

the **Stand** south side news

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Syracuse, NY

NOVEMBER 2018 Issue 70 **FREE**

PENNE WITH PASSION

Carole Horan discusses
what it's like writing letters
to pen pals behind bars

RECREATIONAL REHAB
Renovations proposed to make Burnet Park more accessible

memory
honored

Elmwood cleanup continues
on five-year anniversary
of Jim Gifford's death

**Where He
Stands Now**
How Eurain Scott took photography
from a required high school credit to
college and into a new career path

ELECTION DAY — NOV. 6



the
Stand

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SPECIAL THANKS THIS MONTH

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AND BEA GONZALEZ

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FATHERHOOD | Meet Christopher Montgomery, a father who strives to serve as a 24/7 role model for his son Qristopher.

SCHOOL AND YOUTH | Learn what a local high school media student discovered during a professional multimedia training.

ENVIRONMENT | See what a long-time city park supporter has proposed for the southern section of Burnet Park and Harbor Brook.

PRISON TO FAMILY | Meet Carole Horan, who has spent years writing to prisoners, most recently a former student she remembers from elementary school.

PRISON TO FAMILY | Read about James Rivers and how he broke the cycle that kept landing him in jail.

COMMUNITY | Discover how murder victim Jim Gifford's legacy lives on, inspiring dozens of people to clean up neighborhood streets year after year.

FEATURES | Reconnect with Eurain Scott, an up-and-coming artist, who is forging his own path in the city through photography. He got his start through ITC and The Stand.

■ Cover photography by Zachary Krahmer of Carole Horan. Story on page 10.

CALENDAR | NOVEMBER

What: Veterans Day Reading: "Returning from Conflict"
When: Thursday, Nov. 8, with reception from 5 to 6 p.m., reading and Q&A from 6 to 7:30 p.m.
Where: Goldstein Faculty & Alumni Center, 401 University Place
Details: This nonfiction reading by the Syracuse Veterans' Writing Group will feature stories that testify to a wide range of experiences and struggles veterans face when trying to come home from war — experiences that are all too easily erased under the banner of "celebrating veterans."
Cost: Free and open to the public. CART services will be provided, and books will be available for sale.
More Info: Email Ivy Kleinbart at ikleinba@syr.edu

What: Rise Above Poverty Benefit Brunch
When: 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday, Nov. 10
Where: Barbagallo's Restaurant, 6344 E. Molloy Road, East Syracuse
Details: Funds from ticket sales to the brunch will provide new winter coats to 60 to 75 city students to ensure they are prepared for the harsh Syracuse winter. Rise Above Poverty's mission is to bring community awareness to the socio-economic issues of poverty in the Syracuse City School District.
Cost: \$50
For Tickets: Contact Reggie Kelly at Reggie.Kelley@riseabovepovertysyr.org or (315) 863-6496

Our series “Prison to Family” continues with two new examinations of how important various forms of family and community support are — while incarcerated, immediately after release and even decades later — in preventing recidivism.

While incarcerated, a prisoner feels isolated from their friends and family and struggles to find comfort and familiarity. Researcher Jackie Hodgson found that receiving letters can greatly improve prisoners’ lives for the price of a stamp. Prisoners in Hodgson’s study reported that having a pen pal connected them to the outside world and helped them feel accepted.



For four decades, Syracuse resident Carole Horan has written to inmates on death row, and for nearly two years now has been writing to a South Sider behind bars who she remembers as a student at Seymour Elementary School.

Read why she is committed to supporting prisoners through her letter writing on Page 10.

In our other feature, James Rivers shares what life is like after being off parole for a decade and how he continues to find motivation. He started volunteering at PEACE Inc.’s Emma L. Johnston Southside Family Resource Center with his nephew, and soon was hired by Associates for Training and Development, a workforce development agency for seniors, to work at the center’s food pantry.

Read a profile of Rivers on Page 13.

The final piece in this series will run in the Winter issue and profile Charles Rivers, coordinator for PEACE’s South Side center. Rivers spent more than 19 years behind bars, returning to Syracuse in 2012 to start again.

Other stories this month include reporter Nicole Valinote’s story on Eurain Scott, who participated in a special summer photography program with The Stand in 2014. At the time, Scott had just graduated from the media program at the Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central and had been taking photography classes for over a year. His teacher saw potential in his photography and encouraged him to participate with The Stand’s “From Where We Stand” project.

The goal of “From Where We Stand” was to empower South Side families to document and tell their own stories. Scott’s images documented his exhaustion of packing and moving with his grandmother, as well as celebrations from his high school graduation and touching moments captured at family barbecues. He next began studying at Onondaga Community College while continuing to hone his photography skills.

To read more stories, visit The Stand’s homepage at mysouthsidestand.com or turn the page.

Ashley Kang

PHOTO WALK DISPLAYS

SPONSOR A LOCATION

If your business, nonprofit group or center would like to cover the cost to print and hang photos from The Stand’s annual Photo Walk, contact Ashley Kang at (315) 882-1054 or email Ashley@mysouthsidestand.com

Current displays can be found throughout the community at:

- **Blue Brothers Barbershop,**
2036 S. Salina St.
- **Beauchamp Library,**
2111 S. Salina St.
- **Cut Kings,**
2850 S. Salina St.
- **Elks Lodge,**
3815 S. Salina St.
- **Colonial Laundromat,**
3901 S. Salina St.

If you spot one of our permanent displays, take a selfie and share it on Twitter with @MySouthSide or tag #PhotoWalkDisplay

Correction

In October’s preview on “Possessing Harriet” by Rachel Burt, it was incorrectly reported that no written record exists of a meeting between Harriet Powell and Elizabeth Cady Stanton. A meeting is documented in Cady Stanton’s autobiography, but the details of the conversation are not known.

Christopher Montgomery

Nominated by Deka Dancil

By Lianza Reyes
Staff Reporter

Q: How did it feel when you became a father?

