

# the **Stand** south side news

[www.mysouthsidestand.com](http://www.mysouthsidestand.com)

Syracuse, NY

**APRIL 2017**

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**FREE**

## STARTING FRESH

Local lawyer helps  
those with criminal  
pasts to find stability

## Racism & homelessness

Initiative changing conversations around inequality

## a dad's duties

Advice & reflection on  
the meaning of family  
from a proud father

Students will brighten  
vacant homes with murals  
**Painting  
the town**

## REZONING THE SALT CITY





# 2 INSIDE | APRIL

the  
Stand

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## SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH

DEAN LORRAINE BRANHAM,  
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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.

**COMMUNITY** | Read about By HIS Spirit Ministries, which is buying vacant houses and transforming them into community centers for city youth between 9 and 17 years old.

**FATHERHOOD** | Meet Stanley Ford, father of two, who teaches sixth-grade math and is intent on defying stereotypes about minority fathers.

**FEATURES** | Find out how lawyer Lanessa Owens helps community members who have criminal records overcome barriers to finding jobs.

**COMMUNITY** | Learn about ReZone Syracuse, a project that is updating the zoning ordinance and map for the city — for the first time since 1967.

■ Cover photography by Ashley Kang of Lanessa Owens

## CALENDAR | APRIL

**What:** I-81 Impact on the Southern End Neighborhoods

**When:** 6 to 8 p.m. Thursday, April 6

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

**Details:** Discussion will center on the direct impact I-81 will have on the South Side. Presentation by Mark Frechette, New York State Department of Transportation, with panelists: Angela Wright (moderator), executive director of Syracuse Model Neighborhood Corporation; Jim Bright, president and owner of Dunk & Bright Furniture; Mark Nicotra, Save I-81 and town supervisor for Town of Salina; Peter Sarver, convener with Moving People Transportation Coalition; Bill Simmons, executive director of Syracuse Housing Authority; and Lemir Teron, assistant professor at SUNY-ESF focused on environmental justice.

**Cost:** Free

**More Info.:** Call Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today coordinator Tina Zagya at (315) 448-8178 or email TZagya@SyrGov.net

**What:** Poetry and Drawing Contest and Workshop

**When:** 2 p.m. Saturday, April 8

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

**Details:** Poems and black-and-white drawings will be created on-site based on a theme. Poets and artists will be encouraged to talk about their creation and the theme. Final selection of winners will be made by the general public at the Betts Branch Library on May 6. Winning poems and drawings will appear inside Centro buses. Workshop providers: Martin Willitts (poetry) and Michael Sickler (drawings).

**Cost:** Free

**More Info.:** Call the library at (315) 435-3395

**What:** ACTing For A Just Community

**When:** 6 to 9 p.m. Tuesday, April 25

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

**Details:** The Alliance of Communities Transforming Syracuse's annual banquet will feature keynote speaker Kathryn Howe Ruscitto, president and chief executive officer of St. Joseph's Health. She has dedicated herself to civic-minded and mission-driven roles throughout her career, including efforts to make St. Joseph's a driving force in the revitalization of Syracuse's North Side neighborhood. In addition, she oversaw St. Joseph's in the creation of an innovative, integrated health care center on Syracuse's Near West Side in collaboration with key community partners.

**Cost:** \$65

**For tickets:** Contact ACTS office manager Liso Smith at (315) 416-6363 or visit [acts-syracuse.org/events](http://acts-syracuse.org/events)

**What:** Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today Strategic Planning Meeting

**When:** 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. Thursday, April 27

**Where:** Gifford Foundation, 126 N. Salina St.

**Details:** TNT is now a 501c3, separate from the city of Syracuse, and will meet to redefine its mission and values as well as set goals and objectives for the future. Parking is available behind the building at no cost.

**Cost:** Free

**To RSVP:** Email [TNTstrategicplanning@gmail.com](mailto:TNTstrategicplanning@gmail.com) or reach out to either the TNT coordinator, Tina Zagya, (315) 448-8178 or the TNT citywide board co-chair, Frank Cetera, (315) 308-1372

If you've enjoyed reading stories in The Stand about South Side residents doing interesting and incredible things, then you're going to love the Human Library Event planned at Beauchamp Branch Library this month.

Many people previously featured on these pages will be a part of this event, and you'll get to hear their stories in person.

The event allows you to "check out" an individual to hear the person's story live.

A Human Library allows people to reach out and connect with individuals in their community with whom they might not normally interact. Visitors who arrive April 15 will have the opportunity to borrow and engage in conversation with a Human Book.

The goal of the day is to promote tolerance, celebrate differences and encourage understanding of people who come from varied cultural or lifestyle backgrounds. Books can be checked out the day of the event or in advance at the library's front desk.

Each Human Book is a volunteer who is open to sharing personal stories with others in a safe environment. The Readers (anyone who attends) will have the opportunity to participate in one-on-one or small group conversations with Human Books. Then Readers are also able to ask questions and to learn about another's experiences or special interests. Readers check out Human Books for 30 minutes at a time. Nine "books" will be available.

Among the guests: Clifford Ryans with O.G.'s Against Violence, who recently received a Social Justice Award for his efforts to help reduce community violence; Alamin Muhammad, who will speak about his past involvement in a Chicago gang and what inspired him to launch We Rise Above The Streets, a local nonprofit that helps feed the homeless; motivational speaker George Lynch; Kate Waltman, who launched Step Up Moment with a mission to offer fitness and nutrition training to residents in need; Quindell Williams, an Emmy award-winning journalist working for CNY Central; and Ardena Harvey, who overcame an abusive relationship and went on to write a book about the lessons she learned. Be sure to call or visit the library to learn more.

This month, you also can hear from me directly during the TEDx Syracuse University Talk, which is set for April 22. I'll be speaking on how a community newspaper can serve as the voice of one's community and how The Stand's model could be replicated elsewhere to engage and serve other communities.

TED (Technology, Entertainment, Design) talks are known as live presentations on ideas worth spreading. The TEDx are independent events held and organized locally to connect people in one community to have a TED-like experience. I'm excited to share what I've learned working at The Stand over the past eight years and why I feel community journalism is so important. This year's event will promote a new series — local Changemakers. This series will showcase big ideas, bright thinkers and relentless innovators from Syracuse. These local stories will be shared via social media (search for TEDx Syracuse University on Facebook) and some may even join me to speak at the event.

