

# the **Stand** south side news

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Syracuse, NY

**FEBRUARY 2017** Issue 56 **FREE**

## EMMY WINNER

South Side resident  
reflects on his career  
at CNY Central

## Acting as a father to all

Teacher serves as a role model for own kids, students

## urban forest

How trees benefit  
environment, beautify  
our community

## Step Up Moment

Bringing healthy living to  
homeless, those in poverty

## UPDATE ON LAND BANK



# 2 INSIDE | FEBRUARY

the  
Stand

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## DISCLAIMER

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MATERIAL THE STAND DEEMS ACCEPTABLE TO  
THE PUBLICATION'S EDITORIAL PURPOSE AND  
IN KEEPING WITH COMMUNITY STANDARDS.

## CALENDAR | FEBRUARY

**What:** Exhibit of CNY Reads: Central Library Teen Photography Club  
**When:** On display through Feb. 20  
**Where:** ArtRage Gallery, 505 Hawley Ave.  
**Details:** Currently displayed in the gallery windows is a collection of photos taken in August 2016 by participants in Central Library's Teen Photography Club. The assignment was to read quotes from the CNY Reads 2017 book, "The Double Bind," by Chris Bohjalian and take photos inspired by the story of downtown Syracuse.  
**Cost:** Free to view during regular hours: 2 to 7 p.m. Wednesday through Friday, and noon to 4 p.m. Saturday  
**More info.:** Visit [artragegallery.org](http://artragegallery.org)

**What:** Tax Help  
**When:** By appointment only. Offered Tuesdays and Wednesdays: Feb. 7, 8, 14, 15, 21, 22 and 28  
**Where:** Betts Branch Library, 4862 S. Salina St.  
**Details:** AARP tax preparers are available Tuesdays and Wednesdays starting Feb. 7 by appointment only, to help residents in need prepare a tax return. Clients must bring last year's tax return, a valid picture ID, social security cards or official documentation for all listed on the return, all W-2 and 1099 forms, and a checkbook if direct deposit is wanted.  
**Cost:** Free and open to the public  
**More info.:** Call the library at (315) 435-1940 to schedule an appointment

**What:** Money Smart for Small Business (MSSB)  
**When:** Noon to 1 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 15  
**Where:** Syracuse CoWorks, 201 E. Jefferson St., second floor  
**Details:** This Syracuse CoWorks Brown Bag Lunch & Learn Series will be available the third Wednesday of every month through 2017. MSSB provides a practical introduction to topics related to starting and managing a business. These modules were developed jointly by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation and the U.S. Small Business Administration. Presented by Frank Cetera, NYS certified business advisor.  
**Cost:** Free to attend; pack your own lunch  
**More info.:** Contact Frank Cetera at [ceteraf@sunyocc.edu](mailto:ceteraf@sunyocc.edu) or (315) 308-1372. For more on Money Smart for Small Business, visit [sunyocc.edu](http://sunyocc.edu).

**What:** Sled for RED Cardboard Sledding Derby  
**When:** Registration at 4 p.m.; derby starts at 5 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 11  
**Where:** Four Seasons Golf & Ski Center, 8012 E. Genesee St., Fayetteville  
**Details:** Event will include the cardboard sledding derby, along with a newly added winter drink competition. Food and beverage sampling will be offered inside a heated tent. A Tubing Party will be held on the slopes. The event benefits ACR Health's youth prevention programs and emergency client needs.  
**Cost:** Tubing Party is \$15 per person. Participants also can enjoy the competitions without sledding. The fee to attend the Hot Chocolate, Food, Beer and Wine Sampling is \$10; \$5 for age 10 and younger.  
**More info.:** Call (800) 475-2430 or visit [ACRHealth.org](http://ACRHealth.org)

## ■ Cover photography by Zau Nhkum of Quindell Williams

## SEEKING NOMINATIONS FOR SENIOR CITIZEN OF THE YEAR

Do you know an outstanding and active senior? Onondaga County Office for Aging seeks nominations for the 2017 Onondaga County Senior Citizen of the Year.

The office seeks nominations of Onondaga County seniors who have demonstrated the power of making a difference through civic engagement.

The winner will attend a New York state event May 9 in Albany and an Onondaga County event May 17.

Submissions are due by Feb. 10.

Visit [ongov.net/aging](http://ongov.net/aging) to learn more and to download an application.

Email your completed nomination form to [cherrylamb@ongov.net](mailto:cherrylamb@ongov.net).



This unique community paper has focused on the people and events of Syracuse's South Side for the past seven years. The idea started with a journalism project out of Syracuse University and has grown into a paper presenting the voice of residents.

One recent event of note is an effort by volunteers last year who gathered to plant trees in the Strathmore neighborhood. See photos on Page 10 followed by a story on how planting trees in the city helps save tax dollars and reduce pollution.

On Page 13, we follow up with Rashawn Sullivan, who was featured in last month's issue of The Stand. Since then, he officially released his book, "iApologize," at a book-signing event. "iApologize" documents Sullivan's youth, including the night he committed a drive-by shooting. In that instant, he took the life of another teenager, Jason Crawford. The book shares the lessons he eventually came to learn while serving 17 years in prison.

Starting on Page 14, learn how the Syracuse Land Bank — the most active land bank in the state — is helping some families purchase their first home.

This issue includes three profiles on individuals working to better the neighborhood. On Page 4, meet Kate Waltman, who started Step Up Moment last year. She brings fitness and healthy options to the homeless and those in poverty by offering free fitness classes weekly at the Rescue Mission. Waltman is described by others as the kind of person "who changes your life when you meet her."

Next meet Quindell Williams, a South Side native, on Page 8. He works with the CNY Central TV station and has earned an Emmy. Williams says that by using his community connections, he can help fellow newscasters as they share perspectives from the neighborhood, especially when they might be met with mistrust by community members. He hopes his sharing can lead to wider perspectives being broadcast by local news.

Last, meet Derrek Thomas, a newly appointed judge, on Page 20. Thomas was sworn in as City judge in December and started his new role Jan. 1.

And at the start of this year, we received a number of nominations for our Fatherhood Q&A. The large number shows that many active fathers reside on the South Side and that their efforts are recognized by others. In this issue, we spotlight Leroy McClain. He serves not only as an exceptional father to his four children, but also as a father figure to many students at the Southside Academy Charter School. He attended Pace University on a basketball scholarship and says that the arrival of his first child in 2000 made him "easily decide to come home and be a father rather than go overseas to pursue a career in basketball." When he introduces himself to students, he shares the opportunities that were available to him and why he chose family. He believes this is what makes students gravitate to him. "They like that I'm good in basketball, that I live where they live, and I keep it real, which just means I'm authentic with them." Learn more from McClain on Page 7.

Finally, Reggie Seigler, a board member of The Stand, was busy last year. He assisted in leading a 12-week course on small business. On Page 18, Seigler shares the success of the various participants who completed the course.

In honor of this being Black History Month, a number of specially planned events are listed on Pages 22-23. You can find even more events listed in our online calendar.

Ashley Kang



## UPCOMING MEETING

Feb. 6

### TNT South Side

**What:** Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today Southside General Interest Meeting

**When:** 6 p.m. Monday, Feb. 6

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

**Details:** TNT Area 3 Planning Council meets regularly at 6 p.m. on the first Monday of each month; meetings are subject to change as necessary.

**More info.:** Call TNT Coordinator Tina Zagya at (315) 448-8178 or email [TZagya@SyrGov.net](mailto:TZagya@SyrGov.net)

### WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor may be mailed to:

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Syracuse, NY 13205

or emailed to:

The Stand's director,  
Ashley Kang, at [Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com](mailto:Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com)

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

## STEP UP MOMENT

### WHAT IS A #STEPUPMOMENT?

The concept is simple: making a decision to improve your life

**Mission:** Bringing fitness and healthy lifestyles to the nation's poorest communities

**Online:** Visit [StepUpMoment.org](http://StepUpMoment.org)

**Twitter:** [@StepUpMoment](https://twitter.com/StepUpMoment)

— Source: Family First Fitness Foundation, [StepUpMoment.org](http://StepUpMoment.org)

# BRIDGE FOR LIFE

*An unlikely friendship opens opportunities for homeless community*



> Kate Waltman stands on the bridge near the intersection of South Clinton and West Onondaga streets, where she and Timothy “Timmy” Turner would sometimes meet. | David Onoue, Staff Photo

By | David Onoue  
*Staff reporter*

### After the loss of her father and a friend, Kate Waltman helps the homeless

It's a cloudy Saturday afternoon as Kate Waltman crosses the intersection of South Clinton and West Onondaga streets. She walks under the overpass where the “Lives Change Here” sign is painted and stops at a bridge. Looking down, she points to a spot below. “That’s where Timmy and I would sometimes meet.”