A: It was the best, scariest moment of my life. I was 23 when I had him. I didn't know what it took to be a father. It was a quick learning process, but it's something I enjoy every day in my life.

Q: How did it feel to become a father in your early 20s?

A: It was hard. Because you have to find a balance. I'm someone who's still growing professionally. So when I was working in Congress and was always between Syracuse and Washington, D.C., you need to have systems that will keep everything in line. His mother is also strong, so having that relationship and not looking at it as co-parenting, but as blending. Because you need to be dependent on your other half to make sure everything is in order. To ensure at the end of the day, he has everything that he needs.

Q: What can you share about your son?

A: He's really outgoing. I always ask him "how do you know so many people?" He is a joy to have. He goes to Roberts Pre-K-8 School. He's in the third grade. Everyone in the school loves him. He knows everyone from the principal down to the students. He doesn't shy away from helping, or from talking. He's really upbeat.

Q: How is it being Qristopher's coach and also his father?

A: It's hard, hard, hard! Because he doesn't want me to be coach. He wants me to be dad. And you have to figure out ways to be forceful as a coach and enforce the rules to not show favoritism to your son. And also hold your son accountable. Getting into that groove has gotten easier. I ask one of the other coaches to interact with my son. Then we have our father-son moment to talk.

Q: What does he like aside from football?

A: He loves bowling, playing video games and animals. He



MEET FATHER CHRISTOPHER: Montgomery, 31, a youth football coach, commissioner for Syracuse Housing Authority and program counselor at SUNY-EOC. | Annaliese Perry, Staff Photographer

loves to research on animals. We take trips out of state to go to different zoos, so he can see a wide variety.

Q: What is unique about your relationship with your son?

A: Our ability to have long conversations and be with each other as much as we want. We are always trying to find new ways to connect and bond. Whether it be watching a movie or recreating our movie snack bowl. I just want him to know that I'm someone who always wants to be there.

Q: What was your relationship like with your father?

A: I did not know my father. I depended on my uncles and my

“Fatherhood, if I could sum it up in one word: joyful”

grandfather here in Syracuse. I didn't meet my dad until I was 23. They (my uncles and grandfather) taught me what work ethic was. Everything I can do is because of them. They taught me how to become a man, how to be responsible and how to be dependable as an adult.

Q: Did your uncles and grandfather ever share advice?

A: Yes, and they also modeled it, which is the most important. There isn't anything I learned that was bad from my uncles and my grandfather. They owned their own business well over 50 years. They woke at sun up, went to bed at sun down, and repeated it every day. They did everything they needed to do to be the role models we needed.

Q: What are your thoughts on stereotypes about black fathers?

A: I think they're starting to become myths. Because the black fathers I know are all doing what they have to do, and way beyond that. They're involved with their children's lives, they're there 24/7, they're going to school. So the stigma that black fathers are absent from kid's lives is not what it was in the '90s or the '80s. In 2018, I believe that black fathers are doing what they need to do.

Q: Is there anything in your role as a father that would surprise people?

A: My commitment with Qristopher. The way I am able to be in my son's life every day. I'm a 24/7 father. I'm involved in every aspect of his day. Whether it be getting him up in the morning to bringing him to school and everything in between.

Q: Any advice for first-time fathers?

A: It's not going to be easy. Whatever you read in a (parenting) book is not what is going to happen when the baby comes out. You can use it as a guide. But it's more important to become hands-on and create your own systems. And just be patient. It's all you can do. Kids are the best I've ever seen, and every day is a coaching or growing moment. You have to take the punches. They're depending on you.

Q: Final thoughts?

A: If I could sum up fatherhood in one word: joyful. I love the joy he brings to me. Whether it be his personality, interest in bowling, wanting to travel, it's all joyful. It's joyful for him to see me in a way that I never saw my father. And I like the way he is able to grow.



CHIEF OF POLICE

The City of Syracuse narrowed down the list of candidates for its next police chief from six to three in October.

The finalists are:

- Syracuse First Deputy Police Chief Joe Cecile
- Durango, Colorado, Police Chief Kamran Afzal
- Little Rock, Arkansas, Police Chief Kenton Buckner

Mayor Ben Walsh says he will continue to listen to resident input and feedback on the candidates.

The city is set to name a police chief later this month.

— Source:
City of Syracuse

CIVVYS WINNER

InterFaith Works' El-Hindi Center for Dialogue honored



> El-Hindi Center for Dialogue Director Peter Willner and InterFaith Works President and CEO Beth Broadway hold the Civvys award outside their office on James Street. | Provided Photo

Guest Submission
Update from *InterFaith Works*

Nonprofit recognized for efforts to spark communication between community, police

InterFaith Works of Central New York's El-Hindi Center for Dialogue was honored last month in Washington, D.C., as a winner of the 2018 American Civic Collaboration awards, or Civvys. The center tied for first in the local category and was noted for its work in a variety of programs, most notably the Police-Community Dialogues, an initiative bridging the gap in understanding between the Syracuse Police Department and local community.

The award hosts praised the dialogue initiative for having an immediate and lasting impact that presents a model for other communities to follow. Civvys judge Michele Holt-Shannon, pointed out how “the use of multiracial, multilingual facilitators expands the impact of the dialogues.”

Finalists were evaluated by a committee of reviewers including The Kettering Foundation, Bipartisan Policy Center, Converge and Democracy Fund.

InterFaith Works President and CEO Beth Broadway,

who accepted the honor at the awards ceremony with Center for Dialogue Director Peter Willner, said the agency was honored to receive the award from its peers in democracy building.

“Our work in leading deliberative dialogue for four decades has given our community and the people of our region the opportunity to find common ground in polarizing times,” Broadway said.

“Our work to build trusting relationships among diverse groups of people in many different settings across our community has never been more needed,” Willner added. “Meeting colleagues from across the nation in DC had been energizing and inspiring. We thank our community partners here in Central New York who share this award with us.”