Ashley Kang



## UPCOMING EVENTS

**What:** Human Library Event

**When:** 1 to 4:30 p.m. Saturday, April 15

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

**To reserve:** Call the library for a list of available books and to register at (315) 435-3395

**What:** TEDx Syracuse University presents Switch

**When:** 1 to 5 p.m. Saturday, April 22

**Where:** Syracuse University, 146 College Place

**For updated info.:** [tedx.syr.edu](http://tedx.syr.edu)

## WRITE A LETTER TO THE EDITOR

Letters to the editor can be mailed to:

The Stand c/o Ashley Kang  
South Side Communication Center  
2331 South Salina St.  
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.

## TWO-DAY CLEANUP

**What:** Clean Up 'Cuse

**When:** Friday and Saturday, April 21 and 22

**Where:** Volunteers can choose location

**Details:** Join OCRRA's volunteer litter cleanup crew and help beautify the city. Last year, more than 7,200 Onondaga County residents collected over 95,000 pounds of litter during the annual event. OCRRA will mail disposal instructions and special trash bag stickers to volunteers for free Earth Day disposal.

**To register:** Visit [syrgov.net/CleanUpCuse](http://syrgov.net/CleanUpCuse) by Friday, April 14

**More info.:** Email [earthday@ocrra.org](mailto:earthday@ocrra.org) or call (315) 453-2866

# EARTH DAY EVENTS

*List of cleanup and garden events in honor of Earth Day, April 22*



> Sarah Evans, left, Nyah Water and Denise Baker pick up trash along South Salina Street during a community cleanup event held last year. | File Photo

**What:** Earth Day Clean Up Event

**When:** 9 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 22

**Where:** Meet at Onondaga Commons, 484 W. Onondaga St.

**Details:** The West Onondaga Street Alliance will host. Participants will be divided into two groups. One will clean up West Onondaga Street, from the Marriott Syracuse Downtown hotel to the Leavenworth Circle Fountain. The other will distribute free LED lightbulb packs to residents on the West Side. Participants will receive a free event T-shirt (first 100 people) and a homemade lunch.

**To register:** Visit [Eventbrite.com](http://Eventbrite.com), search WOSA Earth Day

**More info.:** Call Robb Bucklin at (315) 788-1205

**What:** Spring Cleanup

**When:** 9 a.m. to noon Saturday, April 22

**Where:** Jubilee Homes Southwest Community Learning Farm, at the intersection of Midland and Bellevue avenues

**What:** Help with new Community Garden

**When:** 9:30 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 22

**Where:** P.E.A.C.E., Inc. South Side Family Resource Center, 136 Dr. Martin Luther King West

**Details:** Help the family resource center spread mulch on raised garden beds for its new Peace Garden in partnership with Syracuse Inner City Rotary Club. The garden will grow vegetables and other plants for the community. Volunteers will also plant flowers around the center.

**More info.:** Email Charles Rivers at [charles.rivers@peace-caa.org](mailto:charles.rivers@peace-caa.org)

**What:** Community Cleanup

**When:** 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, April 22

**Where:** New Covenant Baptist Church, 107 E. Beard Ave.

**Details:** Cleanup is organized by the Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today Area 3 Beautification Taskforce headed by Patrona Jones-Rowser and Sue Woods. Group will clean up areas along South State Street, South Salina Street and Midland Avenue from Kennedy Street to Brighton Avenue. Volunteers can bring personal items such as gloves, rake, litter pickup tools and shovels.

**More info.:** Contact Sandi Patterson at (315) 464-0876 or email [newcovenantbaptistchurch.syr@gmail.com](mailto:newcovenantbaptistchurch.syr@gmail.com)

**What:** Community Cleanup

**When:** 10 a.m. to 1 p.m. Saturday, April 22

**Where:** Sankofa District South, along South Salina Street

**Details:** Meet at the Rahma Edible Forest Snack Garden, 3100 S. Salina St.; parking available on side streets or in the clinic parking lot. Volunteers will help to clean the garden space and will work along South Salina Street, West Newell Street and West Pleasant Avenue. There also will be mulch and compost work, so volunteer shovelers are appreciated.

**More info.:** Visit Facebook and search 'Rahma Edible Forest Snack Garden'

*Visit [MySouthSideStand.com](http://MySouthSideStand.com) for more community events*



# MEET TAMMY

*Writer introduces herself to The Stand readers*

By | Tammy Reese  
Guest columnist

*Editor's note: Tammy Reese, a community contributor who has written articles for The Stand over the past few months, would like to introduce herself to readers in this column.*

I am the creator of the uplifting “Visionary Minds” website and Facebook blog used to highlight visionary artists, business owners and leaders as an outlet and resource for promotion, inspiring and networking.



> Tammy Reese | Michelle DiBernardo,  
Photo Provided

As a community contributor for The Stand, I enjoy interviewing my community because I know there are many people doing amazing things. I love displaying the positive things people are doing.

Having graduated from Empire State College in 2008, I majored in media studies, including journalism, TV, film, social media and radio. But I focused on theater arts and minored in cultural studies.

My career started at age 12 with The Media Unit TV and Stage production company. I was traveling and doing over 60 live stage shows a year, and also producing its public access TV program, “Rough Times Live.” In my 10 years with the company, I was an actress, dancer, writer, TV host and director. Hosting and directing a live TV show made me ready for anything.

Since my days with the Media Unit, I have branched into an independent artist. I was part of the “Dreamgirls” show at The Redhouse arts center in 2015. The production received a Syracuse Area Live Theater nomination for Best Musical and Best Ensemble. Other appearances at The Redhouse included “The Color Purple” and “Elegies for Angels, Punks and Raging Queens,” in which I played the role of Sally.

My first love in the industry was theatrical performance. As I got older, I embraced video and film production, producing PSAs on suicide prevention and domestic violence and also writing scripts for short films. I also appear as an extra in the feature films “Irrefutable Proof” and “American Dresser.”

I am currently the producer’s assistant for a film being produced by KomfortZone ENT’s Kilo Thompson that stars Robin Givens, Clifton Powell, Lakisa Renee and Jamal Woolard. Being a part of this project is an honor and dream come true that allows me to work with and learn from some of the best in the business. I appear in numerous films that are being worked on and soon to be released. My passion is acting, but I know being a “Jill of all trades” will help me get opportunities and enhance my skills.

