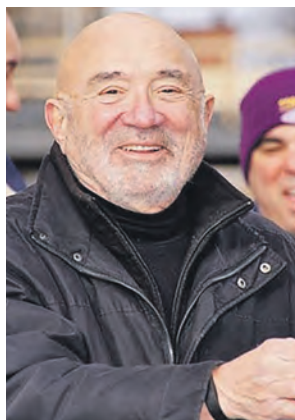
lunches ... I had prior commitments that I didn't change. On my Facebook page I talked about how I took a colleague to lunch and that particular colleague doesn't make very much money, and I bought her lunch. So I broke the rules. I broke the rules several times because it was the right thing to do in any given circumstance. Because the reality is that I was only pretending that I was living on minimum wage. I bought Girl Scout cookies from an inner-city Girl Scout Troop because they actually needed me to buy the Girl Scout cookies that support their program.

What I really noticed is there's a lot of privilege in a middle-class lifestyle. And most people have some kind of budget that they have to work up against. But where the flexibility in the budget is, varies considerably from family to family. If you're a solidly middle-class family, you do have areas of flexibility. It doesn't mean you don't watch what you spend at the grocery store or limit how much you go out to eat, but you make choices. And you can flex those choices when you want to or when you need to.

I think another big thing I came up against was my pets. I have a lot of pets. And the first time I really, really went over on the budget, I had to buy supplies for my pets.

Q: What did you learn as a result of the challenge?

A: Some of this I kind of knew already, because I've worked in human services for a long time, but a lot of people who are in poverty, or living on the edge, they're women and children. They're families. Sometimes there's a perception out there that these are healthy single adults, men, who can take care of themselves and go get a job. But these are people who have a job or are trying to work or are working more than one job and raising a family, and trying to get their kids to school and grocery shop. The list of things and tasks that these people have to do just to survive, it's exhausting. I just can't even imagine. I don't see how you can do it on \$97 a week.



JERRY LOTIERZO
RETIRED, FORMER HIGH
SCHOOL COUNSELOR

Q: How was your experience?

A: I ran out of money on Wednesday night, because it was just impossible to do some of the things with \$97 a week, especially when I needed to buy socks and razor blades. I

spent a lot of money on gas because I'm active in the community. I certainly couldn't do that if I had to live on \$97. I wouldn't even be able to afford the car, probably. But also, the food. I spent a minimum amount of food for me and my wife, around \$50 for the week, but my money ran out quickly. I can sympathize with those people who have to live on that amount of money.

I just don't know how they do it, especially if you have a cost. Like I had to buy razor blades because I ran out of them, and that cost me quite a bit. In the future, if I was living on that amount, I would buy not such good blades, because I couldn't afford them. So you have to really do a lot of thinking. You don't realize if you're going to live on that amount of money, you have to sacrifice some quality things just for the sake of buying something that you need. So it was very, very difficult.

Q: How did you get involved with the Fight for \$15?

A: I've been an activist all my life. And my mother demonstrated that to me. My mother once told me, whenever someone is suffering and needs help, stop and help those people.



WENDY COLUCCI
FIELD COORDINATOR
FOR CENTRAL NEW
YORK AFL-CIO

Q: What inspired you to take on the challenge?

A: To try to put a light on what it's like to live on minimum wage and how desperately we need an increase so that people don't have to live in poverty while working full time.

Q: What was the most difficult aspect of the challenge?

CHALLENGE STEPS

1. Announce you're taking the challenge
2. Take a grocery trip and post a video and/or photos to talk about what difficult decisions you had to make because of your budget limitations
3. Ride with a low-wage worker or take public transportation to work
4. Social activities: What would you normally be doing that you can't do this week? Dinner with friends, a movie, etc. Are there affordable options within your budget?
5. Share a summary of your challenge

CHALLENGE BREAKDOWN

Weekly income

The challenge provides a weekly budget of \$360 per week based on 40 hours of work at \$9 per hour

Taxes

From the \$360 salary, take out \$40 for taxes, leaving \$320 per week

Housing expenses

Deduct \$223 per week for housing and utilities. This is the average amount a minimum-wage worker in New York pays for housing