The El-Hindi Center for Dialogue also sponsors the Community-Wide Dialogue to End Racism (the longest-running dialogue program of its kind in the nation), supports the Syracuse Chapter of the Seeds of Peace program, run the annual Duck Race to End Racism and oversees the Starting Small school exchange dialogue program. The center was established in 2012 through a gift from the Ahmad and Elizabeth El-Hindi Foundation to serve as a regional hub for constructive community engagement.

FALL WORKSHOP

ITC student builds skills and finds passion at SU's Fall Workshop

By Ellie Mayberry
Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central Student

High school media student leaves weekend training inspired, prepared for future

Syracuse University's 2018 Fall Workshop at the S.I. Newhouse School of Public Communications was a life-changing event for me.

Throughout this weekend I had the incredible opportunity to work alongside some of the most talented people the photojournalism world has to offer, all in my hometown of Syracuse. All of the coaches participating in the workshop are professionals in the industry and were so willing to help me in every way possible to grow as a photographer.

Because of that, I am no longer the same photographer I was at the beginning of the workshop.

My coaches were Syracuse's own Mike Roy, Wasim Ahmad, Linda Epstein and Michelle McLoughlin, along with my high school photography teacher, Mr. Jeffrey Newell.

I believe that I have improved in so many aspects of my photography and storytelling. Building connections was something that many of the coaches said would help you in the industry of photojournalism. Throughout the weekend I was able to do just that! All of my coaches on the Emerging Team, which consisted of ITC Media Communications students, are not only people who I



> Pich Chet works with her team's coach, Mike Roy. | Wasim Ahmad, Photographer

admire and trust, but people who are also willing to help me navigate the industry.

Walking out of this workshop I am no longer unsure of my future and am confident that photojournalism is a career I want to pursue. The weekend was jam-packed with learning, working and having fun alongside people I have admired for years including my classmates from ITC: Ana McGough, Pich Chet, Malika Ghazai, Claudia Pels and Gaydoh Soe.

I will forever be grateful for this chance of a lifetime that has not only helped me grow as a photographer, but as a person as well. I will never be able to thank everyone enough for making this past weekend so incredible.

TRAINER'S TAKE

By including high school students from the ITC media program to participate in the Fall Workshop, professors like Mike Roy say they were able to draw a straight line from Newhouse to the community.

"Not only did they learn videography techniques, we asked them to think about story structure and how similar threads of their lives might be used to tell one story. As beginners, their overall effort and willingness to look at the challenges to accomplish this was impressive."

— Mike Roy, Emerging Team Coach and adjunct professor in the Multimedia, Photography & Design Department



> Ana McGough works with her media teacher, Jeffrey Newell, on a video project inside ITC High School. | Wasim Ahmad, Photographer

PLAN DETAILS

WHO: Mike Behnke is the man behind the proposal.

WHAT: Nature trails, an aviary, increased accessibility and more.

WHERE: Burnet Park

WHEN: Unknown. Money is being raised to create a formal plan for the work.

WHY: To make the area more accessible and child-friendly.

HOW: \$5,000 has already been committed with the remaining estimated \$15,000 still to be raised.

RESTORING BURNET

A proposal hopes to bring Syracuse's largest park back to life



> Land adjacent to Burnet Park is overgrown with foliage and contributes to a sense that the park is rundown. | Justin Perline, Staff Photographer

By Justin Perline
Staff Reporter

Renovations include increased accessibility and making the park child-friendly

Mike Behnke envisions a dramatic restoration of the southern side of Burnet Park. If his proposal is approved, the park, along with its neighboring basin, would receive a flood of renovations in an effort to make the area more accessible and child-friendly.

Under this proposal, Behnke said that nature trails would be created and maintained in Burnet Park. These trails would stretch along the border of Grand Avenue, running as far east as Delaware Street and as far west as South Avery Avenue. Behnke would also like to include an aviary in the plans because of the park's abundance of wildlife.

However, not all of the changes would be confined to Burnet. Behnke believes children in the Harbor Brook neighborhood would benefit from transforming the empty basin surrounding the west end of Rowland Street into a place where people could ride dirt bikes. Among other small improvements, he would also like to paint cross-

walks and increase accessibility to that side of the park.

"It's probably the most beautiful park in the city of Syracuse," Behnke said. "It's so rich environmentally, but the children are unaware of it."

Behnke, a self-proclaimed 'park-ologist', has been bettering the green spaces around Syracuse for more than 20 years. He now serves as the vice president of the Syracuse Parks Conservancy, a local nonprofit aimed at making a difference within the city's parks. Behnke's grandchildren currently live in the area.

"I think that they need to do something with it," said Regina Reith, a resident of Harbor Brook. "It has potential."

Reith said that she'd enjoy seeing the neighborhood address the Grand Avenue side of Burnet Park, which is the only green space nearby. She has had to call the police on multiple occasions due to vandalism around the park. Behnke said the only other recreational area for children in the area is locked up at night.

"The best things that grow in our parks are our children," Behnke said.

The conservancy has already committed \$5,000 towards his proposal with the condition that the rest of the funding goals are met through fundraising, according to Behnke. He estimates that the proposal will require a

total of \$15,000 to \$20,000 in order to contract a master plan, which would detail the exact minutia of every planned change and provide guidelines for the entire project. He plans to enlist the help of Environmental Design & Research, a Syracuse-based architecture firm that has experience mapping out neighborhoods all over Central New York.

In order to raise the rest of the funds, Behnke said that he is going to go door-to-door asking for donations. He will also try to contact Syracuse University, elected officials and nonprofits in the area. His goal is to raise enough money to commit to the master plan within six months. Behnke would also like to solicit public input on the proposal, which he hopes to accomplish by holding community meetings and partnering with local organizations.

Behnke knows there will be obstacles to overcome, as the master plan is just the first step in a long bureaucratic process.