I would like to thank my family and all who believe in me. So many people have become like family. I would like to thank my son Shauny, Joey, Katishma, LSK, the Thompsons, Nykeace, Tizak, Walt Shepperd, Baisha, Ashley Kang, Michelle, Taj, KM, Kristin, Jamica and Nina, to name a few.

*To contact me, a woman with a vision, email me at  
tammyreese7@gmail.com*



## 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 covers tuition, books, and fees.**

**HEOP provides academic advising and tutoring.**

Are you eligible?

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

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

**GO SU**  
**part time!**

ONLINE or ON CAMPUS



## MINISTRY INFO

Next board meeting of By HIS Spirit Ministries is scheduled for 7:30 p.m. Wednesday, April 12, at Greater Love in Christ Church

**Interested in getting involved? The group is looking for:**

- Volunteer for treasurer
- Licensed electrician, plumber and architect
- Board of Trustees members

**For more:** Visit [byhisspiritministries.com](http://byhisspiritministries.com)

**Greater Love in Christ Church**

Sunday service 10 a.m.

2026 Midland Ave.

(315) 472-1261

# BY HIS SPIRIT

*Ministry will transform vacant houses into community centers for kids*



> The first property set to be turned into a youth safe house was purchased by the Greater Syracuse Land Bank and is located at the corner of West Newell and Cannon streets. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo

By | JP Hadley  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

**Group aims to ‘decrease future teen crimes’ through the rehabilitation of abandoned homes**

**B**oarded-up houses are typically seen as a negative aspect in a community. However, the founders of By HIS Spirit Ministries see them as projects waiting for a start date.

The group, founded by Vicki Hemmer, looks to buy abandoned properties with the intention of converting them into community centers for city youth between the ages of 9 and 17. The group’s mission is to “decrease future teen crimes” by having young people help rehabilitate the dilapidated properties and learn valuable life lessons in the process.

The ministry is partnered with Greater Love in Christ Church on the city’s South Side. It houses the ministry’s offices free of charge until the group has enough money for its own office space. The church, located at 2026 Midland Ave., is also less than a 10-minute walk from the first house the group purchased, at 205 W. Newell St., in January 2016. It is the first house that will be rehabilitated.



> Vicki Hemmer, founder of By HIS Spirit Ministries, and her husband, Mark Hemmer, are shown outside the existing activity space, which is on the top floor of the Greater Love in Christ Church. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo





> DeRasia Williams, left, and Infinity Toledo, right, put together a puzzle at Greater Love in Christ Church. Helping is Mikayla Sobon, center, whose mother is a board member of By HIS Spirit Ministries and also a volunteer. | Cody Hendrix, Staff Photo

“The Lord gave me a vision, that basically ... we had children in the church and I have grandchildren and we’re taking care of our own,” Hemmer said. “What about the young people, his children, which are still his children, what are we doing for them?”

The program began to work with youth in the first week of March, gathering from 3:30 to 7:30 p.m. Tuesday and Wednesday evenings — including dinner — in the Greater Love in Christ Church. Everything will take place in the church until the West Newell Street house is ready; then the home will be open seven days a week.

Activities available for youth attendees at the church include games, sewing and crafts, listening to Christian music, singing, playing the drums and learning guitar. There is also a space to complete homework.

Hemmer said that attendees can choose which activities to participate in based on their interests.

“You can’t force a child to do something,” Hemmer said. “You have to give them choices.”

The house originally was zoned residential, but the zoning board voted unanimously to rezone the property for the intentions of By HIS Spirit Ministries. Hemmer hopes that they will have similar luck as they look to purchase more properties. Hemmer owns six rental properties with 16 units in Syracuse and cited prior experience with boarded-up houses as additional reasoning for taking on this task.

The ministry aims to create a “peaceful sanctuary” for children to “engage in wholesome activities away

from the discord that surrounds them,” Hemmer said. Once rehabilitated, each “safe house” will be named after and dedicated to a young member of the Syracuse community who died because of violence, she added.

“God’s children need our support, our help, our mentoring,” Hemmer said.

The eventual goal is to build at least one “safe house” within walking distance of each school in the Syracuse City School District. The West Newell Street house is next to McKinley-Brighton Elementary School and less than half a mile from Danforth Middle School, which is located at 309 W. Brighton Ave.

Besides the partnership with the church, the ministry is looking for other partners who can support the mission, said Mark Hemmer, who is Vicki’s husband. “So, if we can’t handle it, we have somebody else in our chain of people that we know that can,” he said.

The ministry is seeking volunteers who will help mentor youth and assist with the building projects. Eventually, the group hopes to have full-time staff living in each house and assisting with activities.

The full-time staff, along with a dedicated group of volunteers, will oversee youth who use the center. In return, the staff members will live on the top floor of each renovated home, without paying rent or utilities.

“That’s really how a community should work,” Mark Hemmer said. “We should interact and help each other, and that’s the whole idea, to get that thought process back into the community.”

## MISSION AND VISION

**By HIS Spirit Ministries seeks to:**

“Decrease future teen crimes by promoting the welfare of the youth and the citizens of Syracuse and surrounding areas by providing, through the love of Christ, opportunities and jobs, promoting a way to succeed in life.”

**The vision of By HIS Spirit Ministries is to:**

“Encourage, with love and support, inner-city children, and any person connected with By HIS Spirit Ministries, helping them build self-confidence, a positive outlook and diverse skills.”

— Source:

[byhisspiritministries.com](http://byhisspiritministries.com)



# Stanley Ford

*Nominated by fellow teacher Anton Ninno*



**MEET FATHER STANLEY:** Ford, who has two grown sons, teaches sixth-grade math at the Southside Academy Charter School. He has been married to his wife, Debra, for 37 years. | Dominique Hildebrand, Staff photo

By | Ashley Kang  
The Stand director

**Q:** *What did it feel like when you learned you would become a father?*

**A:** I was in the military and had a duty assignment in a suburb of Detroit. I was an advisor to the 70th Infantry Division on training. My wife would usually have breakfast in the morning and on this day things just weren't right. She got sick by the smell of bacon. I had a conference to attend, and she was uneasy driving to the airport. When I got to the conference and was sitting with a colleague, I said, 'You know what, I think my wife's pregnant.' I called my sister, who is a nurse, and was running some data by her. She said, 'Yep, your wife is pregnant. She's gonna have a baby around September.' He was born Sept. 26.