Timothy “Timmy” Turner was a homeless man whom Waltman met a few years ago during a Pedal to Possibilities bike ride. “I remember pulling up next to him,” she said. “He had these stunning blue eyes, and he looked over at me on the bike and said, ‘Hey lady!’”

Waltman says she was a bit nervous about riding with the homeless people, but Turner was the first person who made her feel special about being there.

Every Monday, Wednesday and Friday when Waltman walked into the Brady Faith Center, Turner was sitting there, saving her a seat with a magazine in hand and a cup of coffee poured. She felt like she had made a friend who was from a completely different world.

“I was amazed at how much I looked forward to

spending time talking to Timmy and how happy it made me,” she said. “And how important I felt my relationship with him was in his life.”

On any given day, there are more than 800 homeless people like Turner living in Onondaga and Oswego counties, according to the Housing & Homeless Coalition of Central New York, and before getting involved with Pedal to Possibilities, Waltman had very little contact with them. But the bicycling program became the bridge for a special relationship and laid the foundation for her passion for helping the homeless, ultimately leading her to start her own nonprofit.

Waltman started to have conversations with Turner about ways she could help him work his way out of issues he had found himself in due to homelessness and drugs.

“We had a couple of really nice sit-down meetings at Café Kubal about some ways that I could find Timmy a job or that we could start a program together that would get Timmy and some other folks in similar situations on their feet working,” she said.

Then one day Waltman read an article in the paper about a body found in the creek not far from where she and Turner did a lot of their bike rides. It took authorities about a week, but they were able to identify the body. It was Turner, who drowned May 9, 2015.





> At the end of a Step Up Moment class, participants celebrate their hard work with Kate Waltman. | David Onoue, Staff Photo

Waltman had not openly wept over the death of someone since the passing of her father around five years ago, but she still holds a vivid memory of sitting down and crying for an hour. She felt like she had failed Turner. And with tears starting to run down her face, Waltman said, “I never really got to express to him how much he had changed me, and so I just put my foot down and said, ‘That’s not going to happen again with anyone else that I know here.’”

It took a few months, but she was motivated to start a program for the homeless and those in poverty.

“One of her greatest strengths besides being an incredibly thoughtful person is her ability to listen and act upon what she hears,” said Andrew Lunetta, founder of Pedal to Possibilities. And act she did.

Waltman started Step Up Moment in January 2016, which brings fitness and healthy lifestyles to the poorest communities in Syracuse. It offers free fitness classes every Wednesday at the Rescue Mission chapel.

On Wednesday nights, classes are on the small side with 12 participants. That compares with 30 participants Waltman averaged during the summer months when she had a \$50 healthy groceries initiative in place.

For every five sessions that participants attended, they earned a \$50 gift certificate to Nojaim Brothers Supermarket to buy healthy groceries.

The unexpected growth of the program led to a shortfall in funding, which had initially been funded through a GoFundMe campaign.

“In July the most I gave out in a week was \$450, and at that point, we were giving out too much per week to

sustain my personal ability to reach out and get more money,” Waltman said.

While Waltman no longer offers the healthy groceries initiative, participants still show up Wednesday nights, an encouraging sign for her.

As a few participants who were late made their way into the Rescue Mission chapel this fall, Waltman enthusiastically called out their names from the stage. She acknowledged them, then ran down and gave each one a huge hug. For many of them, that acknowledgment and genuine care had helped them through their hardships.

In less than a year, Waltman has been able to affect the lives of many individuals through Step Up Moment, including Andres Henriquez.

Geri Corradino, a co-worker at the Central New York Community Foundation and volunteer at Step Up Moment, recalled when Waltman first met Henriquez. Waltman was driving down the road in downtown Syracuse when she saw a man on crutches with one leg, struggling along. She pulled over immediately and asked him if he wanted a ride somewhere.

Corradino asked Waltman if she was afraid to welcome a stranger into her car. And Waltman replied, “No. It looked like he needed help and it was really cold.”

Waltman then took Henriquez out for a cup of coffee. She learned about his life and that he came to Syracuse from Cuba to get fitted for a prosthetic. She invited him to attend Step Up Moment classes, where he met another volunteer, Patrick Smalanskas, who eventually helped him find employment in Massachusetts. Smalanskas’ family is from there. “She didn’t think about

## WALTMAN’S NEW JOB

When this story was written last fall, Kate Waltman was employed by the Central New York Community Foundation, which is reflected in this piece.

Since then, Waltman has begun a new chapter in her life. She is now working at The Bonadio Group as an audit assistant in the healthcare / tax-exempt division. She hopes to complete the CPA exam in 2017.



> Kate Waltman | Photo Provided

## LOOKING AHEAD

Kate Waltman’s work with Step Up Moment is far from finished. She and her brother, Guy Waltman, developed a “Logic Model” to get participants enrolled with a health care provider, and they plan to launch a fundraising campaign once Step Up Moment receives its 501(c)3 status.



## BIKE RIDES

### Pedal to Possibilities

9 to 11 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays at the Brady Faith Center, located at 404 South Ave.

Free bikes provided. After 10 rides, participants get a free bike, lock and helmet.

### Brady Faith Drop-Inn Center

7 to 9 a.m. Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Usually provides coffee, food and conversation.

anything but just helping this guy with one leg on the street and he's homeless," Corradino said.

Waltman and Corradino first met when Waltman became the 2015-2016 Moynihan Accounting Fellow at the foundation, and the two were cubicle mates. Corradino remembers the moment.

"I was like 'Oh my gosh she is so happy,' and no one can be this nice," she said.

Corradino eventually became a volunteer with Step Up Moment, and she considers Waltman to be one of her best friends. "I just love her so much," she said.

Another believer in Waltman is Jerry Lieber. Lieber is a resident of Crossroads, an affordable permanent housing option on the Rescue Mission campus; he started attending Step Up Moment classes when his primary-care physician told him he needed to exercise.

Since attending the workout sessions, Lieber has been taken off one of his medications for diabetes, and Waltman has seen him come out of his shell, talking and interacting with all the participants.

"I'd be a different person if it weren't for Kate," Lieber said. "She's a kind human being who changes your life when you meet her and talk to her."

While Waltman may appear happy, she is trying to balance two worlds. Her father wanted her to become a certified public accountant (CPA), and she promised him that she would. They both realized he wouldn't be alive to see that day.



> Andrew Lunetta, left, founder of Pedal to Possibilities, sits with Timothy "Timmy" Turner at the Brady Faith Center. This photo had appeared in a feature about Lunetta, which was published in the April 2015 issue of The Stand. | File Photo

Lunetta believes Waltman will need to have a heart-to-heart conversation with herself about what she wants to do. "I personally think that she is going to have to decide if she wants to dedicate 100 percent of her time to this, or if getting a job at a prestigious accounting firm is what she wants to do," he said.

For the time being, Waltman has her heart set on bridging these two communities. "I get so excited by the idea that because I am part of those two worlds, I might be able to be a bridge and help other people," she said.

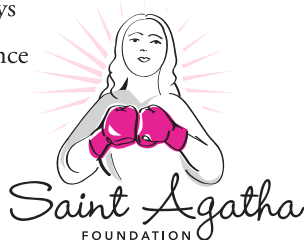
A bridge just like the one she crossed with Timmy.

## Do you need help with your breast cancer bills?

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

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# Leroy McClain

*Nominated by Anton Ninno, fellow teacher  
at the Southside Academy Charter School*

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand director*

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

A: It was a rush of excitement and the feeling that I have to be responsible all the time now because this little person is depending on me.

**Q: What can you share about your children?**

A: We have Aniya, who is 16. She's my independent one — even when she was young. She used to sit around with the adults and listen to music that is even older than me and like it. She was always well-behaved and didn't cry. She made it seem like parenting would be simple. Then came Azzuré. She's 12 now. She had to be the quickest birth. We rushed into the delivery room and 20 minutes later, we had another girl. She was the complete opposite of her sister — she was a bit clingy. But now she has come into her own. Then Leroy, who is 8. He was a difficult birth and can be the more challenging, since he's the only boy. But his memory is incredible, and he's very intelligent. Then we have the 3-year-old, Ariana. She was the surprise. She's smart beyond her years; her vocabulary is incredible. Sometimes I feel like turning around and making sure it's a preschooler I'm talking to. She's like my little shadow.

**Q: What was your relationship like with your father?**

A: Incredible. My father is a bishop of God's Temple of Faith church, located at the intersection of South Avenue and West Colvin Street. My whole family grew up in the church. My father always set the example — sometimes it was a silent example and sometimes it was vocal. And I think that mindset carried over to me. I'm super neat and like to get things done.

**Q: Did he have a saying that you catch yourself repeating today?**

A: If and when I tell the children to do something, I tell them to do a *thorough* job. It was always (from him) not do a *good* job, but I want the job to be done *thorough*. When I say it, I can hear my dad's voice in my head.