Final budget

Deduct the taxes and housing costs from a \$320 weekly salary, which leaves \$97 per week or \$19.40 for each day of the five-day challenge

A: Transportation. We had one day when we were supposed to take public transportation or get rides in to work or to do whatever you were needing to do. I decided to carpool that day, which meant that I had no flexibility in doing what I needed to do. The next day my son, he smashed his hand in a car and we had to take him to the doctor's. I was just thinking about if I had to try to get him to the doctor's and I didn't have a vehicle or couldn't afford a vehicle, how would I do it? The co-pay was \$20 but thankfully I had health insurance. So what would I have done if I didn't have health insurance? And even the \$20 co-pay was a lot of money coming out of the \$97 that we were allotted for the week. So making the decision of, "Does he really need to go see a doctor?" Could we have put that off for financial reasons? How does that work for society if you can't get medical treatment when you need it?



LAWRENCE BROOKS
UNION ADMINISTRATIVE
ORGANIZER WITH 1199
SEIU

Q: What was the most difficult aspect?

A: As true as I tried to stay to the challenge, I knew that it wasn't a true representation of what actual low-wage earners go through. Up until about three and half years ago, I was actually making just a little bit more than the minimum wage, around \$10.50, \$11. And it was difficult then. One of the things that we had to do with this challenge was, we had a specific task that we had to do, and then we had to report on it, whether we took a video with our cellphone or type something up and then post it to social media. When I was actually not even making minimum wage, but just above that — the Internet, cable, television — all of that was a luxury. I just didn't have it. So even staying within the budget of \$97 a week, I realized that there were things that I just automatically take for granted. Because I know, three and a half years ago, I couldn't do it. There was no way. So even taking the challenge ... it's just one of those things where even the best intentions don't accurately represent what those folks are going through.

Q: Why do you support Fight for \$15?

A: Just the fact that, you know, people hear \$15, it's not as much as it should be. I'm glad the governor came out in support of that. People are only looking

at the financial aspects of it. People also need to take into account the dignity that it's going to give people. Hopefully the decrease in crime that it may create because in taking some of those young people off the corner, the amount of economic growth that it's going to create, because poor people don't save money, they spend it. There's a lot of things that are definite positives, and that's what I want to come out. I know people have their reservations, thinking that it may cause job loss, and that we can't afford it. I think we can't afford not to do it.



DOROTHY WIGMORE
DIRECTOR OF
OUTREACH AND
EDUCATION AT THE
OCCUPATIONAL HEALTH
CLINICAL CENTER

Q: Do you think you'll change any of your habits or your routine now that you've completed the challenge?

A: I'm certainly thinking about how much things cost and whether I really need to buy something or not. The other thing is that — I realized this during the challenge — I think it reinforces my general shopping habits. People are saying that if the minimum wage goes up to \$15, small businesses are going to hurt. But I really think that small businesses are being hurt now. Because people don't have money to spend. I realize I wasn't able to spend money at the local food co-op, I wasn't able to spend money to get a sewing job done. So those were all local small businesses that I try to support. And places where I try to spend my money and I wasn't able to do that if I really lived on \$97 a week. So it's just really important for my goal of supporting local businesses as best I can to avoid the big box stores. Sometimes they're cheaper, but they're not as big a part of the community as the local shops.

Q: Anything else?

A: I have a co-worker here who has three kids who also was taking the challenge, and she says, 'I went broke.' If I had kids to support on minimum wage, I just don't know how I would do it. Between rent and food for kids, there's just no way people can survive. And even if they're two people doing two jobs, that's still not a whole lot of money. I just question the fairness and justice. When you lift up everybody from the bottom, we all benefit. The vast majority of us will benefit.