**Q:** *How did it feel being a father?*

**A:** Challenging and exciting. You know that you have to provide clothing for them, have to feed them, guide them, but no one ever told me how nervous you get during the Christmas pageant before they say their first line. You're in the audience, mouthing the words with them. Or when they play sports ... I would be nervous, it was intense. As I reflect back, no one ever prepared me for those moments.

**Q:** *What can you share about your two sons?*

**A:** Stanley is the oldest, and he is a high school teacher in Baltimore teaching 11th grade social studies. Joshua, my youngest, is 29 and is a goalkeeper coach for the Seattle Sounders Soccer Academy after retiring from being a professional soccer player.



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

A: Like many during that time, he worked a couple different jobs to provide for the family. I had one brother and three sisters. He taught me how to throw a baseball. How to tie my ties. He was a role model by being a hard worker, responsible and accountable to his family. I learned that from him, and for that I am truly grateful. I just wanted to tweak it a little bit, where I could get an education so I could get a job where I wouldn't have to work two jobs to care for my family. Because I wanted to spend that time with my family. He would leave early in the morning to work in a foundry, and then he was also a custodian at a synagogue. Sundays were big days for our family to sit down to dinner all together, and Saturdays I would spend time with him cutting the grass or working on home repairs. One time we worked to remodel the basement, and I got to spend quality time with him. That experience led to me learning numbers because he let me measure as he would build.

and wellness fair, and dads came out. I see them, and their involvement is working to change those stereotypes that exist. And just seeing the dads come on the first day of school and how their faces beam because that's their child. The pride they have in their children. I think that sometimes goes unnoticed, but I see it.

*Q: Any advice for first-time dads?*

A: I know that there will be times when you feel, 'These kids are getting on my last nerve.' But I tell other dads to enjoy this time while you've got it because it races. Now we have the emptiness in the house. I once complained to my neighbor about my grass because there were worn spots, but he told me, 'You've got kids, and you know where they are because there's evidence of where they play.' And now I have grass in my backyard, but I think back, and I was happier when I had those dead spots.

## *“Work twice as hard to go half as far”*

*Q: What is unique about the father's role?*

A: It's so special. Women are the backbone of the family, but we need to do more, give more to get more. Get more what? Get more special moments with our family. With the way things are going with social media, etc., I can keep in touch with my sons, but to know that it's more to being a dad than just having kids. You got to work with your children and develop your children so they become productive members of society and just good people.

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

A: I text them daily. Every morning 'good morning' and every night 'good night' because I want them to know how much they mean to me. Even though they are not here, I want to have that relationship with them. Except Friday nights. Friday mornings I text them, but then I don't text them again until Sunday night. I don't want them to be out and get a ... (text) at 9:30 at the bar and their friends or date asks, 'Who's that?' But now everyone knows it's their dad and then they tell them to tell me hi.

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

A: I want to eradicate that stereotype that men of color just have kids and are not responsible. As a teacher, I see dads involved. The dads come for parent-teacher conferences. We just had a health

*Q: Any final thoughts?*

A: I sometimes feel African-American dads don't get enough credit for spending time with our children. Fathers that are doing what they are supposed to do are just really doing what they should be doing. There's no accolades with that. It's all part of the job. So I'm surprised to be in this position, and I thank Mr. (Anton) Ninno for the nomination. He has been here a long time and has seen my kids grow up. In reflection, it seems somebody did notice that I was trying to be a good dad, and that just happened to be Mr. Ninno and for that I truly thank him.

*Q: Is there a saying you have?*

A: I used to tell my sons: 'You have to work twice as hard to go half as far.' That's just the way it is. It's not fair. And when my youngest got drafted to the professional team in Seattle, we didn't see him again until Christmas. When he came back to visit, I was trying to be funny and just asked him, 'You have a tattoo now?' And he said, 'Yes, you need to sit down.' He takes off his shirt and across his chest is "work twice as hard to go half as far." He said he put that phrase there because it meant a lot to him. I said, 'Man, if I knew you'd go and do that, I would have stolen the Nike slogan and told you just do it.' So we must continue to be positive role models because we never know what our kids will pick up along the way and just what they are going to embrace that means the most to them.

## ACCESS TO JUSTICE

Find out more about the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County

**Mission:** Provide access to justice through engaging the legal community in volunteer service to those in need

**Address:** 221 S. Warren St., Suite 320

**Phone:** (315) 471-3409

**Email:** info@onvlp.org

**Website:** onvlp.org

# NEW BEGINNINGS

*Lawyers help those who have criminal records conquer barriers to jobs*



> Lanessa Owens is a staff attorney with the Volunteer Lawyers Project's New Start Program, which partners with the Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand* director

## Lanessa Owens oversees the New Start Program - Reentry Assistance division

There is more to one's criminal record than merely having to check a box on a job application.

A person's past resurfaces when employers or landlords do background checks. Barriers arise, such as being barred from earning a state certificate, being restricted from receiving educational loans and veering further from jobs that offer stability and that pay a living wage. Self-perception can be damaged by feelings of shame over a mistake likely committed in one's youth.

Locally, attorney Lanessa Owens is helping job seekers eliminate such barriers.

Attorneys with the Volunteer Lawyers Project of Onondaga County each run a division. Owens, 36, oversees the New Start Program - Reentry Assistance. She says her typical clients are women between the ages of 24 and 30 who have misdemeanors on their RAP sheets.

"About 80 percent are young women with children that are trying to get employment," she said. "Most have done some stupid things when they were kids. They've

matured. They've gone to school, but they can't get a job."

New York state does not expunge a record, "so if you ever commit a crime, it's on your record *forever*," she said, stretching out the word's first syllable for emphasis.

"The next best thing is Certificate of Relief from Civil Disabilities (COR) or Certificate of Good Conduct," she said, explaining that these certificates state a person has done enough in life to rehabilitate from a past crime. CORs remove some legal restrictions accompanying convictions, particularly state licensure barriers for jobs such as home health aide and certified nursing assistant.

The reentry program started about a year ago and caught speed when Owens took over this past July. The goal was to see 60 clients a year, but Owens already has surpassed that, helping more than 80 clients.

"I think when the program was designed, we didn't know how much need is out there," she said.