**Q: Why are fathers important?**

A: They are the head of their household. That is what I was taught. They are the leaders, and they instill a sense of security in the family. They raise the boys to be the men they are supposed to be. And even though we raise our girls to be princesses, we let them know they can be independent and do things on their own. But I want to let them know that having someone to lean back on and gain security from is good. I see a lot of my students come from a one-parent household. They end up calling me dad a lot. I show them caring, like I do my own children, but never let them off the hook. All are responsible for their actions.



**MEET FATHER LEROY:** McClain, 38, has taught at the Southside Academy Charter School for 14 years and is a father of four. Here he sits with his children: Aniya (left), Azzuré, Ariana and Leroy. McClain will soon celebrate 12 years of marriage to his wife, Mariama. | Perfection Rivers, Staff Photo

So with my daughters being my princesses, it doesn't mean they don't have responsibilities. They are expected to grow up, get an education and be well-rounded women.

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

A: Every morning before dropping her off to daycare, I do my 3-year-old's hair. I learned by watching my wife. But if somebody sees me doing it, I tell them 'Shhhh. Don't tell anybody!' Once when my father saw me doing it, he then shared with me he used to do my aunt's hair when his mom would go to work. So I found out I'm not the only one that does hair, but he never told me that until he saw me.

**Q: What is your opinion about commonly held stereotypes about black fathers?**

A: I see the absence. With my students and some of the young men around the neighborhood, there's just an absence there. They ask me a lot of questions about what I do when I get home; can I stop by? And they do. And some of my students from the past will contact me to let me know what they are doing, because I served as a father figure in their life. I had one student that got caught up in gang activity, went to jail and then came back. He finished high school, walked the stage at graduation and then came straight to my house the next day to share his success. So I try and serve as a role model and be a steady figure for them.

**Q: Any advice for other dads?**

A: You're not going to be perfect. You're going to do some things wrong and think back on it and wonder how you could have done it better. But that's a part of growing. When you grow, you become better and that's how wisdom is achieved. Once you experience it, you have a better outlook and are able to give that good advice now. You grow with each child.

*"You grow with each child"*



## TIPS FOR SUCCESS

Quindell Williams shares his advice on what you can do to succeed.

- Be a leader. Great leaders not only lead, but you teach others how to lead.
- Have a great support system of people who encourage you to be great.
- Remember that learning should be a combination of being fun and having great teachers.
- Always hope for positive outcomes.

# A BALANCED LIFE

*South Side native uses his storytelling talent to inspire the community*



> Quindell Williams, far right, covers a story for CNY Central. | Rachel George, Staff Photo

By | Rachel George  
Staff reporter

### Quindell Williams makes time for family, colleagues and community members

Growing up on the South Side near Midland Avenue, Quindell Williams developed a unique relationship with many in the community, which allowed him to understand the broader image of the stories he covers. Depending on the individuals involved and the type of stories he covers, whether it be crime or education, he has an in-depth relationship with the South Side residents.

“I draw a different connection in the community because I grew up here. When shooting in the field, sometimes it’s just a story ... but for me, sometimes the people involved may be family or someone I grew up (with),” Williams said.

Williams, 32 this month, is highly recognized among his family, friends and former colleagues for his humble personality and strong work ethic. He recently won an Emmy for his coverage of the Dr. Robert Neulander trial, along with his team members: Matt Mulcahy (anchor), Sarahbeth Ackerman and Alex Dunbar (reporters), Rae Fulkerson (news director), Megan Coleman

(anchor) and Amelia Couch (producer). Neulander was found guilty of murdering his wife, who died in 2012. Williams and his team at CNY Central covered the trial in April 2015.

Williams was born in Syracuse to Corre Williams and Desiree Odom. His father signed him up to play football at Kirk Park at the age of 6, in order to keep him physically active. He was guided by former coach Bryan Preaster for almost eight years. Preaster said he doesn’t like to say any kid is a good kid but if he had to, it would be “Q.”

“He was the kind of young person you admired because he was so young and focused,” Preaster said. “More young people can accomplish their dreams, if they are more focused.”

Tiffany Henderson said she has known Williams for almost 20 years, and he serves as a mentor and godfather to her eldest son, Zacari. They attended T. Aaron Levy Middle School and graduated from William Nottingham High School in 2003. She became emotional talking about the influence he has on her son’s life and her friendship with him.

“I’m just happy I was able to be a part of seeing him (Williams) grow up from a young man to a grown man and to see him grow into his fatherhood, husbandhood and his career,” Henderson said. “Nowadays it’s hard



for an African-American man to balance different hats. It's good to see men like that in the community but also across the world."

He played football in high school and one year at Wagner College on Staten Island, where he studied political science. He hoped to be the first black president of the United States. After realizing that was not the career for him, he transferred to Onondaga Community College, eventually studying electronic media communications. Williams said he wanted to be the male equivalent of Oprah Winfrey and build his media empire.

Under the leadership of professor Mark Ballard, Williams was eager to go to class every day, learning "something different, fresh and exciting" about television and broadcasting. He worked with Ballard on local sporting events for ESPN, assisting with production and crew setup — something he occasionally still does today.

"I've been teaching for 16 years and 10 to 15 percent of the kids that come into my class come with a work ethic already," Ballard said. "Quindell was one of them, and I'm glad he's finally being praised for it."

Williams transferred to Oswego and graduated in 2011 with a bachelor of arts in broadcasting and mass communications.

"I thought this was a hobby. I didn't think this would turn out to be a career," Williams said, wearing his New York fitted cap and CNY Central royal blue polo shirt.

Although he won the Emmy last March, the conversation was recently sparked by his proud father, Corre, who posted a picture of the award on his Facebook page.

"I was proud of him and his accomplishment," Corre said. "I knew he was always going to do what he wanted to do because I always taught him discipline and execution."

Williams' wife, Jamira, said she placed the award on the dresser because he was too modest. "I often tell him it's OK to celebrate your accomplishments; you earned them," Jamira said. They initially met as classmates at Nottingham High and reconnected years later.

Henderson sang "My Funny Valentine" at the Williams' wedding almost two years ago. Williams had heard her sing that exact song during an Afro-Academic, Cultural, Technological and Scientific Olympics competition at Nottingham. He told her then that the song would be sung at his wedding, if he ever got married.

Now, Williams and his wife have 1-year-old Jasai, a name Jamira said came to her in a dream, and they are expecting their second child in August. Williams said he does a good job of balancing work and family considering some of the stories he covers hit close to home.

He said he had to recuse himself from the Father's Day shooting coverage last summer because he knew many people who lived in the area. As well, the story earlier this summer of Baby Maddox, a toddler who was murdered by her father, was also difficult for Williams considering he has a son. He said it can be draining cov-



> Quindell Williams with the Emmy he won for covering the Dr. Robert Neulander trial. | Zau Nhkum, Staff Photo

*"I thought this was  
a hobby."  
— Quindell Williams*

ering a story and hoping for a positive outcome.

"Stories like these are tough because I have a child, and all I think about is him," he said. "It's hard being a father now and having to visually tell a story to others with young children."

Williams continues to use his personal connection to the community and its neighbors to break down the walls of distrust that some journalists face when conducting stories. He said he covers stories that matter, allowing people to show both sides: the good and the bad. He also said he wants to begin mentoring young men the way he was mentored growing up.

"I'm sure he's not done yet; we're just beginning to see what he can do," Preaster said. "The best is yet to come."

## PHOTO CLUB

Teens 13 to 18 years old are invited to join Central Library's Teen Photography Club, which meets monthly at the downtown library. The interests of the teen members shape the club.

**March meeting:** 3:30 to 5 p.m. Wednesday, March 1

**Where:** Robert P. Kinchen Central Library, 447 S. Salina St.

**More info.:** Contact René Battelle, Central Library teen librarian, at [rbattelle@onlib.org](mailto:rbattelle@onlib.org)



## YOUTH WORKERS

The **Onondaga Earth Corps**. (OEC) is accepting applications for youth and young adult workers

Job opportunities are available for young adults ages 15 to 25 and also for supervisory positions for more experienced applicants

- Youth program is open to high schoolers
- Young adult program, for 18- to 25-year-olds out of school, starts with an unpaid professional development program offered the week before interviews for open position
- AmeriCorps Internships are also available

# ADDING GREENERY

*Volunteers plant trees to naturally soak up stormwater, reduce pollution*



Photos by | DeArbea Walker  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

### Last Save the Rain planting of 2016 adds 100 trees to the Strathmore Neighborhood

**T**he tree planting initiative is an important component of the Save the Rain program. Onondaga County Executive Joanie Mahoney's comprehensive stormwater management plan uses green and gray infrastructure solutions to capture stormwater and reduce pollution to Onondaga Lake and its tributaries. Some 6,000 trees have been planted to date under the Save the Rain program. — *See related story on Page 12*







## ABOUT OEC WORK

Onondaga Earth Corps. crews often work on a variety of projects, from public outreach and education development, to neighborhood demonstration projects and tree-planting programs.