HONORING A LEGEND

The Bells of Harmony's Charles Cannon celebrates 50 years of gospel



> The Bells of Harmony, left, in 1973 and 2008. Visit mysouthsidestand.com for more vintage photos. | Photos provided

By Reggie Seigler
A Friendly Five columnist

The Bells of Harmony founder is proof that gospel thrives in a changing music world

Over the past 50 years, music has gone through a number of innovations in the way it is written, recorded, distributed and heard. It has held up through a time when musicians would all gather together to record in a single room to a time where virtual recording sessions can happen simultaneously, with each musician being in different parts of the world.

Now, you can get music anytime, anywhere. In fact, since they've invented a way to pack a concert sound system into the trunk of a car, you can even hear music at 2 a.m. when a neighbor comes home and decides he wants to hear "auto-tuned sonic boom" at 135 decibels, with some "yeeah boycees" thrown in for good measure.

As the methods of record producing and distribution have changed, the music also has changed. Music Jazzed its way through the Rock of The British Invasion and Rolled away holding on to its Soul. Eventually it managed to Hip-Hop its way back to the Dirty South. Through it all, though, Gospel music maintained itself.

Charles Cannon can attest to that. He has held onto his Southern gospel roots for 50 years or more, founding The Bells of Harmony gospel group in 1966. To mark the group's 50th anniversary, Charles' family, friends and fans have decided to throw him a black tie celebration.

"I have enjoyed performing with the Bells for over 30 years off and on," said Glen McArthur, who plays guitar and sings backup. "We have traveled to Akron, Ohio, Dorchester and Boston, and cities in Florida."

Glen has also performed on their recordings. He has recorded three CDs with the group, including "Live at

Tucker" and two titled "The Lord will Make a Way." He also sang lead on one of the group's songs. That song was also titled "The Lord will Make a Way."

For more than 40 years, Howard Wright has been a part of the group as well. "My role has been mostly as a bass player and singing tenor, but I've written and produced a lot of the group's music," he said.

"Charles is the founder and leader of the group," Howard said. "He does all the group's business like the booking and the promotion and keeping things going."

Howard added, "We were recently inducted into the SAMMY's Hall of Fame. They gave us the award on Thursday, March 3, at the Dinosaur Bar-B-Que. We sang a short a cappella when we accepted it. They invited us out the next night to the Palace Theatre, where they presented the award to us in front of a bigger audience."

Charles is committed to what he does. His commitment has earned him a great deal of respect within the Syracuse area and its music community.

Charles left Randolph, Georgia, for Syracuse as a young man in 1964. Upon his arrival, he landed a job at General Motors, and after settling in there for a while, started The Bells of Harmony. He was also raising a family and hosting his radio show, the Charles Cannon Gospel Hour, on AM 1540. He first began the radio show with his cousin, Otis Starling (now deceased), and it has been on air for more than 35 years. He also spent 30 years at General Motors.

Now, after 50 years with The Bells of Harmony, I'm sure Charles might want to say in a very, very loud voice: "Yeeah boyce!"

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

IF YOU ATTEND

What: The Bells of Harmony 50th Anniversary Celebration

When: 5 p.m. Saturday, April 30

Where: Grand Ballroom of the DoubleTree hotel, 6301 Carrier Parkway

Cost: \$50

For Tickets: Calvin Carter (315) 383-1411, Keith Cannon (315) 575-0087, Calvin Cannon (315) 807-3153 or visit Collins Barbershop, 309 S. Crouse Ave.; (315) 475-9147

Entertainment: The event will feature performances by The Bells of Harmony and the local gospel group Foundation, as well as The Gospel Legends, a group out of Columbia, South Carolina

LISTEN IN

Hear an audio clip of The Bells of Harmony at mysouthsidestand.com



WHAT NEXT?

The group's 50th anniversary celebration is also Charles' official retirement party.

Since Charles is about to turn 70, he wants to spend more time at home and enjoy his health.

Currently, Charles has a few more commitments. That seems to be his way. But after that, he says he is going to relax.



PEOPLE WHO CAME TO MY HOUSE

A Community Project Exhibit at ArtRage Gallery

Photographers usually venture out into the world to find their subjects. This time, a group of Syracuse area photographers allowed the world to come to them. Their portraits of service providers, delivery people, and sales people peer inside the intricate connections and communities of the Syracuse area.

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