"I call it the dark side of the park," Behnke said. "Nobody wants to be involved with it, so it has to be a community effort"

The south side of Burnet Park is currently overrun with foliage. A walk through the Harbor Brook neighbor-

hood demonstrates that what was once a trail that runs parallel with Amy Street has been left to nature's devices. Access from the street is also limited as it lacks crosswalks and is lined with fences.

"It's so rich environmentally, but the children are unaware of it."
— Mike Behnke

An abandoned building complex that lies adjacent to the park's eastern boundary further worsens the area's problems. The former Syracuse Developmental Center has been sitting vacant there for more than 10 years and takes up about 40 acres of land. Trash and debris currently litter the space around the complex.

Turning a master plan into action begins with the Syracuse Department of Parks, Recreation &

Youth Programs. Glen Lewis, the head of planning and development, said that these kinds of proposals are often turned in straight to the commissioner. From there, commissioner Julie LaFave would delegate the plan to one of the department's chief officers and they would begin to break down the master plan piece by piece.

Complicating matters is the fact that Behnke's proposal includes land owned by the state, county and city. Only after the master plan is approved by each entity could people begin putting on gloves and getting to work, Behnke said.

PARK FEATURES

AT 88 ACRES

- 50-meter, eight-lane pool with a capacity for 492
- Rosamond Gifford Zoo, home to over 600 animals
- 2 softball diamonds
- Baseball diamond
- 2 multi-purpose athletic fields (for soccer, football and lacrosse)
- 2 tennis courts
- Basketball court
- 2 handball courts
- Playground
- Picnic Area
- Golf Course
- Monday Mile Trail



> Behnke's plan includes the creation of new trails. | Justin Perline, Staff Photographer



Letters of Support

> Carole Horan has written to 10 incarcerated men through the Death Row Support Project. She says it doesn't matter what they did, what matters is who they are trying to become. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photographer

By Bianca Moorman
Staff Reporter

How four decades of handwritten letters help incarcerated men connect to the outside world

Carole Horan has been handwriting letters for 40 years. The era of email and texting hasn't altered that practice.

She enjoys sharing little things, and so do the people she writes to, who respond with neatly penned replies that Horan keeps in a box under her bed.

For them, the extra time it takes is no issue: All of them are in prison, some on death row.

"A long time ago people wrote letters," Horan said during a chat at a coffee shop. "I mean real letters, not email letters, to people because long-distance phone calls were really expensive."

Horan shared some letters she has written and received over the years, including recent exchanges with a man on death row in Ohio and a local South Side man

she reached out to after she saw his name in the news and remembered him from Seymour Elementary School.

Horan originally got involved in writing to prisoners through a program based out of Chicago that connected letter-writers with inmates sentenced to death.

She never asked them how they feel about getting her letters, but then she had a first-hand experience that provided an answer.

The first man she wrote to was Jeff Dicks of Tennessee. He was on death row for about 17 years before he died of a massive heart attack. In 1979, he was convicted of murdering an elderly store owner. Horan felt that Dicks, whom she described as a poor, white man from the South, had a hard time getting a fair trial. Horan added that his mother fought for his innocence, even writing six books about it.

"The first letter was so hard to write because you don't know what to say or ask," Horan said.

Horan said that Dicks, like many of the others, was surprised to hear from somebody, anybody. Over a few

Hello dear friend, how are you? I pray that you are well and in good spirit. Forgive me for being late with this letter, but know that it is coming.

You asked me what books I am reading and as of right now I am reading Richard Wright's "Native Son" and then Ralph Ellison's "Invisible Man". I am studying Unger's Bible Hand Book also, so as you can see I am super busy. I also have my Man-up class going and a new class starting on the 10th. It's called Victim Impact, which gives you an insight of what a victim has been through and how it has taken place and how it changes their lives. I am teaching up. They have me teaching up.



> Horan shares a letter from incarcerated South Sider Habakkuk Nickens and an image of him with family he sent her. | Bianca Moorman, Staff Photographer

years, a friendship developed, and Horan eventually got a chance to meet him. While she was visiting, she stayed with his mother and got to experience what it is like to be in a maximum-security prison.

"To physically see (him) and being able to hug him," Horan said. "It was pure joy."

For the first 17 years she was only writing to Dicks, and after he died she stopped for a time, processing it all.

In the letters, Dicks had described to Horan his time in solitary confinement, when he was allowed to come out of his cell for only one hour a day. During that hour he had a choice to exercise or take a shower, but as time passed he was allowed to do more — even teach a class.

Horan said that Dicks' handwriting was small because he was depressed. He would talk to her about how long his appeals process was taking, a divorce from his wife, not seeing his daughter and how he felt his public counsel was being ineffective.

Currently, Horan writes to three prisoners. One is on death row.

Horan said she writes the letters by hand using a fountain pen. For most letters she writes, she is usually paired with someone by the Death Row Support Project. But she reached out to Habakkuk Nickens because she remembered him as a student when she worked as a secretary at Seymour Elementary School.

Horan knew all the Nickens children, and said that she was inspired after reading an article in The Stand about efforts he is leading to prevent gang violence in the South Side community — efforts he oversees while behind

bars. Nickens is serving 20 years for gang activity at the Federal Correctional Institution in Ray Brook, New York.

Horan said she got in contact with him through his mother initially via email. They have been writing back and forth for over a year now.

"It's just a beautiful thing," she said. "(It is a) very loving friendship, and he is doing beautiful work trying to turn his life around."

Horan said she has a visit with Nickens scheduled later this month, but her trip could be canceled if the prison is on lockdown, which he tells her has been happening a lot recently.

In total, she has written to 10 incarcerated men; she has never been paired with a woman. She also writes to a man named "Jonathan" at the Louisiana State Penitentiary at Angola, who is not on death row, and she writes to a 72-year-old man named "Von" in Ohio who has been on death row for 35 years.