Participants will be provided with basic training in environmental and community development-based work. Public presentation and creating materials, such as PowerPoints, videos, brochures, etc., are often requirements of the work, in addition to daily work outdoors in gardens and landscape settings.

## HOW TO APPLY

Submit resume, cover letter and completed application

**Find applications** online [onondagaeearthcorps.org](http://onondagaeearthcorps.org) or outside the office at SUNY EOC Center 100 New St.

Next, submit all three items by email to [onondagaeearthcorps@gmail.com](mailto:onondagaeearthcorps@gmail.com)

or USPS mail

or drop off in person to the correctly labeled submission box

Onondaga Earth Corps  
100 New St., Rm 239  
Syracuse, NY 13202

— Submitted by OEC



## 2016 REPORT

### By the numbers

- **Number of trees:** 1,583,000
- **Tree canopy cover:** 27%
- **Carbon storage:** 247,000 tons (\$32.8 million)
- **Carbon sequestration:** 6,856 tons/year (\$912,000/year)
- **Pollution removal:** 177 tons/year (\$6.5 million/year)
- **Avoided stormwater runoff:** 13,275,000 cubic feet/year (\$884,000/year)
- **Avoided carbon emissions:** 753 tons (\$100,000)
- **Total functional value:** \$9.2 million/year
- **Structural value:** \$735 million

— Source: *State of the Urban Forest Report, City of Syracuse 2016*

### TO READ THE FULL REPORT

- Visit the New York State Urban Forestry Council at [nysufc.org](http://nysufc.org)

# BENEFITS OF TREES

*Arborist explains that ‘neighborhoods just look so much nicer’*

By | Alex Amico  
Staff reporter

## County officials stress the financial, ecological and social importance of planting trees

In a new report, “State of the Urban Forest,” Syracuse officials estimate the city saves nearly \$1 million a year through trees absorbing rainwater runoff that would otherwise overflow the sewer system.

The report lays out several benefits that trees provide to the city, including improving the air quality and temperature of neighborhoods. That awareness has caught on among city residents, like the dozens who gathered one recent weekend in Onondaga Park, west of South Avenue, to plant trees along neighborhood sidewalks.

“Hotter neighborhoods cost more to cool,” said Steve Harris, Syracuse’s city arborist. “Without trees, it makes pollution worse; it’s inhospitable.”

The report states that on an 80-degree day, neighborhoods without trees can be as much as 12 degrees warmer than those with trees. On tree-lined streets, natural cooling can have a positive financial impact for local merchants. “It’s been determined that business districts with tree-lined streets have people linger longer and spend more money,” Harris said.

One of the most tangible benefits trees provide is curbing stormwater runoff. Onondaga County’s Save the Rain program has reported that a single tree, through its root system, can soak up 2,000 gallons of water each year.

“Historically, we’ve had a lot of challenge with combined sewer overflow,” said Madison Quinn, a project coordinator with Save the Rain. “When there’s too much rainwater, it overflows into the lake and its tributaries,” Quinn said, referring to Onondaga Lake. “Trees reduce that occurrence.”

Quinn said that the county had once planned to build several water treatment facilities to help clean the lake. When County Executive Joanie Mahoney took office, however, she halted that plan in favor of creating a green infrastructure.

“This is better for the triple bottom line,” Quinn said. “Environmentally, economically and socially.”

The city estimates that trees soaking up stormwater runoff save close to \$900,000 a year, over the cost of treatment plants. Inevitably, not all trees survive. Save the Rain combats that, Quinn said, by continuing to plant trees. To date, it has planted more than 6,000 trees.

One Saturday in November 2016, nearly 100 volunteers gathered in Onondaga Park to plant more than



> Representatives from Save the Rain, National Grid and Onondaga Earth Corps led a tree planting last year. | DeArbea Walker, Staff Photo

100 trees in adjacent neighborhoods. Volunteers ranged in age from young children to older adults — dressed in boots, jeans and neon safety vests.

“I’ve never planted a tree before, so I’m excited,” said Becca Rock, a student at State University of New York College of Environmental Science and Forestry who heard about the event from an advertisement on campus.

Representatives from Save the Rain, National Grid and the Onondaga Earth Corps led the planting, after first demonstrating to the volunteers the best methods for tree planting. First, they hacked away the top level of sod and grass, then dug into the ground. They put in the sapling, poured the dirt back on top and stomped it down, then spread rich, black mulch around the roots with their hands.

Jim Maloney, an arborist with National Grid, led a group of volunteers into a neighborhood to start the day’s planting. By noon, he and his group had worked three hours. “Most of this planting is driven by the rainwater benefits,” Maloney said. “But the reciprocal value is the communities get trees.”

In the neighborhood, Maloney pointed out the places where trees would be planted, which had been spray-painted on the grass. After setting up one group, he jogged across the street to help another one get ready. A truck pulled up with shovels. Maloney gave shovels to the volunteers, and they went to work.

“Neighborhoods just look so much nicer with trees,” he said.



# BOOK-SIGNING EVENT

*Author introduces his book to inspire others to ask for forgiveness*

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand director*

**Rashawn Sullivan compiled letters he wrote to apologize for the things he has done in the past**

**R**ashawn Sullivan pauses while addressing the crowd at his Jan. 6 book-signing event. After a deep breath he says, "These are tears of joy. I went to prison at age 17, and now I'm here."

Sullivan was released from prison in 2015 for committing a drive-by shooting in his youth that took the life of Jason Crawford. It took nearly half of his 17-year prison sentence for him to feel regret.

He shared that he grew up in and out of juvenile detention centers, had a mother and family addicted to drugs, and received guidance only from the young men he associated with in the neighborhood. Those factors, he said, led him to make such a rash decision based on ignorance. In prison, he found a higher power and worked to make changes.

Once released, Sullivan made a public apology to the Crawford family and vowed to inspire others. One effort is that the money from his first book, "iApologize," will be used to help establish a college fund for Crawford's nieces.

"This is the time for us to reclaim our community," Sullivan concluded. "It's time to go to the next level to save lives."

Sullivan organized the event not only to share his book, but also to unite the community. About 75 people attended to show their support, snap selfies with the author and read through a display of apology letters submitted by people in the community.

The letters — all focusing on a personal apology — were addressed to someone who had been wronged. Apologies were made to mothers, families or children, community members and even to the apology writers themselves.

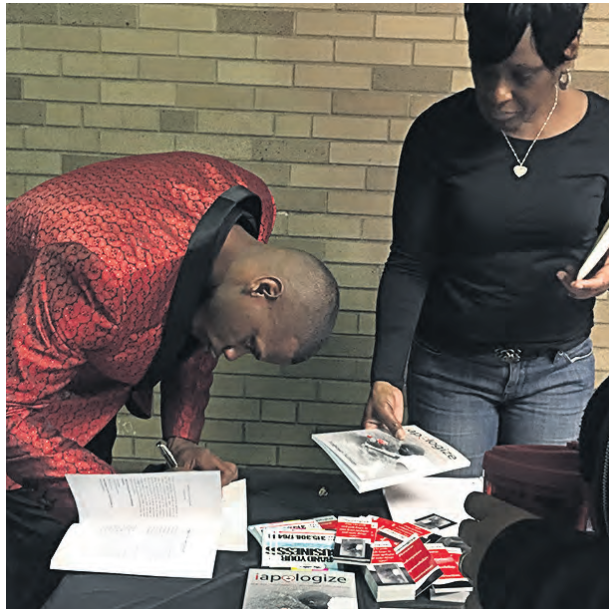
Apologies were written for things such as: selling drugs, hitting a teacher, stripping and sleeping with men for money, being a bad mother, sleeping with someone else's husband, smoking crack, stealing from their children and more.

One read: "I apologize for selling my kidz Christmas toys to buy drugs."

But other apologies were written directly to themselves, apologizing for not achieving their own dreams.

"I apologize to my career for not following through," stated one of them.

Clifford Ryans is with OGs Against Violence and is a strong supporter of Sullivan and his iApologize cam-



> Rashawn Sullivan, who was profiled in the Winter issue of The Stand, signs books at his book-signing event Jan. 6 at Henninger High School. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo

paign. He contributed a letter apologizing to the community for retreating after his son's murder in 1999.

"I turned my back on my community after his death," Ryans said. "I think back on it and think of the difference I could have made sooner if I wouldn't have waited nearly a decade to speak out and take action."

The letters played a powerful role in the event.

Olivia McCheyne wrote a letter to the family of the man her husband murdered and apologized for her role in hindering prosecution by destroying evidence.

"The thought of losing him (her husband) to life in prison or the death penalty was unbearable ... the day the police took him, I was pregnant," her letter stated.

She also apologized to her children for losing custody of them because of her role.

"I spent most of your lives fighting to try and get you back." She concluded that she wished she could go back and do everything differently, avoid the street life and put her children first.

Letters also were important in the creation of Sullivan's iApologize organization.