A study by Alec C. Ewald, published in the "Journal of the American Bar Foundation," notes that applications for CORs in New York state appear to be underutilized based on discussions with attorneys, judges and probation officers. Ewald found that in most counties, fewer than 5 percent of people sentenced in a typical





> Lanessa Owens speaks to Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center students. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo

year sought certificates, showing that the populations who stand to gain from CORs have little knowledge of them.

## WHO QUALIFIES

“We’re the only program in this area open to the public,” Owens said, noting that eligible clients qualify for free legal services if their annual income falls up to 200 percent above the poverty line. In 2016, that level was \$11,880 for an individual. The Center for Community Alternatives provides a similar service, but clients must meet additional requirements for that program.

Clients find Owens through the program’s partners — Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center (EOC); Jubilee Homes; The Right Turn Career-Focused Transition Initiative, a job-training program for at-risk youth based at Onondaga Community College — and referrals from others she has helped. To keep up with demand, more than a dozen local lawyers volunteer their time.

The majority of her clients are enrolled in the Health Train program — known for its partnership with Loretto to train certified nursing assistants with a 90 percent job-placement success rate. Early on, Christopher Montgomery, who works with these EOC students, realized that many have a blemish on their record, disqualifying them from earning the state license.

“In my experience, they like to withhold that information,” Montgomery said. In the first few trainings, he did not find out about students’ pasts until training was over, so starting their new jobs had to be put on hold until they could acquire a COR to then seek state

certification. He now brings Owens in during orientation so students can start the process early. “I can’t put anyone in front of an employer if they are not going to qualify,” he said.

“Some are so scared when they first approach her, the lawyer, but she is so personable,” Montgomery said. “She creates a timeline for them and takes them through the process step by step to show them how they can overcome this. Lanessa is the number one reason why participants with a past are continuing with this program and being successful.”

## THE INTAKE

The first step is the intake session. Owens carries a mobile fingerprinting device with her to every off-site visit because clients usually are not sure what’s on their record.

“This way, I can pull a copy and see what’s there and determine if there are any mistakes,” Owens said.

During a series of one-on-one intake sessions at EOC recently, Owens fielded questions from students for three hours as they popped in and out of a door connecting two classrooms.

Cachet Woodhall, 22, requested a meeting to verify her record was clear. She previously checked with the criminal courthouse by giving her first and last name and asking that her record be checked. “They said I didn’t have anything, and everything had been sealed,” Woodhall said, “but I wanted to meet with you (Owens) to double check.”

Owens asked her: “Have you been arrested before?”

## WHO CAN APPLY

The main difference between the two certificates is who is eligible to apply for each.

**A Certificate of Relief from Civil Disabilities** can be issued, in certain situations, at the time of sentencing. However, a **Certificate of Good Conduct** has a required waiting period.

Both may be issued to remove legal barriers or civil disabilities — legal rights revoked as a result of a criminal conviction — or to remove only specific barriers or disabilities.

Only a Certificate of Good Conduct will restore the right of an individual to apply for public office.

— Source: Legal research, including information from Lanessa Owens

## TERMS DEFINED

### Collateral consequences

refer to additional civil penalties, mandated by statute, that attach to criminal convictions.

**Misdemeanors** may include: petty theft, public intoxication, simple assault, disorderly conduct, trespass, vandalism, reckless driving, discharging a firearm within city limits and/or possession of cannabis.

**Self-stigma** is a phenomenon when existing stereotypes about criminal offenders may be integrated into one's self-concept when a person is labeled a criminal offender.

**RAP** stands for "record of arrest and prosecution" in RAP sheet.

**Criminal complaint** is a court document filed that accuses or charges a suspect with committing a crime and shares what the victim says happened.

**Disposition** is the final court ruling of a case.

— Source: Legal research, including information from Lanessa Owens



> Lanessa Owens advises students during a recent Health Train orientation for Christopher Montgomery's class at the Syracuse Educational Opportunity Center. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo

"Yes," Woodhall answered without pause. "But it was for something stupid and petty," she said, explaining that when she was 13 years old, she went for a joy ride in a car that belonged to her mother's friend.

"I was young, dumb and wasn't thinking. I think that case was sealed because I was a minor. I was going through the system at that time, wasn't thinking clearly, wasn't stable and was acting out," Woodhall said.

In her teens, she also faced a burglary charge that was later dismissed, and at the age of 18, she got in trouble a few times. She says she was homeless and was charged with petty larceny.

Woodhall says she just wants stability. "I currently work at Burger King, but my hours are unpredictable." She feels if she is working regular hours at a good job, she'll be too busy to get into trouble.

"So I want you to be the second person that goes through and makes sure that everything is clear," Wood-

hall told Owens before leaving. "I don't want to enter the health field, go through the training and they hire me and then be told, 'Oh you have something on your record and we've got to let you go or put you on hold until you figure it out.' I don't want to have anything on hold," Woodhall repeated. "I want to start working."

## THE PROCESS

Some 65 million Americans have criminal records of some kind, according to National Employment Law Project statistics from March 2011. Owens adds: If you've ever been arrested in New York state, you have a 67 percent chance of having an error on your record.

Obtaining a Certificate of Relief is not easy and requires a lot of work from the client — three letters of recommendation; a personal statement; copies of certificates, trainings or education that have been completed; past dispositions; and criminal complaints.

The recommendations should be strong. "They want to see one from an employer, community leader, organization or religious institution — not your friends," Owens said. "Or if you went through an educational training or rehabilitation program, a letter from someone in a leadership role there." The personal statement should explain one's past mistake and how the person changed.

Then dispositions and criminal complaints can be challenging and timely to gather. "It's not often easy for a lot of people in this situation to get," she said. "You're talking about people who typically are living in poverty, have children ... it's a lot of running around to obtain everything."

The other caveat is that the judge who sentenced a person is the same judge who must grant the certificate. "The reason, presumably it's a judge that knows you," Owens explained.

On average, it can take from one to three months, she says, noting that this is after a client has gathered all the paperwork and her office has filed it. "Getting all the paperwork together," she adds, "could take a client a month or even two depending on the person."

"So there's a lot in limbo," she said. "They could have a job offer, but are waiting on the certificate to start."

Or if Owens finds an error on someone's record, she



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***“So there’s a lot in limbo. They could have a job offer, but are waiting on the certificate to start.”***

**— Lanessa Owens**

can correct it. “We will contact the New York State Division of Criminal Justice Services by mail or by motion, and we’ll fill out a challenge form,” she said. After the legal team reviews it and if they agree, the record is then changed immediately.