"You are sharing your life with them," Horan said. "It's a lovely thing."

She does not ask any questions about what they did, sticking instead to how they spend their time and their prison jobs.

She shares stories about her grandchildren, travel and books, and what she or they like to read. She said "Von" likes to crochet, sharing he was having a hard time completing the feet of a penguin. "Jonathan" makes her laugh, often describing how he doesn't like working in the fields in Louisiana, where inmates farm crops such as cotton and corn.

BECOME A PEN PAL

Those who have signed up with the Death Row Support Project (DRSP) commit to write to an inmate at least once each month for one year. DRSP will either send you a letter from someone on death row who has requested a pen pal (this may take up to three months) or will send you a randomly selected name of someone who does not already have a pen pal (this takes up to one week).

To begin, complete an online form, providing your name, address, age and religious affiliation. Guidelines for writing letters will also be provided.

To learn more: Visit brethren.org/drsp/

HELP THE PROCESS

Sending first-class stamps helps support the volunteer-run project.

Mail to:

Death Row Support
Project
PO Box 600
Liberty Mills, IN 46946



> Horan describes relationships she forms with pen pals as a “beautiful thing.” | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photographer

“I am not fearful about writing,” Horan said. “I am cautious in the sense that there are things I don’t tell them about me.”

Because letter writing is out of fashion now, she gets excited to go the mailbox and find a letter. She’ll rip it open, sit down and read it right away.

In 1987, households reported receiving 1.6 pieces of personal correspondence each week, according to a U.S. Postal Service survey. By 2015, personal correspondence declined 69 percent, to just 0.5 pieces per household per week.

Word has spread about Horan’s efforts. She was writing to a man named “Richard,” and he kept telling others. He gave her name to two prisoners, and they wrote to her. One was “Jonathan,” and the other was looking for her to give him money. Horan said she does not give money, preferring friendship.

She’s been writing to “Jonathan” for at least 10 years. He makes her laugh, saying things like, “Girl, you need to take some time to rest.”

Nickens remembers her from school but didn’t recall what she looks like. She sent him a picture with her daughters who Nickens called Miss Americas and his pen pal Miss Universe.

Horan said Nickens asked her how he can improve his vocabulary, and she said through reading. Nickens told her that he has been reading “Native Son” by Richard Wright and “Invisible Man” by Ralph Ellison. He shared that he is not a monster; he is a changed man. He’s created a program while in prison called M.E.N.,

Men Educating Neighborhoods.

“What he is working on now is to help men realize that violence is not the answer,” Horan said.

When she first wrote to Dicks, her original prison pen pal, it took her anywhere from a day to weeks to complete a letter. Now she says it takes her about an hour, or up to three days.

She keeps pictures of all the prisoners she writes — her “friends,” as she calls them — on her refrigerator. She also keeps a box under her bed of letters she has received. Just recently, she went through the box and saw the last letter that she received from “Jeff.” She reads them for inspiration.

“One of the beautiful things about writing and receiving is that you can read it again and again,” Horan said. “And sometimes in writing, you can say things on paper that are a little hard to say in person.”

She finds having something handwritten is a lasting quality.

She has learned that a lot of people who are on death row are rejected by members of their family. She fills a critical void, one that prisoners have alluded to.

In a recent letter that she received from “Jonathan,” he wrote: “(You’ve) got this Pope Francis, Mother Theresa thing going on haven’t you?”

Horan does not believe that this letter-writing will lose its appeal and said she’ll keep at it for a long time.

“To me it is not important what they did,” she stressed. “It is important in who they are trying to become.”

MOTIVATING FACTOR

How family, community have helped James Rivers stay out of prison

By Bianca Moorman
Staff Reporter

After multiple visits in and out of prison, local man shares why he hasn't returned

He's a good person who made bad decisions. James Rivers distills his own complicated life into that simple sentence. He ended a roller coaster of nearly three decades in and out of prison in 2011 when, he said, he decided that he had had enough of the bad.

"I just got tired of looking at the same people every day," he said earlier this year at PEACE Inc. Rivers works at the food pantry of this 50-year-old community service agency, which helps the poor through a variety of programs offered at several sites across Onondaga County.

Rivers said he was fed up with prison life.

"They tell you when to get up, when to go to bed," he said. "They tell you when to eat. That is the kind of stuff that I got tired of."

Rivers, who turns 63 this month, had some family support every time he got out, but it never seemed quite enough. He said he would have benefited from programs like the one for parolees, overseen by PEACE, if it had been there earlier in his life.

Over the past two years, PEACE has helped 17 parolees through its pilot re-entry program, designed to provide comprehensive support in the critical months after a person is released from prison.

Rivers' nephew, Charles Rivers, oversees the Emma L. Johnston Southside Family Resource Center and was key in administering the \$95,000 pilot for PEACE's program, along with Karen Loftin. Charles Rivers and Loftin have both spent, in total, decades in prisons. For the pilot program, they helped others just getting out of prison.

James Rivers did not have the benefit of programs like the one run by PEACE, he said. But he did have support, and that allowed him to break the cycle that kept landing him back in prison. Every time he was released, he said he was lucky to have someone there to support him. He could always stay with a family member or a friend, he explained.

"I never had to go to the Rescue Mission," said Rivers, explaining that many parolees end up at the Mission because of little cash on hand. "I always had somewhere to go."

The pilot program helped parolees get into more



> Rivers used his time in prison to earn his GED and study recreational leadership. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photographer

stable, public housing, so they could avoid the shelter and the stress of staying with family or friends.

James Rivers said that when he was released, he wished something like the pilot program was established. It might have helped him bridge the time until he'd completed a mandatory drug and alcohol program. Many parolees must satisfy such conditions before they can look for jobs and make a living.

Rivers was born in South Carolina, and his mother moved them to Syracuse when he was 5 or so. He said that during the summers he would go back and visit his grandfather in South Carolina, but he didn't care for feeding the chickens before he went to school there, and couldn't wait to get back to Syracuse.