"At the tail end of his prison term, we had a lot of letters back and forth," said Timothy "Noble" Jennings-Bey, who runs the Trauma Response Team and works with Sullivan. The letters were a way for the two to discuss Sullivan's vision.

"It takes a special individual to step across the line and make an apology," Jennings-Bey said. "There's not many that can do this."

## iAPOLOGIZE ITEMS

To purchase iApologize apparel and Rashawn Sullivan's book, visit [iapologize315.com](http://iapologize315.com)

**Short-sleeve shirt:** \$15

**Long-sleeve shirt:** \$20

**Hat:** \$15

**Book:** \$19

Combination packages are also available





## LAND BANK PROCESS

- 1 The Land Bank acquires abandoned, vacant and tax-delinquent property from the city, from donors or through purchase. If there is a tenant in the house, the tenant is offered a lease to rent or relocation assistance.
- 2 The Land Bank examines the property and determines if it needs to be demolished or can go up for sale. Properties that are stable enough to list are cleaned out, tarped or boarded up to prevent water damage.
- 3 Most homes are then listed online in as-is condition and a sign is put on the home. The buyers must do the renovations. Some homes are renovated with funding by state grants. Home HeadQuarters often assists.
- 4 A potential buyer must submit background information. Owner-occupants must prove they have enough financial resources to purchase and renovate within six months. Landlords must prove they don't have any previous code violations or tax delinquencies. Buyers also submit a renovation plan and budget.
- 5 If the buyer is approved to purchase and does, renovations must be completed within 12 months.

# AFFORDABLE HOMES

*Buyers purchase vacant properties and restore them to usable form*



> Homes like this one, located on the Near West Side, are available for purchase through the Greater Syracuse Land Bank. After acquiring properties through the Land Bank, owners have one year to complete renovations. | Jasmine Gomez, Staff Photo

By | Jasmine Gomez  
Staff reporter

## Syracuse Land Bank, Home HeadQuarters work to make home ownership a possibility

In a three-bedroom home in the Eastwood neighborhood of Syracuse, Alexandra Adames' 3- and 5-year-old daughters have space to play, run and throw themselves on the ground without worries of bothering any neighbors.

"I'm really thankful because having this house means a lot to me because of my kids," Adames said. "They love it. They feel comfortable."

Since moving to Syracuse from the Dominican Republic nine years ago, Adames, a single mother of three on an income of \$23,000 a year, has rented apartments that never really felt like her own.

But now, Adames feels more at home than ever before. A year ago, she became a first-time homeowner when she purchased and moved into a newly renovated house on Hillsdale Avenue, partly due to a partnership between the Greater Syracuse Land Bank and Home HeadQuarters, a nonprofit whose primary mission is to renovate and sell homes to low- and moderate-income owner-occupants.

Home HeadQuarters acquired the property from the Land Bank for \$2,500, next to nothing in a neighborhood where the median sales price is about \$95,000. Adames paid \$90,000 for the home after renovations were completed, according to online listings, aided by a \$3,000 stipend from Home HeadQuarters.

The Greater Syracuse Land Bank sells homes at significantly lower prices to qualified buyers who can return them to productive use. In a city where out of a population of more than 144,000, only 21,306 people own homes, the Land Bank's prices make the path to homeownership more accessible to some who would otherwise be left out of the market.

Unlike Adames, most buyers purchase properties directly from the Land Bank, which acquires the houses after the city forecloses on owners for failure to pay property taxes. New owners generally take it on themselves to make the necessary repairs to restore properties to habitability. Owners agree to a timeline to get the work done, and can lose the property if they fail to keep on schedule.

But often, the Land Bank demolishes properties that are far beyond hope for reasonable repair, a practice that has attracted criticism, especially from advocates of the South, Southwest and Near West sides like Rich Puchalski of the nonprofit Syracuse United Neighbors.



While the demolitions take out homes that are unsafe and that some may see as eyesores, Puchalski and others say there have been too many demolitions and not enough renovations in the areas that need them the most.

“We’ve been critical of the fact that when we counted up the numbers and looked at the houses, we’ve found very few houses have been renovated and sold to owners in our target area,” Puchalski said. “Most of them took place in better neighborhoods — the Valley and Strathmore, for example.”

At a Common Council meeting a few months ago, Syracuse United Neighbors accused the Land Bank of redlining the most underprivileged parts of the city.

“We want to see the resources put into renovating these houses and turning our neighborhoods around,” Puchalski said.

The 5-year-old Land Bank recently applied for funding from the New York State Attorney General’s Office to renovate 10 homes in neighborhoods with the highest concentrations of abandoned and tax-delinquent properties.

The Greater Syracuse Land Bank was created in 2012 to combat Syracuse’s vacant and underutilized property problem. The Land Bank acquires most of its homes through Syracuse’s foreclosure process, a method where the city takes the home of a tax-delinquent owner in order to satisfy the unpaid back taxes. As of Jan. 17, the Land Bank had acquired 1,264 properties.

As the housing stock in Syracuse becomes older — 94.4 percent of the housing stock in Syracuse was built before 1990, according to [cnyfairhousing.org](http://cnyfairhousing.org) — more residents have trouble keeping up with the costs related to repairs and the upkeep of an aging home. In a city where 34.8 percent of residents live below the poverty line, according to the U.S. Census Bureau, absent and unable homeowners have left properties abandoned, vacant and tax-delinquent. This contributes to the extensive inventory the Land Bank has today.

Katelyn Wright, executive director of the Land Bank, says another problem is there is no incentive for landlords and homeowners to invest in property maintenance since the low property value of an older house makes it unlikely the owner will receive that money back once the house is sold.

Kerry Quaglia, the executive director at Home HeadQuarters, has dealt with the high rehabilitation costs associated with dilapidated homes. He points out that the majority of the properties the Land Bank sells are sold as is, and many are in a state of extreme disrepair. Though the listing prices are low, the properties will eat up a lot of funds in renovations.

“That’s a common problem here in Syracuse,” Quaglia said. “Because property values are pretty low, but rehab costs are pretty high, we might buy a property from the Land Bank for \$10,000 and need to put \$70,000 or \$80,000 into it to get it fully up to code and

## MEETING DEADLINES

What happens to a property if the purchaser does not renovate the house in the given time period of one year?

- The buyer can request an extension, but the buyer must show he/she has the financial resources to finish.
- If not, the Land Bank moves to foreclose, but says this is very rare. It really depends on the buyer’s situation.



> Rich Puchalski, of Syracuse United Neighbors, in front of a property scheduled for demolition by the Land Bank. Puchalski says that there have been too many demolitions by the Land Bank and not enough renovations. | Jasmine Gomez, Staff Photo



## 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](http://syracuselandbank.org)



> Alexandra Adames, right, a first-time homeowner, is shown with her mother and two daughters in her Hillsdale Avenue home, which she purchased a year ago. She bought the home newly renovated. | Jasmine Gomez, Staff Photo

then it may only be worth \$50,000 or \$60,000 after rehab.”

The Syracuse Land Bank is one of the most active in the state, according to a recent report from the Office of the Attorney General titled Revitalizing NY State. As of Jan. 17, the Land Bank had sold 402 properties, many of these to first-time homeowners.

Adames, who pays about \$600 a month for her mortgage, says what she pays now is comparable to what she used to pay in rent in a worse neighborhood than where she lives now.

“When you’re renting an apartment, it’s like you’re giving your money away and you’re always going to be renting, but if you have a house at least you know whatever money you’re paying is for your own house and one day it’s going to be your completely paid house,” Adames said.

Ebony Selmon, who also purchased a Land Bank property through Home HeadQuarters, says she’s proud to have something she calls her own.

“I feel like I’m paying into an investment for me, an investment for my future,” Selmon said. “I don’t need permission to paint the ceiling black if I want to and it gives me a sense of pride because this belongs to me.”

Selmon grew up in the Strathmore neighborhood and always dreamed of owning a home there, but didn’t know if she could afford the typical price of a home in one of the city’s more affluent neighborhoods. Selmon and her husband consider themselves a middle-class family, with their income falling into the \$40,000-\$50,000 income bracket. According to city-data.com, the average price of a home in Strathmore is about \$140,000.

“In the back of mind, I was like, ‘We’re never going to be able to afford a house up there,’ but it’s nice to

dream,” Selmon said.

But after discovering a Land Bank house, Selmon and her husband were eventually able to close on a property in May 2015, becoming the first-time homeowners of a fully renovated home on Glenwood Avenue for \$89,000, a price significantly lower than other listing prices in Strathmore. She and her husband pay \$515 a month for their base mortgage, a price she says is cheaper than renting a “nice” two-bedroom apartment.

While Adames and Selmon were able to have their homes renovated through Home HeadQuarters, some buyers purchase directly from the Land Bank, either hiring outside contractors, or completing the renovations themselves.