The change should be in effect everywhere, but with so many private companies that compile background

checks, she says it could still pop up. “And with the internet, there’s just nothing we can do,” she said shaking her head. “It’s always out there.”

Another element to her job, therefore, is education. “I educate my clients on how to confidently say: ‘This is what I have on my record, this is what I did and this is who I am today.’” To further help, she conducts mock interviews on what to disclose and what is and isn’t lawful for an employer to ask.

Owens says New York Correction Law is unique because of Article 23-A, the state’s employment antidiscrimination statute, which prohibits refusal to hire solely because of a criminal conviction unless there is a direct relationship between the infraction and the potential job. For example, someone with a “driving while intoxicated” conviction would not receive a commercial driver’s license.

Owens optimistically believes employers just want to know that the person regrets what happened and is now a different person. “A lot of my clients are very ashamed, humiliated and embarrassed,” she said. “You can sense this when they talk about their past.”

A poignant example from Owens: a mother who could not find a job, who was arrested for stealing a \$12.48 pack of Pampers for her newborn.

“That’s what makes it so rewarding for me because people come in and we get them jobs,” Owens said. “We’re helping mitigate that last barrier to employment.”

## IMPORTANT FACTORS

New York law specifies eight factors that employers must consider. Among them:

- Time that has elapsed since the offense(s)
- Age of the person at the time of the offense(s)
- Seriousness of the offense(s)
- Bearing, if any, the criminal offense(s) will have on one’s ability to perform job duties

— Source: *Ending Discrimination through Unity Collaboration Advocacy Training & Empowerment*

ON THE SIDE



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## A DAY TO PAINT

**What:** Paint the City – The Vacant Mural Project

**When:** 10 a.m. to 3 p.m.  
Saturday, May 13

**Where:** South  
Presbyterian Church,  
2110 S. Salina St.

**Details:** The Greater Syracuse Land Bank will host a weekend painting event that is open to the public. The community as a whole will have the opportunity to participate in brightening up our city. Paint, plywood and a place to paint will be provided. Completed boards will then be displayed on Land Bank properties throughout the city.

**More info:** Email  
Liam Kirst at lkirst@  
syracuseLandBank.  
org or Logan Reidsma  
at lreidsma@  
SyracuseLandbank.org

# OUTSIDE LOOKING IN

*Outreach coordinators help launch a mural project for vacant houses*



> Liam Kirst, left, and Logan Reidsma outside 213 Clarence Ave., where students from Clary Middle School will paint murals on the boarded-up windows. | Ben Cleeton, Staff Photo

By | Stacy Fernández  
*Staff reporter*

## Two Syracuse University alums are teaming with schools for their new community project

When kids walk by boarded-up homes on their way to school, Liam Kirst and Logan Reidsma want those vacant houses to brighten up the children's day, rather than remind them of economic realities.

That's the goal of the Vacant Mural Project, headed by the pair, both community outreach coordinators with the Greater Syracuse Land Bank. They receive brainstorming support from their supervisor, Jake Thorsen, a program manager and neighborhood planner, and Katelyn Wright, the executive director. Kirst and Reidsma are partnering with teachers and community members to replace boarded-up windows with young students' art on vacant homes around the city.

The Land Bank is a nonprofit working to put vacant, abandoned, underused and tax-delinquent properties to productive use in the local community. The entity is the default recipient of all city tax foreclosures, which creates

a misconception among South Side residents who directly associate it with the foreclosure process, Kirst says.

"It almost comes off as if we were the bad guy," Kirst said. "When there is a foreclosure that gets transferred to the Land Bank, we work with Catholic Charities to try to relocate people. Nobody ends up on the street."

Many properties obtained by the Land Bank are not demolition candidates but, realistically, aren't going to be sold right away.

"It's just an economic reality that people aren't moving back into the city at a high rate," Kirst said. "They're just not."

Properties must be secured, usually with plywood. The idea, which has been carried out in cities across the country, is for murals to be painted on the plywood — whose cost is already budgeted — and displayed.

Reidsma had the idea to reach out to art teachers in the city's various schools. The team will work to assign a house close to the residency of their students so youth can look up at their own work when walking by the house.

Kirst and Reidsma, both Syracuse University alums, said they have met with about eight art teachers, and all



responded with enthusiasm, adding that the project gives teachers an opportunity to share that art can have an impact on the community and on students. "People can create careers out of it and do it for a living," Reidsma said.

The participating schools are: Clary Middle School, Dr. King Elementary School, Dr. Weeks Elementary School, Hughes Elementary School, Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central (ITC), McKinley-Brighton Elementary School, Syracuse Latin School and Van Duyn Elementary School.

"One thing that has been pretty consistent among all the art teachers is these kids want to be able to create art that can have some type of real world implication," Reidsma said.

Plywood boards and paint were dropped off to teachers last month. Classes will have complete creative control as to how they go about the project.

Currently, 20 to 25 houses are being considered for the mural project. But based on the positive feedback, the number may grow. Already, 400 people have shown

interest for a communitywide painting day to be hosted on May 13 at the South Presbyterian Church.

For both the community event and the school-based project, the Land Bank will supply plywood boards and paint. For any individual artists who want to take part independently, the Land Bank will provide the plywood but ask that artists use their own art supplies.

Kirst and Reidsma will be a part of the process from start to finish. They will prime and seal each board themselves and will work with another staff member to place and secure the murals to the houses.

The Land Bank project, coupled with other art efforts in the works on the South Side, may create inspiration that has been lacking for years, Reidsma said. Kirst added that the mural project is tapping an energy that has been flowing through the South Side chapter of Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today, an organization working to build community and address neighborhood issues.

Reidsma concluded that both would be a spark to create change.

## POCKET PARKS

The **Land Bank** has begun planning for pocket parks in three areas: the city's South, West and North sides

Residents have been encouraged to share their ideas, and the parks will be designed by SUNY- ESF landscape architecture students

All three parks will be installed by **June 30**

# 2017 RACIAL JUSTICE YOUTH AWARD

Staff Report

**Z**au Jat N-Hkum received the Youth 2017 Racial Justice Award presented by Interfaith Works of Central New York during an awards ceremony held March 1 at Syracuse Stage.

The honorees were selected for their efforts to end racial injustice and promote social equity in Central New York.