He said he wasn't a bad kid growing up here, until his mother died when he was 15. Then he started

50 YEARS OF PEACE

Did you know that this year marks PEACE Inc.'s 50th anniversary?

The organization launched in 1968 with a staff of 20, offering three programs at two locations.

It now employs nearly 400 individuals and operates nine programs at 50 different sites.

In honor of its golden anniversary, the nonprofit is working to highlight its program participants, partners, volunteers, employees and other stakeholders as a way of sharing its story with the community.

If you have a special memory to share to help PEACE mark this milestone year, Tweet it out with the hashtag **#PEACEIncSyr**.

NEXT IN THE SERIES

In the Winter issue, read about Charles Rivers' personal story. Rivers runs PEACE Inc.'s South Side center and offers support to those recently released from prison, a scenario he is all too familiar with.

WIDER AUDIENCE

Past features in our “Prison to Family” series on Shalla “Brooklyn” Beal, Karen Loftin and the Family Reunification Grant were republished in The Crime Report.

The Crime Report is a nonpartisan, nonprofit multimedia news platform run by John Jay College of Criminal Justice in New York City. The publication produces comprehensive reporting, commentary and analysis of the criminal justice system.

This in-depth series “Prison to Family” was completed as part of a 2018 John Jay/H.F. Guggenheim Justice Reporting Fellowship awarded to The Stand’s director, Ashley Kang.

For more, visit thecrimereport.org

to “act out.”

“I got an attitude of ‘I don’t care,’” he recalled.

He started to get in trouble in school, and eventually he was sent to the Industry Residential Center outside Rochester, a facility for teenage boys in the criminal justice system. After a short stay there, and a return to school in Syracuse, he dropped out.

Then Rivers found trouble in earnest. He spent six months at the Jamesville Correctional Facility in 1972 on a criminal trespassing charge. Then he started cashing bad checks, and soon he was using cocaine and committing burglaries, he said.

In 1981, he was arrested and sent to Attica on a burglary charge. Between 1988 and 2010, he was in and out of prison for selling drugs or for parole violations, which almost always guarantees a return to prison, he said.

Rivers said his longest reprieve, between 1990 and 1998, was mainly spent using drugs and living on public assistance.

In prison, he earned his GED and majored in recreational leadership, as part of a college program. He also gained cooking skills, working in prison kitchens.

Now Rivers works at PEACE’s South Side site through a Vermont-based employment program for older residents called Associates for Training and Devel-

opment. Rivers said he will be part of the program until September 2019.

Since getting off parole in 2011, he has been able to leave New York State, including a visit to New Jersey to see a sister. He said he has rekindled his relationship with one of his daughters, who has dealt with resentment toward him because of his years in and out of prison.

“I couldn’t blame her because there were times when it really hurt her,” Rivers said.

Now they get together for dinner, and he enjoys trips to the water park with grandkids who call him “Johnny.”

Rivers also has a girlfriend he met in 2012, through his daughter. His girlfriend helped him deal with prostate cancer.

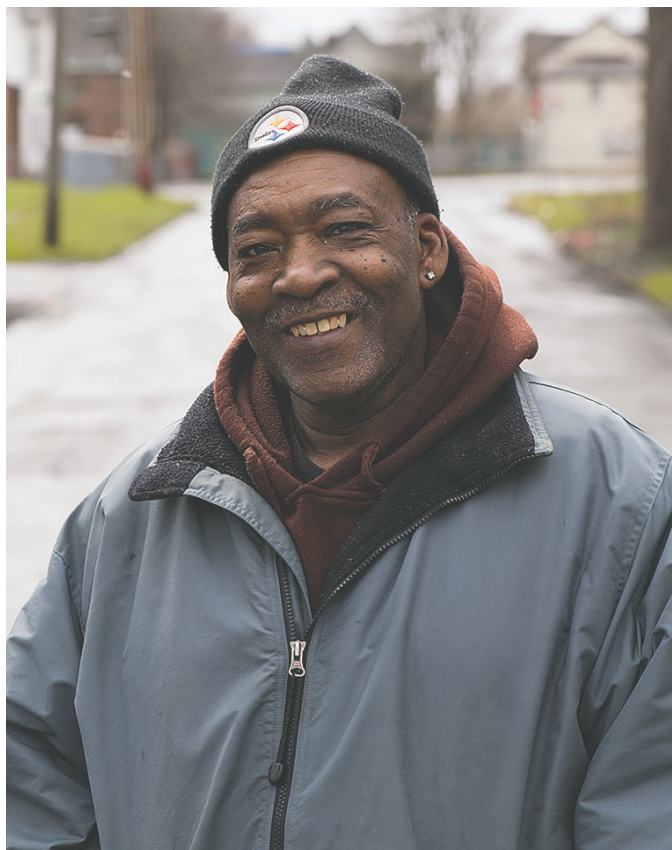
Rivers enjoys helping others who visit PEACE, including getting them provisions from the on-site pantry.

He understands what it is to live day-to-day or even meal-to-meal.

“I have always been a good person,” Rivers said. “But I have always made bad decisions in my life. The decisions that I made in my life made me part of who I am today.”