Margarita Rodriguez, another first-time homeowner, bought her Near West Side home on Fabius Street directly from the Land Bank for \$12,000. It was originally on the market by the owner for over \$40,000, a price that she could not afford and thought was way too high.

Rodriguez and her husband are both disabled and live on a fixed income made up of their monthly Social Security payments. She always dreamed of owning a home and was searching for one that fell within her price range.

The Land Bank sold the Fabius property with the condition that she complete the few necessary repairs within a year. Most of the repairs were completed by her husband, lowering their costs.

Now Rodriguez owns the fixed-up house and all she pays are the property taxes and homeowner’s insurance.

Rodriguez has been living in the home for a year and a half now and loves it because the design reminds her of Puerto Rico, her home country.



“Every person’s dream is to have a home that is their own, and I guess you can say I have completed my dream and thanks to God I am here,” Rodriguez said in an interview conducted in Spanish. “The house is humble and small, but for us two it’s enough.”

One thing almost prevented Rodriguez from purchasing the home.

There was an abandoned, vacant house next door that was causing the neighborhood problems. Not only was the house physically unsafe because it was falling apart, but it also was being used as a hangout spot. Vacant houses tend to attract unsolicited activity like trash dumping, drug dealing, or vandalism. Fortunately for Rodriguez, the house was ordered to be demolished, meaning it would no longer cause problems for the property that Rodriguez eventually purchased.

As of Jan. 17, the Greater Syracuse Land Bank had completed 169 demolitions. Some houses have been vacant so long that they are too far damaged, such as being waterlogged, and cannot be saved. When such homes are demolished, the Land Bank tries to sell the lot to homeowners next door.

For example, the recent demolition of a house left an open lot next to Maria Acevedo’s house on Elliot Street on the Near West Side. She was able to purchase the lot from the Land Bank for \$151. The lot will allow Acevedo to add something extra to her home, such as a tent or a kiddie pool for her granddaughters, she said in an interview conducted in Spanish.

Bob Dougherty, a former common councilor who supported the creation of the Land Bank and who is now a member of its advisory board, says the Land Bank must make strategic decisions.

“The Land Bank had to be smart, particularly in the beginning, about where they were going to try to get their foot in the door. So if they were just going to be concentrating on the South and West sides of the city, I’m not sure they would be selling many properties, particularly to owner-occupants,” Dougherty said.

Dougherty says the South and West sides have suffered not so much because of the Land Bank directly, but more so because of the market. There isn’t as much interest from owner-occupants to live in those neighborhoods.

“It’s particularly hard to market something, especially to an owner-occupant, because people look up and down the street and think, ‘Why would I want to live here?’ and ‘Why would I want to spend money to live on this street?’ unfortunately,” Dougherty said.

The South and Southwest sides carry the majority of the vacant and dilapidated properties in the Land Bank’s inventory list.

Dougherty says he would like to see the Land Bank tackle more foreclosed properties in many neighborhoods, doing the renovations itself or through organizations like Home Headquarters and turning over

occupant-ready properties instead of dilapidated homes where buyers take on the work themselves, on deadline.

But the lack of funding is an issue. The Land Bank applies for grants from the state and has successfully solicited \$1.5 million from the Common Council each year.

However, the Land Bank does not have a secure stream of revenue. It must reapply for the funding it gets every cycle, an issue that Wright says limits the work the Land Bank can do.

“I would say if we had more financial resources we would probably be doing a lot more renovations before we sell because we’re only attracting a certain type of buyer that’s willing to take on the renovations. They’ve got to have the right skill set,” Wright said.

“We could appeal to a much broader range of buyers if we had some fixer-uppers and some move-in ready stuff,” she added.

Though the Land Bank faces criticisms, most agree the creation of the Land Bank was a step in the right direction. Puchalski says the Land Bank could benefit from partnering with other organizations besides Home Headquarters that will help the Land Bank tackle the issue of vacant properties faster and more aggressively.



> Margarita Rodriguez and her husband are shown in their Fabius Street home on the Near West Side. Rodriguez bought the house directly from the Land Bank for \$12,000 under the condition that she complete the necessary repairs within a year. Her husband performed most of the work, which kept down costs. | Jasmine Gomez, Staff Photo

But while the Land Bank strategizes ways to ensure greater success, first-time homeowners are grateful to have a place they can call their own.

For Rodriguez, the Land Bank has already done lots of good.

“It is helpful because there are a lot of people out there that don’t have a high enough income to buy a home but the Land Bank selling houses cheap — for people to renovate it — is a good idea because the dreams of many people come true,” Rodriguez said.

## BY THE NUMBERS

**Properties acquired:**

1,264

**Properties sold:**

402

**Demolitions completed:**

169

**Private investment:**

\$15.5M

**Grants leveraged:**

\$9M

**Property taxes generated:**

\$728K/YR

— Source: Greater Syracuse Land Bank as of January 17, 2017



## ABOUT START IT

The Start It program costs \$40, which includes a book. There are no additional costs. The program provides:

- 12 weeks of coursework
- 10 hours of one-on-one consultation
- Help with securing loans needed to finance business ideas; Cooperative Federal Credit Union is a partner in that process

### INTERESTED?

Recruitment has begun for the next class, which should start in late March or early April.

If you would like to join the next class or would like to know more about the program, contact Dan Cowen at [DCowen@CenterStateCEO.com](mailto:DCowen@CenterStateCEO.com) or (315) 470-1800.

You also can reach out to Rickey Brown at [diversifynewyork@gmail.com](mailto:diversifynewyork@gmail.com) or to me at [reggie@softspokenband.com](mailto:reggie@softspokenband.com)

Visit The Stand online at [mysouthsidestand.com](http://mysouthsidestand.com) to view a photo gallery of the December 2016 graduates

# GETTING STARTED

*Course helps people transform dreams into successful business plans*

By | Reggie Seigler  
*The Stand columnist*

**Start It inspires participants who have a wide range of creative entrepreneurship ideas**

For those of you who have been following my Friendly Five column regularly, you know that I usually write about local musicians and their accomplishments. That theme hasn't been abandoned, but I have chosen this month to write about another interest: entrepreneurship.

I hope the topic will still be of interest to the non-musician readers of my Friendly Five column. I expect my musician friend readers to find it of interest because almost every one of them that I've ever encountered has been an entrepreneur. If you don't believe me, just try to get one of them to play for you for free. You'll become a believer very quickly. LOL!

This month's column has something useful for all. It's about a 12-week business course called Start It.

CenterState CEO offers the course for people who are thinking about starting up businesses and also for entrepreneurs who are in the early stages of businesses they have started. The program focuses on helping individuals and partners to think through their business ideas and create viable business plans. Classes are held weekly, and the curriculum is presented by Rickey Brown of Diversify NY and myself. Dan Cowen of CenterState CEO is the program's director.

Entrepreneurs learn, among other things, how to analyze and define their target markets. They develop a 30-second elevator pitch and learn how to effectively use it to help market their businesses.

At the beginning of the course, Tricia Stewart, who wants to open a Grenadian restaurant, said, "I'm not good at public speaking." Asia Matthews, of Asia's Lash & Brow, thought the same thing. At graduation, however, both gave business presentations with calm and finesse.

Classes are usually made up of individuals with a wide range of creative business ideas. The recent graduating class included event promoters, masseuses, boat seat upholsterers and sellers of skincare products. Jaqueline and Chris Travis, a husband-and-wife team, were in the class. They described their business idea, always in unison, as "empanadas, empanadas, empanadas."

They plan to start a food truck featuring authentic Bolivian food, including, of course, empanadas.

Shankevia "Kevi" Dean was one of the food service providers in the class. Kevi has a master's degree in social work and is employed full time at OCM BOCES. She



> Asia Matthews receives her diploma from Reggie Seigler at the Start It graduation ceremony. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

began her business, "Kevi's Treats," in 2012 while she was a student at Syracuse University. "I started selling my lemon cookies as a way to earn extra money," she said. "I found that I liked it and wanted to keep building on it after graduation."

Kevi's business model drives her sales — she delivers. A banner on her website, [KeviTreats.com](http://KeviTreats.com), states: "Kevi's Treats. Because grandma doesn't deliver."

Asia, of Asia's Lash & Brow, has been a licensed esthetician since 2010. She promotes her business through word of mouth and Facebook. In a recent post, she described the role of an esthetician. "An Esthetician is someone who is devoted to, or professionally occupied with skin health and beauty." Asia provides facials and lash and brow treatments. Her dream is to open a full-service spa where people can be pampered. She works by appointment only and can be reached at (315) 288-8087. Her business is located at 404 Oak St., Suite 340.

Graduation was Dec. 20, 2016, with nearly 20 graduates. Dan helped Rickey and me to host a ceremony at the Tech Garden, 235 Harrison St., by securing the place for us. He also knocked the ball out of the park with some delicious authentic Jamaican food from the Jerk Hut. Sarah Robin, a class participant who is new to the U.S., brought a delicious dish from her native Pakistan.