N-Hkum is a senior at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central (ITC) and has been a photo contributor to The Stand newspaper. He even shot the cover image of Quindell Williams featured on the February print issue. Last year, he was one of two high school students who completed a rigorous four-day photo workshop at Syracuse University.

He's served as a facilitator in the "Dialogue to End Racism" program between ITC and Central Square high schools and joined in the four-mile march from the Onondaga Nation to Syracuse to support native rights related to Standing Rock. He holds a leadership role in the Diversity Club at the high school, and he is involved in the Seeds of Peace, Teen Institute and Citizen U.

During his acceptance speech, N-Hkum felt overwhelmed and honored to receive the award. He shared that he is originally from Myanmar, a country that refuses to give freedom to its own people.

"You cannot get freedom in my country," he said, noting this is why he and his family had to leave. "We want freedom, liberty and justice for better education and healthcare — these basic human rights. And I'm not only speaking about my own country, but for all the countries without these rights."

He concluded that when rights are being taken, "we must stand up together for our brothers and sisters. It doesn't matter if it's far away or right next to your house ... we must all work together for peace and love."



> Zau Jat N-Hkum, center, holds his award with his sister, Mai, and mother, Moon Ra, who both attended the awards event. | Provided Photo

He thanked the Northside Learning Center for its help when he first came to this country nine years ago, the Syracuse City School District for supporting diversity, Interfaith Works for its efforts in resettling refugees, and also the Syracuse community and Mayor Stephanie Miner for always welcoming refugees. Lastly, he thanked his close friends, teachers, sister and mother for their support.

Looking forward, he hopes his photography will dismantle barriers, celebrate diversity and promote justice to end prejudice of any kind. He feels passionately about the injustices he saw inflicted on his people (the Kachin from Burma and Myanmar) and wants to continue to find ways to stop injustice in his new home, Syracuse.

Additional winners this year included: Hon. Jawwaad Rasheed, Laurel Ullyette and the Brady Faith Center.

ON THE SIDE

## FEATURES OF PLAN

The ReZone Syracuse project seeks to:

**Streamline** the process of zoning

**Create** new districts that are mixed use and open spaces

**Update** land uses for artisan manufacturing, solar and wind energy uses

**Promote** environmentally sustainable land use patterns

# ZONING UPDATE

Rezone Syracuse is modernizing city's 50-year-old zoning map



> ReZone Syracuse's private consultants discuss plans to update the current 50-year-old zoning map, with a few members of the public Feb. 15 at Corcoran High School. | Siddarth Senthilkumaran, Staff Photo

By | Siddarth Senthilkumaran  
*Urban Affairs reporter*

### Team plans to refresh zoning map to make city more attractive and sustainable

The ReZone Syracuse project team presented the first draft of its new city zoning map at a public meeting in February.

City officials, private consultants and the neighborhood representative were present at Corcoran High School on Feb. 15 to give a brief overview of the project and hear from local residents from the Southwest quadrant of the city. The project team also gave presentations several times in different parts of the city.

The new zoning map comes with the arrival of a draft for a new city Zoning Ordinance, which was last updated 50 years ago — in 1967. This two-pronged ReZone Syracuse project is a city-led effort to update the city's zoning codes to facilitate the implementation of the Syracuse Land Use and Development Program 2040.

"It's going to update our zoning code," said Owen Kerney, project manager for ReZone Syracuse. "So anybody that interacts with the zoning code or uses it would be using a more streamlined, more focused and clear document."

The primary objective of the ReZone Syracuse project is to make Syracuse an attractive destination. The new zoning districts and map would make neighborhoods more attractive through high-quality design and environmentally sustainable means. The updated zoning districts also would make the process of doing business easier. Kerney pointed out in his presentation that the old ordinance and map had run their course and that it was time for a comprehensive evaluation.

Susan Boyle, common councilor for District 3, said that residents and business developers want their voices to be heard in this current drafting process. "Ideally it's supposed to be easy for everyone," she said.

Around 20 people attended the meeting at Corcoran High School as the team presented the first module in the drafting process of ReZone Syracuse. Boyle opened by giving a short overview of the project and then introduced Kerney, who gave his presentation.

A question-and-answer session followed. Audience members asked questions about the regulation of corner stores, vacant lots and the extent of the zoning ordinance's jurisdiction.

Jovan Collins, a resident of West Colvin Street, said she liked the fact that people are coming together in her neighborhood to talk about this project. She said that the



neighborhood has to be continuously involved during this drafting process.

Module 1, as explained by Kerney, lists the proposed new zoning districts and an addition of new land uses, such as microbrewery and artisan manufacturing.

“Right now our uses are limited,” he said. “They’re dated. They’re old, and so this is expanding and looking at new uses that maybe weren’t anticipated or contemplated back in the ’60s when we last did this.”

The new zoning districts feature five new mixed-use districts, which are designated areas that can be used for a variety of purposes, such as an urban neighborhood and a central business district.

Kerney made it clear, in an interview, that zoning would have a limited effect on sidewalks, sewers etc., which would be the focus of public works. Zoning focuses on the use of private land, he said. “Not on our streets, but on our private property,” he clarified.

A major component of the project is streamlining the process of zoning itself. Both Boyle and Kerney stressed that making the approval and review process more efficient would benefit homeowners and business developers.

John Sexton, a facilitator for South Side Tomorrow’s Neighborhoods Today, who has been involved with the group for the past few years, said this was a big effort that would give the city “more control in what kind of



> At a public meeting Feb. 9, the project team presented its first draft of the Citywide Zoning Map and discussed plans with the public. | City of Syracuse, Provided Photo

businesses go where and what they’re going to look like.” He added that change would come slowly as a result of the project.

Kerney, too, mentioned that the changes would not be immediate. He hopes to have the drafting process completed by the end of this year and — with the Common Council’s approval — have it take effect by early next year. The changes would be incremental as new businesses come in, new permits are issued and new rules are applied, Kerney said.

“Over the next few years, the new changes would start to reflect visually,” he said.