> Charles Rivers, coordinator for the Emma L. Johnston Southside Family Resource Center, steps out of the center’s back door to oversee the weekly delivery from the Food Bank of Central New York with the help of his uncle, James Rivers. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photographer



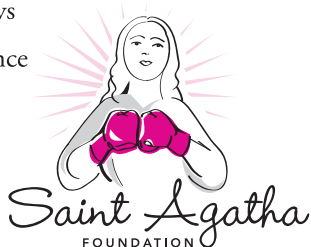
> Rivers is proud of his time helping PEACE with the center's food pantry. The pantry is currently open from noon to 4:30 p.m. each Thursday and also offers daily food giveaways. The pantry is located on the center's second floor, 136 Dr. Martin Luther King West. | Zachary Krahmer, Staff Photographer

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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LOCAL GROUP

What: Tomorrow's Neighborhoods Today Monthly Meeting

When: 6 to 7:30 p.m. Monday, Nov. 5

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

Details: TNT Area 3 Southside regularly meets at 6 p.m. on the first Monday of each month at the South Side Innovation Center

Contact: For more information or to be added to the group's email list, call TNT Operations Manager Tina Zagya at (315) 448-8178 or email TZagya@SyrGov.net

CLEANING CORNERS

Volunteers clean up the streets in memory of a fallen friend



> Ted Bauer, a South Side resident, volunteered along with a couple dozen others during the Oct. 6 Elmwood Business District cleanup in memory of Jim Gifford, who loved his neighborhood. | Provided Photo

By Billy Heyen
Staff Reporter

Five years after Jim Gifford's death, his memory lives on in the form of a community cleanup

Jim Gifford used to stand “like a monument,” frequently present on the corner of Elmwood and South avenues, Sean Kirst said. His house was the second on the right up the South Avenue hill from that intersection. Kirst didn’t really know Gifford then; he just recognized him.

Then, Gifford wasn’t at the corner anymore, victim of a murder early one morning. It happened in 2013, right by the intersection where he so often stood, just after he bought his breakfast inside the old 7-Eleven at the corner of Valley Drive and South Avenue.

“What I heard from everybody is he was just a helping person,” said Bob Dougherty, a former Common Council member. “If there was something that needed to be done, he was the kind of person you could depend on to pitch in.”

That 7-Eleven is closed and covered with wooden boards now. But one Saturday in October more than 20

people gathered for the fifth-annual commemoration of Gifford’s life. A year after the murder, Kirst organized a cleanup of the streets in and around Gifford’s intersection. The first year, Kirst wrote that more than 100 people showed up. While the number has declined in the ensuing years, the memory of Gifford and his commitment to his community has not.

“You’ve got a guy like that who sort of epitomizes the idea of life in the city,” Kirst said, “and we ought to do something to remember him.”

Kirst, a longtime Post-Standard columnist who now writes for The Buffalo News, wrote multiple times about Gifford’s murder. A teen, Romeo Williams, jumped the 70-year-old Gifford in the 7-Eleven’s parking lot and punched him before returning to kick him while he lay helpless on the ground. It’s at that very intersection that people gathered on Oct. 6 to remember.

On Saturday morning, Dougherty, one of the event’s organizers, was parked in the old 7-Eleven’s parking lot by 8:15 a.m. His navy-blue Pontiac Vibe had its trunk open, ready to provide supplies to anyone who showed up to help clean. There were black garbage bags and wooden pickers, akin to large tongs, to grab garbage off the ground.

One of the first arrivals to clean was Pat Hageman. It

was her first year at the memorial, although she has spent time volunteering with similar cleanup projects in Syracuse. Hageman had reached out to Dougherty, because she felt finding a way to help was important.

"You try and do some civic duty," Hageman said. "We all owe it to our city."

By 9 a.m., volunteers were two blocks down the street heading in multiple directions, stretching to Bertram Place off Valley Drive. The sun started to come out after the day had begun underneath gray clouds.

One group of volunteers looked different from many of the adults out cleaning up the corners. Lydia Montgomery brought her two sons, a second and a fifth grader, with her to help. In her mind, there was no grander plan: The boys were being loud at 7 a.m., and she figured it was a good idea. Montgomery had attended high school at Corcoran, right down the street, and so cleaning up this particular area meant something more to her.

Kirst's adult son was also one of the volunteers cleaning, something Kirst said he was proud of. In Montgomery's two young boys, Kirst saw hope.

"You hope there's something planted there, something ingrained, on a kind of genetic level," Kirst said. "That they'll realize this is part of their community, that there's no reason to fear coming here, that there's energy here and maybe someday they're the ones who come down here and open a business or teach."

At one point, a woman stopped at a red light at the

intersection and rolled down her window. Spotting Kirst, she waved and yelled, "Thank you, we really appreciate you." Kirst yelled back, "Take care, thank you."

As the garbage was stuffed away, bags were left on the concrete island at one corner of the intersection. More than garbage ended up there, too. In a small, five-foot-wide alley just north of the intersection on South Avenue,

lots of weeds and ivy had built up. Dougherty's brother, Bill, broke out a tall scythe to cut down some of the tree-like growths in the alley.

Kirst said remembering Gifford was important. He also wanted to remember what this part of town was like before businesses started to close. There was a post office and a department store, an area Kirst said was "thriving." When he spoke, there was a level of nostalgia in Kirst's

voice, but also a belief that keeping the neighborhood a little cleaner could go a long way.

"It's ridiculous for people to feel like they can't come here," Kirst said. "You go to a place, you get your hands dirty, you feel invested in it."

And as Kirst crossed South Avenue, having cleaned up one corner and heading for another, he paused to look at the cars in the old 7-Eleven's parking lot. He glanced at the people spread around the intersection early on a Saturday morning, helping pick up garbage. He felt the cleanup represented something bigger than a once-a-year event.

"There's a certain renewal," Kirst said. "It's good to see cars in this parking lot again."

"You try and do some civic duty. We all owe it to our city."

— Pat Hageman



> Cleanup volunteers scoured the business district, piling garbage on the island by the intersection of Valley Drive and South Avenue to honor Jim Gifford's memory on the fifth anniversary of his death. Gifford, a longtime South Side resident, was attacked in 2013 outside the former 7-Eleven and later died from his injuries. | Billy Heyen, Staff Photographer

ELECTION DAY EVENT

What: Election Day breakfast fundraiser hosted by The Dunbar Association

When: 8 to 10:30 a.m. Tuesday, Nov. 6

Where: Dunbar Center, 1453 S. State St.