John Pertillar, of Ramenes Home Improvement, brought his wife and kids to graduation. He describes himself as a "serial entrepreneur" and recently opened a car lot to augment his business activities. "I am working hard to build something that I can leave my family," he said. "I want them to know what I am doing. I'm doing this for them."





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## PUBLIC INPUT

The draft **Third Annual Action Plan for the City of Syracuse and funding recommendations for HUD's 43rd Program Year** (May 1, 2017 – April 30, 2018) is out. This plan contains recommendations for funding programs and services that were vetted through the city's volunteer Risk Analysis Committee in conjunction with Neighborhood and Business Development (NBD) staff.

To view the report, visit [syrgov.net/nbd](http://syrgov.net/nbd) and scroll down to **Third Annual Action Plan**

A public comment period has begun. Two open forums will be held in February to discuss the contents of the plan.

- 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 8, by NBD
- 5:30 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 22, by Common Council

Both meetings will be held in the **Common Council Chambers** in City Hall

Written comments can be mailed to Paul Driscoll, Commissioner, City of Syracuse Department of Neighborhood and Business Development, 201 E. Washington St., 6th Floor, Syracuse, NY 13202 or emailed to: [nbd@syrgov.net](mailto:nbd@syrgov.net)

# 'DEPTH AND DIGNITY'

*Newly appointed judge says he's familiar with issues of South Side*



> Derrek Thomas is sworn in as City judge by Mayor Stephanie Miner on Dec. 28. | Photo provided by the city of Syracuse

By | Miguel Balbuena  
*Community correspondent*

## Fairness, compassion and justice are values Derrek Thomas intends to instill in new role

Italian theologian St. Thomas Aquinas and the biblical King Solomon were among historical figures mentioned at a recent swearing-in ceremony held in the Common Council Chambers at Syracuse City Hall, which drew a crowd of more than 100 residents.

Tasked by law to pick a replacement for Stephen Dougherty, who resigned as City judge in November, Mayor Stephanie Miner chose Derrek Thomas. His appointment took effect Jan. 1. Previously, he was the city's director of personnel and labor relations.

Speaking at Thomas' swearing-in ceremony Dec. 28, Miner said that smart people are usually considered so because they are surrounded with talent.

"It's an awesome responsibility for me as mayor to appoint judges for vacated positions," Miner said. "I'm proud to appoint a person such as Derrek Thomas, who will do justice for our community, where many are born with two strikes against them. Derrek cares deeply about people, and brings accountability and a sense of justice to the bench."

The function was bookended by an invocation and a benediction by Sharon Perry, an administrative assistant in the department of personnel. She thanked God for "the gift of our city and the hands of Mayor Miner," and asked, "Cover every person here with your divine presence and bless Derrek as you had blessed Solomon with prudence, knowledge and discernment."

Bill Ryan, city of Syracuse chief of staff, served as master of ceremonies. He continued the uplifting paean to Thomas in formal and also lighter tones.

After sharing that Thomas would be a welcome addition to the rotation of the City Court basketball team, Ryan said: "The new judge is a gentleman who is a truly humble and dedicated civil servant. He reads everything, from newspapers to the Bible. He likes to meet people from every walk of life. He draws people from different backgrounds and makes them better."

City Court Judge Mary Anne Doherty also shared her insights into Thomas' personality.

"I met Derrek when I was corporation counsel, and he applied for a job at City Hall," she said. "He looked great on paper, so I arranged to interview him in person to confirm that. He was honest and thoughtful in his responses. He's just a superstar. After we hired him, he has been very positive, and he loves working for the city."



He will bring depth and dignity to the judicial bench.”

Finally, Thomas had the chance to address the audience, which included his family, friends, current and future co-workers, such as judges Vanessa Bogan, James Cecile and Theodore Limpert.

Thomas quoted philosopher Aquinas as having said in his book, “Summa Theologica,” written between 1265 and 1274: “Justice is a certain rectitude of mind whereby a man does what he ought to do in the circumstances confronting him.”

Another of the main influences in Thomas’ life was seated right in front of him, next to his wife and children. “I was raised by a mother who taught me to be fair and compassionate,” he said.

Added Miner: “Every man whom I have met was raised by a great mother. This is the case with Derrek.”

After witnessing Thomas’ oath of office administered by the mayor, the public was invited to a celebratory reception at Maxwells bar in Hanover Square, a mere three blocks from City Hall. There, Thomas granted this correspondent his first media interview as sworn judge.

As to his specific goals, he said: “My plan is to reduce the number of people who are introduced to the city criminal justice system. As a judge, I intend to exude the values of fairness, compassion and justice, keeping in mind the need to balance them with the citizens’ right to have protection and a feeling of safety, including those living on the South Side.”

Asked to expand on what his appointment would mean for the South Side, Thomas said he could relate to the neighborhood because of his volunteer work in Syracuse and his growing up in Albany.

He added that he is familiar with issues affecting the South Side because he is a director on the board of Syracuse Community Connections (formerly Syracuse Model Neighborhood Facility), which operates the Southwest Community Center, and because he is a director on the board of the Syracuse Housing Authority, which owns extensive properties, such as Pioneer Homes.

***“He’s just a superstar.”***

**— City Court Judge  
Mary Anne Doherty**

“I can also speak from my experience growing up in Albany in a single-parent household, and having many relatives requiring public assistance and living in public housing,” he said. “I went to an elementary and a middle school where there was a lot of trouble, plus the high school that I attended was not one of the best.”

Still, he graduated on time from high school and went on to earn undergraduate and graduate degrees from the University at Albany, State University of New York, as well as a law degree from Albany Law School.

“Besides my mother, what made the difference for me when I was younger was having role models,” he said. “I saw other people succeeding in life and I told myself, ‘They are not smarter than I am, so why can’t I succeed, too?’”

He concluded: “What the South Side youth need are role models. Everything is possible. There is no limitation to what the young generation can do if they work hard in their classrooms.”

## Syracuse University



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

**“I wanted to be an example to my children.”**

Angela Gunn  
Political Science major,  
SU student

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## SCHOOL EFFORTS

### Nottingham High School

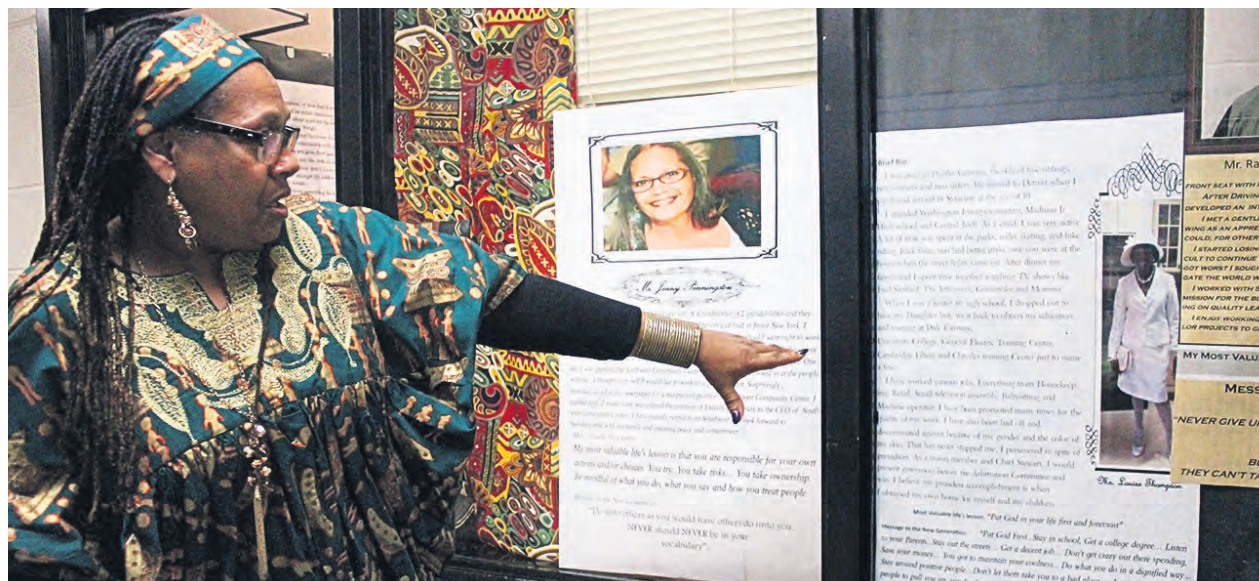
- Students will work on the hall painting for the Academy B wing of the building. The squares will feature positive and educational quotes designed to inspire students and promote the importance of education.
- A large roll of paper will be hung along the top of the second floor of the school. On the paper will be the phrase, "I have a dream that one day ..." Students will write the change they would like to see in the world. This will be introduced after students watch Martin Luther King Jr.'s speech.