## PROJECT’S BEGINNING

**ReZone Syracuse** was initiated in fall 2015, funded partly by a \$300,000 New York state grant

The city hired a team of experts — **Clarion Associates**, who work on zoning updates on a national scale, and **Environmental Design & Research**, a local firm — to plan and implement the project

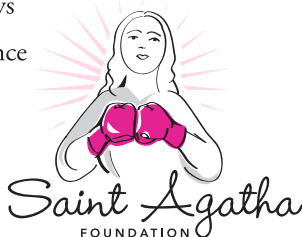
— Source: details shared at public meeting

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

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**By  
Carmen Harlow,  
Life-Long South-  
Side Resident**



## BY THE NUMBERS

There is a disproportionate representation of African-Americans when looking at figures for homelessness

- **13%** of the population is African-American
- Yet **40%** of the homeless population is African-American
- African-Americans are **16 times** more likely than whites to live in shelters, while African-American children under the age of 5 were **29 times** more likely than white children to end up in shelters

— Source: Center for Social Innovation

# RACISM & POVERTY

*National advocacy group tackles homelessness among people of color*



> Speakers at a March 8 public forum, from left: Isaac Rivers, community advocate; George Kilpatrick, master of ceremonies; Jeff Olivet and Marc Dones, with SPARC; Mayor Stephanie Miner; Sally Santangelo, with CNY Fair Housing; Melissa Marrone, with Housing and Homeless Coalition of Central New York; and Josh King, a community advocate. | Ashley Kang, Staff Photo

By | Ashley Kang  
*The Stand* director

## SPARC aims to show that racial inequality is the primary cause of housing instability

People of color are more likely to become homeless and, once so, remain homeless longer than people of other backgrounds, according to the Center for Social Innovation, a national advocacy group working to understand and alleviate the web of social issues connected to inequality.

A public forum on Racism, Homelessness and Creating Change was held March 8 by the Housing and Homeless Coalition of Central New York and the Rescue Mission. National experts and local leaders spoke unapologetically about how racism exists in the agencies and in social service providers — all charged with helping our city's most vulnerable. Speakers included Jeff Olivet and Marc Dones of the Center for Social Innovation and community advocate Isaac Rivers. George Kilpatrick served as the panel moderator as well as master of ceremonies for the event.

Olivet, who is a national leader on homelessness, poverty and issues associated with such struggles, explained that homelessness is not an equal opportunity offender. "It targets African-Americans," he said, noting

research studies by George R. Carter III of the U.S. Census Bureau.

Working with organizations across the nation, Olivet helps improve strategic planning and innovative solutions to tackle this issue through a nationwide project called SPARC (Supporting Partnerships for Anti-Racist Communities). Syracuse is one of 10 cities across the nation partnering with SPARC to conduct research in two ways — data via the hard numbers and qualitative measures by collecting individual personal accounts.

SPARC team members spent one week in Syracuse last month interviewing people living on the street to document the scope of the problem. By the end of their study, the team will have 200 personal accounts to analyze, Olivet said, with a goal to collect 20 stories in each city.

In each city, the SPARC team holds public discussions, trains providers, and collaborates with leaders in housing, health care, education and criminal justice. By engaging stakeholders in a productive conversation, the goal is to educate on how race and racism result in disproportionate homelessness for people of color.

"Homelessness is not an isolated person — it is a crossroad of everything that is wrong," Olivet told the crowd. He continued to explain how the long-standing social systems in our nation developed racism — starting



with slavery and ending with mass incarceration today.

To start dismantling racism, Olivet said, “we must first acknowledge there is a problem.”

Dones, also with SPARC and a leader in equity-based systems transformation, took a historical perspective. He noted how policies like racially restrictive covenants and redlining restricted where people of color could live. “These were ways of policing who had access to what,” he said. “We talk about policy like it’s arcane, but policy builds cities.”

He explained that racially restrictive covenants could make it illegal for African-Americans to live in certain homes. Such a contract would prohibit the purchase, lease or sale of a piece of property by a particular group of people. “And because of redlining, communities of color went into long periods of time with no investment,” he said, explaining further that businesses that wanted to open in these neighborhoods couldn’t get mortgages. The result, he said, was decades of systematic discrimination.

“So when you ask why is that neighborhood like that,” he began, in reference to blighted urban blocks, “it’s because someone made it that way.”

Policy has an influence, but he encouraged those in attendance to consider that policy or government authority is not required for someone to care. “We can care about each other because we know it is what we should do.”

SPARC is working to fundamentally change the conversation and the way American society thinks about the root cause of homelessness, who is at risk for housing instability and the barriers that exist when people of color try to leave the streets.

After incarceration, Isaac Rivers struggled to obtain services that could help his reentry. One barrier was not seeing anyone like himself working at the various agencies in place to assist him. “I would walk in and feel uncomfortable ... feel judged,” he recalled. “I would give them just enough information to get by, but that’s what kept me stuck.”

Rivers says he was born in the projects — the Bricks on the South Side — and moved to the Near Westside at the age of 3 after his father died.

He said he got caught up in the street life and first went to prison when he was 16 years old. There he



> Jeff Olivet, CEO for the Center for Social Innovation, speaks at a public forum held March 8. | Provided Photo

experienced racism on a whole other level. At the correctional facility, he was called the N-word daily; he felt overlooked and underserved. He believes there are many great services in Syracuse, but their offerings need to be broadened. He also noted that mental health and trauma are factors for service providers to consider.

“Looking back, my time in the street ... all the funerals of friends — it all affected me,” he said. “My time in prison, the racism, the trauma. I was suffering, and when I came out, there was no help.”

After the first three speakers — Olivet, Dones and Rivers — addressed the audience, they joined three local leaders for a panel discussion, which concluded the evening. The three were: Josh King, a community advocate; Sally Santangelo, executive director of Central New York Fair Housing; and Melissa Marrone, coordinator for the Housing and Homeless Coalition of Central New York.

Olivet answered a question about the specific variables that keep African-Americans homeless longer. When looking at the layers of collective trauma, being black is that one extra barrier, he said.

“Being homeless sucks — whatever your race,” he said. “But research shows that single, black men remain homeless longer. The deck is stacked worse because they have the added layer of stress of being a person of color.”

## LOCAL FUNDING

Funding for SPARC in Syracuse is provided by the **Allyn Family Foundation** and the **Central New York Community Foundation**

**Want to learn more?**  
Visit SPARC website at [center4si.com/sparc](http://center4si.com/sparc)

## CITY PARTNERS

Currently, six cities are partnering with SPARC, whose team members are collecting personal accounts of homelessness in each place. The cities are:

- Dallas
- San Francisco
- Columbus, Ohio
- Tacoma-Pierce County, Washington
- Atlanta
- Syracuse

Four more cities will be announced in the fall

— Source: Jeff Olivet

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