Menu: Catered by Joe's To Go, breakfast includes: scrambled eggs, cheese grits, bacon, turkey breakfast sausage, homemade biscuits, country-style sausage gravy, fried fish, cinnamon rolls, fruit cups and coffee, juice and Southern sweet tea. Both eat-in and take-out available.

Cost: \$20; all funds directly support the Dunbar Center

ON THE SIDE

SUMMER PHOTOS

Eurain Scott was a 2014 participant of this paper’s “From Where We Stand” grant-funded summer photography project.

Our goal with the project was to put real families behind the camera in order for them to tell and share their own stories.

A total of eight participants were chosen and paired with a professional mentor to document their summer in photos.

By the conclusion of the project, each participant’s best images were displayed in a gallery exhibit for all in the community to view.

To revisit the project, visit FromWhereWeStand.net

WHERE ARE THEY NOW?

Syracuse resident Eurain Scott inspired by ITC photography course



> Eurain Scott has shot dozens of images, including of former President Barack Obama. | All images by Eurain Scott

By Nicole Valinote
Staff Reporter

High school media program, instructor opened the world of photography to Scott

Eurain Scott broke his \$2,400 camera lens the day he set up his new tripod. The 22-year-old photographer knew he had to take action. He is almost never without his camera.

“I’ve sacrificed so much to get that lens,” Scott said. “And after that broke I was like, ‘Oh no. I need to do something about this.’ I made a few calls and I started a new job today in construction.”

To some, physical labor may seem like a lot of work to replace a camera lens. This was never a question for the Syracuse resident, who found his love of photography five years ago.

Scott said he discovered his interest in photography in the summer before his senior year of high school at The Institute of Technology at Syracuse Central. He needed an art credit to graduate, so he took a summer digital photography course. Nicholas Lisi, Scott’s teacher

“He was never the type of student that would shut down.”

— Nicholas Lisi

who taught the summer course, invited Scott to take his advanced digital photography course during his senior year.

“Every opportunity that I had with Eurain to offer him, he took full advantage of it,” Lisi said. “Not that he was great at every one right away, but he was never afraid to try. He was never shy about failing and taking criticism in a way that would make his work better.”

Some of the opportunities Lisi helped Scott obtain included a freelance contract with Syracuse.com, in which Scott took photos at all his high school football

SUGGEST A STORY

Is there a person you’re curious about who previously has been featured in The Stand?

To submit an idea for a future “Where Are They Now?” story, contact Ashley Kang by email at ashley@mysouthsidestand.com or call (315) 882-1054.



team's games, and an opportunity to photograph former President Barack Obama when he came to speak at Henninger High School, Scott said.

Scott demonstrated a willingness to learn and a passion for his work, Lisi added.

"He was never the type of student that would shut down and give up and that's amazing," Lisi said.

After his senior year in high school, Scott said he participated in The Stand's summer storytelling series, "From Where We Stand," in which he documented his summer through photographs. He then attended Onondaga Community College to study electronic media communication, before deciding that he didn't want to continue his studies.

"Everybody has their own different perception of what success looks like," Scott said. "I felt like I could've found success a different way."

Abeer Alziadi said she met Scott because they were both participants in the Educational Opportunity Program, which helps students with economic or academic disadvantages. Alziadi said some of her fondest memories with Scott at OCC were when she would stay on campus late doing work, and Scott would walk her to her car, even if he finished his work earlier, to make sure she got home safely.

"He never had to stay that long," Alziadi said. "He could've went home and went to sleep. Sometimes he used to fall asleep in there waiting for me to get my work done."

Alziadi said Scott would sometimes use his time in the office to work on photography projects. In addition to a job at Best Buy, Scott said he supports himself through his commissioned work, including portraiture and videography. Scott added that he continues to develop his photography style over time.

"You can tell he's passionate about it because he spends endless hours editing and I don't even see him anymore because he's always working on projects like that," Alziadi said.

Alziadi said she and Scott participated in many con-

versations and debates about social issues such as culture and religion in the Educational Opportunity Program's office space.

"He speaks his mind and he uses it carefully but he makes sure he gets his point across," Alziadi said. "He's not afraid to voice his opinions."

Scott demonstrated an interest in debate and social issues when he was a founding student at The Expeditionary Learning Middle School, said Richard Richardson, who was one of the founding teachers at ELMS and is the principal of Danforth Middle School. One project Scott participated in at ELMS included researching local abolitionist heroes, Richardson said.

"Eurain has lived all over the city but when we find these special landmarks in our community and show them to young people it instills a sense of pride," Richardson said. "Eurain's a pretty prideful young man. He was back in those days too. When he has an idea, he sticks with it. He's passionate about it."

Richardson said when Scott found out about the goal to start an expeditionary learning school at Danforth, he asked to be a part of the process and to provide free photography services.

Scott said he is proud of living in Syracuse and sees himself staying in his home city.

"Essentially the city just needs more people that are going to help and give back," Scott said. "I'm not only just talking about financially, but just emotional support for the community too."

Scott said he hopes to use photography to uplift the Syracuse community and eventually provide jobs and new opportunities to other aspiring photographers and videographers.

"The reason why I want to do that is because we see too often from media outlets the negative side of our community and not enough of the positive things," Scott said. "Because believe it or not there are so much more positive things in our community than there are negative."

YOUTH TRAINING

Hope 4 US Housing is offering a free carpentry training workshop for young men and women in the Syracuse area. This cost-free open house precedes a six-week program where youth will learn the basics of the carpentry trade, as well as life skills needed to be successful in the workforce.

What: Open House

When: Noon to 4 p.m.
Saturday, Nov. 10

Where: Hope 4 US Housing Corp., 2004 Teall Ave.

Who: Open to teens ages 12 to 17

Cost: This open house is free

For more information:
Contact Lamar Middleton at (315) 876-7079 or Asean Malik Bey at (315) 863-5570

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