### Institute of Technology Syracuse Central High School

- A cobbler on Washington Street collects used shoes and repairs them for the community. ITC students will select a day when students can bring in old shoes. Then they will deliver them to the cobbler to promote "Walk a Day in Someone Else's Shoes."

# BLACK HISTORY

*Schools, libraries and businesses host events throughout February*



> During last year's Black History Museum on display at the Southwest Community Center, Kathy Pearson explains why she chose the local individuals she featured and what today's youth can learn from them. | File Photo

#### WHAT: Art Exhibit

**WHEN:** Throughout the entire month

**WHERE:** Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.

**DETAILS:** Artist Geraldine Greig, who resides in Syracuse, will display her paintings and drawings

**COST:** Free and open to the public

**MORE INFO.:** Call (315) 435-3395

#### WHAT: The Story Quilts of Vanessa Johnson

**WHEN:** 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 4

**WHERE:** Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.

**DETAILS:** Hear the tales told in the Story Quilts made by fiber artist and storyteller Vanessa Johnson. Travel with her on the Underground Railroad. Hear the stories of the cloth made for African Kings. Listen to the legend of Onondaga Creek. Help a turtle win a tug of war with a lion. Come help tell these stories and pass around touchable quilts in this interactive event for all ages.

**COST:** Free and open to the public

**MORE INFO.:** Call (315) 435-3395

#### WHAT: This is My Neighborhood

**WHEN:** 5:30 p.m. Thursday, Feb. 9

**WHERE:** Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.

**DETAILS:** Brenda Muhammad, local filmmaker, will screen her 2016 short film depicting daily struggles and hopes on Syracuse's South Side. Event facilitator is Focusing Our Resources for Community Enlightenment (FORCE) Ready Syracuse Project

**COST:** Free and open to the public

**MORE INFO.:** Call (315) 435-3395

#### WHAT: Meet the Artist

**WHEN:** 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 11

**WHERE:** Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.

**DETAILS:** Meet the library's February artist, Geraldine Greig. Light refreshments will be served.

**COST:** Free and open to the public

**MORE INFO.:** Call (315) 435-3395

#### WHAT: 'Unwrapping Vanessa:' Fiber Memory Art

**WHEN:** Feb. 11 through March 25; hours 2 to 7 p.m.

Monday through Friday, and noon to 4 p.m. Saturday

**WHERE:** ArtRage Gallery, 505 Hawley Ave.

**DETAILS:** "Unwrapping Vanessa," by Syracuse fiber artist and storyteller Vanessa Johnson, highlights a new body of work that honors the voices of women and girls who continue to influence the artist's life and speaks to her own transnational experience through the women who inspire her.

**COST:** Free and open to the public

**MORE INFO.:** Visit [artragegallery.org](http://artragegallery.org)

#### WHAT: 5th Edition featuring Michael Houston

**WHEN:** 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 12

**WHERE:** Al's Wine & Whiskey Lounge, 321 S. Clinton St.

**DETAILS:** Michael Houston first became popular as the lead vocalist for his late brother Jeff Houston's band, the J Project, back in the early 2000s. More recently, he had been known as the bandleader and primary lead vocalist for Michael and Anjela Lynn & Talented Ones. This new group returns to J Project-style music — classic music with an infusion of jazz.



**COST:** Free entry; 21 and older with I.D.  
**MORE INFO.:** Call Al's at (315) 703-4773

**WHAT: A Place of Rage Film Screening and Discussion**

**WHEN:** 7 p.m. Wednesday, Feb. 15

**WHERE:** ArtRage Gallery, 505 Hawley Ave.

**DETAILS:** A film by Pratibha Parmar. This exuberant celebration of African-American women and their achievements features interviews with Angela Davis, June Jordan and Alice Walker. Within the context of the civil rights, black power and feminist movements, the trio reassess how women such as Rosa Parks and Fannie Lou Hamer revolutionized American society.

**COST:** Free and open to the public

**MORE INFO.:** Visit [artragegallery.org](http://artragegallery.org)

**WHAT: Telling the Harlem Renaissance**

**WHEN:** 2 to 3 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 18

**WHERE:** Petit Branch Library, 105 Victoria Place

**DETAILS:** An African-American baby who refuses to be born in the South; Billie Holiday's first performance; rent parties; and a night at the Apollo Theater. Hear legends, songs, stories and poems from the Harlem Renaissance period in America's New York City. Suitable for youth from sixth grade to adults.

**COST:** Free

**MORE INFO.:** Call (315) 435-3636

**WHAT: Black History Month Cabaret**

**WHEN:** 4 to 8 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 19

**WHERE:** Drumlins Country Club, 800 Nottingham Road

**DETAILS:** Smooth jazz master Jackiem Joyner returns for a reprise performance from last year, joined by Selina Albright, the progeny of the great Gerald Albright.

**COST:** \$35 in advance, \$40 at the door

**MORE INFO.:** Contact Larry Luttinger at (315) 479-5299

**WHAT: Donna Alford JaSSBand**

**WHEN:** 9 p.m. to 1 a.m. Sunday, Feb. 19

**WHERE:** Al's Wine & Whiskey Lounge, 321 S. Clinton St.

**DETAILS:** Local group will perform their vocal-driven rhythm and blues with popular rhythmic instrumentals. The group says it performs regularly at Al's on "the Sunday nights when school teachers, government workers and bankers don't have to work the next day."

**COST:** Free entry; 21 and older with I.D.

**MORE INFO.:** Call Al's at (315) 703-4773

**WHAT: I am Black History**

**WHEN:** 5:30 to 7 p.m. Tuesday, Feb. 21

**WHERE:** Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.

**DETAILS:** Event will be led by Brenda Muhammad with Focusing Our Resources for Community Enlightenment

(FORCE) Ready Syracuse Project and will highlight local Black History and share ways you can record and celebrate your own history.

**COST:** Free and open to all ages

**MORE INFO.:** Call (315) 435-3395

**WHAT: Caribbean Cinematic Festival**

**WHEN:** Feb. 23 through Feb. 26

**WHERE:** Community Folk Art Center, 805 E. Genesee St.

**DETAILS:** The four-day festival will highlight cultural contributions as well as address polarizing issues in the Caribbean and the Caribbean Diaspora. These highlights will be explored through film, dance, post-film discussion, food and spoken word. Full schedule online.

**COST:** Free and open to the public

**MORE INFO.:** Visit [communityfolkartcenter.org](http://communityfolkartcenter.org)

**WHAT: An Evening of Education and Empowerment**

**WHEN:** 6 to 8 p.m. Friday, Feb. 24

**WHERE:** The Black Olive, 250 S. Clinton St.

**DETAILS:** "The African American Dilemma" by Khalid Bey takes a bold look at the psychological effect that slavery has had on the condition of people of African descent, as well as other ethnic groups living in America. Bey's book will be discussed during the event.

**COST:** \$10 admission; \$15 admission includes the book

**MORE INFO.:** Contact Latoya Allen at (315) 880-6296 or [lallenpride@yahoo.com](mailto:lallenpride@yahoo.com)

**WHAT: Movie Matinee: "Race"**

**WHEN:** 2 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 25

**WHERE:** Beauchamp Branch Library, 2111 S. Salina St.

**DETAILS:** Enjoy the newly released "Race," a biopic film about Jesse Owens, the famed track-and-field athlete who endured racial discrimination and adversity on his way to winning four gold medals at the 1936 Olympics in Nazi Germany. Free popcorn provided.

**COST:** Free and open to all ages

**MORE INFO.:** Call (315) 435-3395

**WHAT: SOUL**

**WHEN:** 7 p.m. Saturday, Feb. 25, and

4 p.m. Sunday, Feb. 26

**WHERE:** ArtRage Gallery, 505 Hawley Ave.

**DETAILS:** This new theatrical work by Vanessa Johnson offers a journey of DNA memories, present makings and future dreams, and is told in three actors' voices with spoken word, songs and monologues. Johnson shares the common experiences of all women. This unique, interactive "telling" invites the audience to contribute their own memories and dreams to the story. Featuring Hawa Brima, Debra Richardson and Vanessa Johnson. Music by Bernie Williford.

**COST:** \$10 at the door

**MORE INFO.:** Visit [artragegallery.org](http://artragegallery.org)

**Clary Middle School**

- Students will participate in a canned food drive for the many families in need in the Clary community. The school aims for each student to contribute at least one canned good to achieve a goal of 300 cans

**Roberts Elementary School**

- Students either individually or as a class will work to create poems based on Martin Luther King Jr.'s "I have a dream" speech and focus on how they as individuals can create change in their school community. Classes will read the speech and highlight words and terms that focus on positive changes. The students at Roberts have been working on a positivity project and will compare the words they highlight in the speech to the positivity project.
- Students will examine Martin Luther King Jr.'s obituary from The New York Times. Then as a class, a theme will be chosen and words or phrases highlighted related to the theme (for example: freedom, leader, legacy). Word clouds or poems will be created using the chosen words.

— Provided by Syracuse City School District Central Office





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